

A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS
(IDPS) AS A SOCIAL IDENTITY: A CASE STUDY FOR GEORGIAN IDPS

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GEORGIAN IDPS**

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis analyzes the social identification process of internally displaced persons (IDPs) of Georgia within the scope of Social Identity Theory of Tajfel and Turner (1978). The study focuses on the influential components of the identity formation process of the Georgian IDPs, who have been displaced through several migration waves in two different periods (early 1990s and 2008) from both Abkhazia and South Ossetia due to ethnic conflicts. In order to analyze IDP's self-identification, the research focuses on two main dimensions. While the first dimension is the external definition of IDP identity by the host community, which stigmatizes it over the course of the post-Soviet period; the second dimension is the self-attributed characteristics (i.e., sedulity, unity, coming from the same region) and perceptions of IDPs on certain concepts (i.e., shared trauma, in-group favoritism, home, homeland and the wish to return) which strengthen and transform IDP identity from a stigmatized pattern towards a positive one. Based on the data collected in Georgia between 2014 and 2017 through in-depth interviews with civil society experts, state officials, politicians, academicians and the IDPs from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, who migrated to

Georgia proper in different periods, the self-identification process and behavioral patterns of IDPs, the Georgian social context and IDPs' social interaction with the out-group agencies (host community, state and civil society) are elaborated thoroughly.

Keywords: Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), Social Identity Theory, Georgia, Abkhazia, South Ossetia

ÖZ

SOSYAL BİR KİMLİK OLARAK ÜLKE İÇİNDE YERİNDEN EDİLEN KİŞİLERİN (ÜİYOK'LERİN) SOSYOLOJİK ANALİZİ: GÜRCİSTAN ÜİYOK'LERİ ÜZERİNE BİR VAKA ÇALIŞMASI

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Bu tez, Tajfel ve Turner'ın (1978) Toplumsal Kimlik Kuramı kapsamında Gürcistan'daki ülke içinde yerinden edilmiş kişilerin (ÜİYOK'lerin) toplumsal kimlik oluşum sürecini analiz etmektedir. Çalışma, etnik çatışmalar nedeniyle hem Abhazya'dan hem de Güney Osetya'dan iki farklı dönemde (1990'ların başı ve 2008) çeşitli göç dalgaları ile yerlerinden edilen Gürcü ÜİYOK'lerin kimlik oluşum sürecini etkileyen bileşenler üzerinde durmaktadır. ÜİYOK'lerin kendini tanımlamasını analiz etmek için araştırma iki ana boyuta odaklanmaktadır. İlk boyut, IDP kimliğinin, Sovyet sonrası dönem boyunca yerel halk tarafından stigmalaştırılan dışsal tanımı iken; ikinci boyut, ÜİYOK'lerin stigmalaşmış bu kimliği pozitif bir hale getirmek için kullandıkları grup taktikleridir. Örneğin belirli konseptler (ortak travma, grup içi kayırmacılık, ev, vatan ve geri dönme isteği) ÜİYOK'lerin grup kimliklerini güçlendirirken, ÜİYOK'lerin kendilerine atfettikleri çeşitli özellikler (örneğin çalışkanlık, birlik, hemşehrilik) grup kimliğinin dönüşümünü sağlamaktadır. Gürcistan'da 2014-2017 yılları arasında sivil toplum uzmanları, devlet yetkilileri, politikacılar, akademisyenler ve farklı

dönemlerde göç eden ÜİYOK'ler ile derinlemesine mülakatlarda toplanan verilere dayanarak, ÜİYOK'lerin kendini tanımlama süreci ve davranış kalıpları, grup dışı aktörlerle (yerel halk, devlet ve sivil toplum) sosyal etkileşimi ve ülkenin toplumsal koşulları kapsamlı bir şekilde ele alınmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ülke İçinde Yerinden Edilmiş Kişiler (ÜİYOK'ler), Sosyal Kimlik Kuramı, Gürcistan, Abhazya, Güney Osetya

To My Mother, Father and Husband

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND RUSSIAN TERMS

Cheka	Soviet Secret Police Organization
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CoE	Council of Europe
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CRINGO	Caucasian Refugee and IDP NGO Network
CRRC	Caucasus Research Resources Center
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
ECMI	The European Centre for Minority Issues
EUMM	EU's Monitoring Mission
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
GID	Geneva International Discussions
Glasnost	Openness/Transparency)
Guberniia	Province
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICG	International Crisis Group
ICLA	Individual Counseling and Legal Advocacy
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
JCC	Joint Control Commission
Kavbiuro	Caucasian Bureau of the Russian Communist Party
Kolkhoz	Collective farm
Korenizatsiia	Indigenization
Kulak	Rich peasant
MRA	Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees
Narkomnats	People's Commissariat for Nationality Affairs

NEP	New Economic Policy
NKVD	People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation
OGPU	Joint State Political Directorate
Okrug	Region
Ozakom	Special Transcaucasian Committee
Perestroika	Restructuring
Revkom	Revolutionary Committee
RSFSR	Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
SDC	Swiss Development and Cooperation Agency
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SIT	Social Identity Theory
Sovkhoz	State Farm
Sovnarkom	Council of People's Commissars
TSFSR	Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic
Uezd	District
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNHROAG	United Nations Human Rights Office Abkhazia Georgia
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNOMIG	United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia
USAID	The US Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Program
WVI	The World Vision International
Zavkom	Transcaucasian Commissariat

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introducing the Study

When the Cold-War ended, several issues such as regime changes, regional and global security disputes, territorial integrity threats and ethnic conflicts occupied the international agenda. However, the consequences of these occurrences, particularly the humanitarian ones, were mostly neglected or poorly managed. During the 1990s, migration became one of the hot topics not only in social sciences but also in the international debates; millions of people were forced to migrate from their habitats. Forced migration, which is started to be called ‘refugee crises’ in recent years, continues to be one of the most challenging problems of the world, and the number of the forced migrants has dramatically escalated on a daily basis. In 2016, one person out of 113 has faced forced migration, and in every single minute, 24 people had to leave their homes (Adrians, 2016). According to the 2015 estimations of the UNHCR, the total number of the forcibly displaced population around the world was 64 million, while it was 55 million a year earlier. From among these 64 million people, the highest migration number belonged to the internally displaced persons (IDPs) with approximately 37.5 million people, while the refugees consisted of 15.5 million people.¹

¹ The remaining 11 million of forced displaced groups consisted of people in refugee-like situation, asylum-seekers, returned-IDPs, stateless people and others in concern. According to the numbers provided by the UNHCR, in 2017, the cumulative total of the forced migrants rose to 68.5 million and internally displaced people continue to constitute the vast majority of these migrants. UNHCR. “Populations”, <http://reporting.unhcr.org/population> (Accessed: January 1, 2018).

This thesis aims to make a sociological analysis of Georgian IDPs, approaching them as a social group, and to provide an alternative method for studying IDPs from the perspective of intergroup relations. In the literature, studies focusing on the concept of IDP have widely used either descriptive case studies or response strategies due to its humanitarian dimension. Hence, the theoretical significance of this thesis is that it questions the concept of IDP using the Social Identity Theory of Tajfel and Turner (1978) and it analyzes the influential components of the identity formation process of the Georgian IDPs, who have been forced to migrate from both Abkhazia and South Ossetia, in different periods.

After the declaration of its independence in 1991, the nation and state building went parallel in Georgia. However, the country faced serious crises that many post-Soviet states had experienced including civil wars, ethnic conflicts, territorial integrity threats, political turmoil and economic instabilities. During the last years of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev initiated two major policies, *glasnost* (openness/transparency) and *perestroika* (restructuring) that had substantial influence on the above mentioned crises (Zwick, 1989: 216). These policies allowed room to the Soviet people to protest, criticize, and demand democratic norms. However, the demand for democracy, which fired up in the Baltic States and then expanded to the South Caucasus, quickly intertwined with the nationalist concerns in the former republics (Gooding, 1992: 56; Muiznieks, 1995: 6; Gürsoy, 2011: 40-42). Nationalism has always been a strong sentiment for Georgians as it was for Georgia's ethnic minorities, namely the Abkhazians and South Ossetians. The ethnic conflict between these groups in the early 1990s was neither the first dispute, nor occurred out of thin air; it had roots way back in the history. All three ethnic groups consider themselves as the ancient inhabitants of the region, with their own myths and historiographies (Aydingün and Asker, 2012: 124-125). Throughout their history, they had disputes with each other, but they also formed alliances and strived against the external powers since the lands of contemporary Georgia had been a battlefield of the occupier

empires such as, Mongols, Arabs, Persians, Romans, Turks and Russians. Nevertheless, these three small nations sustained their existences.

All the three nations claiming their antiquity in the region were eventually annexed by the Tsarist Russia in the 19th century, which was followed by the Soviet control during the following century. Both Tsarist and Soviet eras had a substantial impact on the national identity construction of Georgia and its minorities. Particularly, the Soviet ‘demographic engineering’ policy complicated the ethnic tension in Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (Georgian SSR), through which the creation of a hierarchy among the nations further deepened the mutual dislike of the counterparts of the upcoming ethnic conflicts. When Georgia declared its independence in 1991, there were two autonomous republics and an autonomous oblast within its borders: the Adjarian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (Adjarian ASSR), the Abkhazian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (Abkhazian ASSR), and the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast (South Ossetian AO). Under the leadership of Gamsakhurdia, the first president of post-Soviet Georgia, the nationalist discourse strengthened dramatically and became radicalized over years. Gamsakhurdia’s slogan “Georgia for Georgians” created an inevitable unrest in the country. Nationalism was triggered in the autonomous regions, which resulted in ethnic conflicts (Nodia, 1995: 110). In post-Soviet Georgia, under the political leadership of Aslan Abashidze, the Adjarian Autonomous Republic, which was mostly composed of ethnically Georgian Muslims, managed to avoid the catastrophic phase in Georgia proper but became a state within a state by withdrawing into its shell (Gürsoy and Katliarou, 2016: 195).² However, in the two autonomous

² The two most-populated ethnic minorities of Georgia, the Azeris (%6.3) and the Armenians (%4.5) are worth mentioning here. Most of the Azeri minority lives in Kvemo-Kartli, one of the biggest administrative regions in Georgia, yet there are also Azeris living in capital Tbilisi as well as regions such as Kakheti, Shida-Kartli, Adjara and Mstkhta-Mtianeti. According to the 2014 national census, the majority of them live in the Kvemo-Kartli region with 45.1 percent (Asker and Öğütçü, 2016: 222). This minority group has lived quite isolated till the ‘Saakashvili reforms’, with which Mikhail Saakashvili, the third president of the country, aimed to develop the socio-cultural rights of minorities and the infrastructure of the minority-populated regions such as Kvemo-Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti and Adjara. Especially in 2010, a new education

regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the tension escalated. The secessionist conflicts first started in South Ossetia (1990-1992) and then spread to Abkhazia (1992-1994). In addition, the political turmoil in Tbilisi tumbled the country into a *coup d'état* (December 1991-January 1992) and a civil war (1992-1993). When Shevardnadze came to power as the second president of the country in 1992, he managed to put an end to the armed conflict with South Ossetia in the same year, and through a ceasefire signed in 1994, the war with Abkhazia ended. Nevertheless, the two conflicts led to the displacement of more than 300.000 people.

As a result of the displacement during the Abkhaz-Georgian conflict in the early 1990s, 240.000 ethnic Georgians and an unknown number of ethnic Abkhazians had to leave their places of origin. After the signing of the 1994 ceasefire, while the displacement of ethnic Abkhazians was temporary and resulted in their return to their places of origin, the majority of ethnic Georgians could not return to their homelands. It is estimated that the number of the returnee Georgian IDPs was around 50.000. However, a high percentage of the returnees could not resettle in their own habitats (Grono, 2011) because in the post-conflict period, their houses were either destroyed or squatted by other people, and thus the Abkhaz authorities relocated them to the designated places. Therefore, their situation is defined as IDP-like by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

reform called the '1+4 system' was accepted. This reform not only enabled the minority pupils to take the national university entrance exam in their native language but also gave a one-year education of Georgian language prior to the 4 year of university education (Gürsoy and Tulun, 2016: 103-106). The Azeris have never attempted to disintegrate from Georgia. Most of the Armenian minority in Georgia (also known as Javakheti Armenians) lives in the capital, Tbilisi, and the Javakheti part of the Samtskhe-Javakheti region. Like the Azeris, the Armenians in Samtskhe-Javakheti were not sufficiently integrated till the Saakashvili reforms. In addition to the above-mentioned educational reform, a new highway was constructed between the region and Tbilisi. Although there were separatist trends among the Armenians between 1990s and early 2000s, these trends could not be followed. Their population constituted the majority of the region with 54.6 percent in 2002 (this number is around 95 percent in Javakheti), which then slightly dropped to 50.52 percent in 2014 (Biletska and Tuncel, 2016: 323).

(UNHCR).³ The second part of the first migration wave was from South Ossetia. It is estimated that the conflict in South Ossetia in the early 1990s caused the displacement of around 60.000 people. While 50.000 of them were of ethnic Ossetians (around 40.000 were refugees who fled to North Ossetia and around 10.000 were IDPs), the remaining 10.000 people were ethnic Georgians, some of whom returned to their place of origin within the following years). In 1998, in Abkhazia and in 2004, in South Ossetia, small tensions caused further displacements. According to the UNHCR, the total number of the registered IDPs both from Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia were around 212.000 in April 2008.⁴ Nowadays, this first group of IDPs is referred to as “the old-comers/old IDPs” or “Shevardnadze’s IDPs”.

The second forced migration wave was the result of the August War (5-Day War) that broke out between Georgia and the Russian Federation in 2008, which approximately caused the displacement of 158.000 persons, around 128.000 of whom were ethnic Georgians that fled to Georgia proper. Some of these Georgian IDPs have returned to their places of origins right after the war, and some of them have experienced a forced migration for a second time.⁵ The IDPs of the second migration wave are referred to as “new-comers/new IDPs” or “Saakashvili’s IDPs” and it is estimated that 22.000 of them permanently settled in Georgia proper.⁶ The official statement of the Ministry of Internally Displaced

³ UN General Assembly, *Status of internally displaced persons and refugees from Abkhazia, Georgia, and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia*, 20 May 2013, A/67/869, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/67/869 (Accessed at: March 1, 2017).

⁴ UNCHR (2009). “Protection of Internally Displaced Persons in Georgia: A Gap Analysis”, <http://www.unhcr.org/4ad827f59.pdf> (Accessed: April 23, 2018), p. 6.

⁵ Ibid, p. 5.

⁶ Amnesty International (2009). “Civilians in the Aftermath of the War: The Georgia- Russia Conflict One Year on”, Accessed March 10, 2018, https://amnesty.dk/media/2025/civilians_in_the_aftermath_of_war.pdf (Accessed: April 23, 2018).

Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees (hereafter MRA)⁷ reports that the number of the registered IDPs in Georgia was 259.247 in 2014.⁸ When the overall population of the country is considered, which is 3.713.804 according to the 2014 census⁹, their percentage (6.9) significantly makes the Georgian IDPs one of the highest per capita concentrations in the world (Gürsoy, 2018: 102-103).¹⁰

The IDPs currently living in Georgia have spread throughout the country; however, the majority of them resettled in the frontier provinces between Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia and in the capital Tbilisi. According to the figures provided by the MRA, in the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region, which shares a border with Abkhazia, the number of the registered IDPs is 84.420. There is also a significant number of IDPs registered at the regions encircling South Ossetia, which are respectively, 24.755 in Imereti (a region close to Abkhazia), 16.539 in Shida Kartli, and 10.864 in Mtskheta-Mtianeti. Tbilisi, where the fieldworks for this thesis were conducted, holds the biggest IDP

⁷ The Prime Minister of Georgia, Mamuka Bakhtadze, officially abolished MRA in July 2018 and transferred its resettlements to three other ministries. See: Civil.ge (2018). “PM Bakhtadze Names Ministries to be Merged, Abolished”, <https://civil.ge/archives/245060> (Accessed: February 3, 2019).

⁸ MRA (2014). “IDP Figures”, <http://mra.gov.ge/eng/static/55> (Accessed: March 30, 2018).

⁹ GEOSTAT (2016). “2014 General Population Census- Main Results, General Information”, http://geostat.ge/cms/site_images/_files/english/population/Census_release_ENG_2016.pdf (Accessed: April 1, 2018).

¹⁰ In 2009, the UNHCR published a report on the situation of the people affected by the ethnic conflicts in the region and stated that because of the problematic relations between the authorities of South Ossetia, Abkhazia and the UNCHR Representation in Georgia, they could not obtain the information needed. According to the same report, they cannot make an estimation for the IDPs in Abkhazia, but it is estimated that there are around ten thousand IDPs in South Ossetia. See: UNHCR in Georgia (2009). “People of Concern to UNHCR’s Mandate”, <http://www.unhcr.org/4b274bc76.pdf> (Accessed: March 1, 2017).

population with 98.742 registrations.¹¹ As Tbilisi holds the biggest IDP population in Georgia, the fieldwork for this thesis was carried out in the capital. For many interviewed IDPs, migration to the capital meant better job opportunities and living conditions. In addition, it was presumed that since Tbilisi holds a variety of internal migrants and has a cosmopolite nature, it was a more preferable plot to observe the interaction of the IDPs with the other(s). Therefore, during all five fieldworks of this thesis (conducted between 2014 and 2017), twelve settlements were visited and some of them were visited twice. The only settlement that was visited out of Tbilisi was the Tserovani Settlement which is located in Mtskheta Municipality (between South Ossetia and Tbilisi). Visiting this settlement was essential for the research since it was built right after the 2008 War for the new IDPs.

Today, the IDP issue constitutes one of the most vital problems of Georgia and the success of the crisis management is debated, especially regarding the early comers. IDPs, who left their homeland and all belongings behind, mostly hope to return to their homes as they face economic and social struggles on a daily basis. Their main problems can be listed as accommodation, low living standards, unemployment, lack of higher education (due to financial difficulties), alienation, unawareness of the Georgian society about the difficulties they experience, and, in some cases, discrimination. The vulnerable situation of the IDPs creates problems of integration and social interaction. Although there is a very small number of IDPs having different ethnic origins other than Georgian - mostly via intermarriages-, the vast majority of the IDPs are ethnically Georgian.¹² Besides their ethnicity, the IDPs have the same religion

¹¹ The numbers of the registered IDPs in the remaining regions of Georgia is as follows: 6.416 in Adjara, 490 in Guria, 1.486 in Kakheti, 2.288 in Samtskhe-Javakheti and 12.406 in Kvemo Kartli. MRA (2014). "IDP Figures", <http://mra.gov.ge/eng/static/55> (Accessed: April 24, 2018).

¹² It is important to mention that a considerable portion of the IDPs, who have fled from Abkhazia, are Megrelians. Megrelians (Megrels/Mingrelians) are a sub-ethnic group of Georgians, who live mainly in the Samegrelo region of Georgia and in Abkhazia. They speak Megrelian language, which is a separate division of Kartvelian language together with the Laz

(predominantly they are the members of the Georgian Orthodox Church) and cultural norms (there are minor differences mainly because of regional characteristics) with local Georgians. Thus, it is expected that their integration to the society would be easier due to their commonalities. Conversely, several research studies, including the research conducted for this thesis, show that there are important integration problems.

1.2. Argument of the Thesis

This thesis aims at providing answers to several questions such as: 1) Can we conceptualize the IDP identity as a salient form of social identity in Georgia? 2) If so, what are the main factors that lead to the formation of this group identity? 3) How do the IDPs maneuver in their inter-group and in-group relations? 4) If the IDP identity is a significant social identity in Georgia, would it remain, transform or disintegrate with regard to the changes in the social context?

Within the framework of the above mentioned questions and the data gathered from the field research conducted in Georgia between 2014 and 2017, a set of arguments has been put forward. The first argument this thesis supports is that although the IDPs of Georgia (both coming from Abkhazia or South Ossetia) are part of the titular nation, they faced severe integration problems even after more than a quarter century has passed since the first migration wave. Socio-economic handicaps and a forced existence at the bottom layer of the social hierarchy caused a feeling of alienation among the IDPs and in some cases they felt discriminated against. Considering the fact that the country itself experienced

language (South Caucasus Language). The language is not mutually intelligible with the Georgian language. For further information: Mingrelians <http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Mingrelians.aspx> (Accessed: May 30, 2017). During the fieldwork of this thesis, a vast majority of the IDPs, who have migrated from Abkhazia, stated that they were of the Megrelian origin. Those who identified themselves as Megrelian were asked about whether they feel like Georgian or not. A few of the interviewees mentioned that there are some Megrelians they know of; however, they believe that Megrelians are not Georgians. On the other hand, all of the interviewees of the Megrelian origin stated that they are Georgians.

many challenges during and following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the economic hardships affected all the parties in the country, which is why the IDPs were perceived as a kind of a “burden” because of the limited resources. This also caused a fragmentation between the IDPs and the locals, which resulted in an “us and them” process, during which both groups created different labels for the other. Some of the labels directed to the IDPs include also some negative connotations. In addition, due to the socio-economic challenges, the IDPs could not establish well-grounded group solidarity in a political sense; however, during the fieldwork it was observed that there still exists a sense of solidarity among the IDPs based on kinship, neighborliness and the regionality, which became a source for group favoritism. In this sense, being an IDP is an important identity marker and therefore a significant social identity for the forcibly migrated Georgians.

This thesis further argues that the significance of the IDP identity fluctuates with social changes. In times of crises and hardships experienced in the country, the fragmentation between the IDP and the host community increases, and the boundaries of the IDP identity become stronger as a consequence of in-group favoritism and ‘out-group/other(s)’ exclusion. In times of economic stability and political consolidation, however, the vividness of the boundaries of the IDP identity reduces. Based on the data gathered during the fieldwork of this thesis, it is also possible to argue that, in general, the IDPs are still perceived as the ‘inferior’ social group, while the local Georgians are the superior ones in their social interaction. Hence, there is a tendency of social mobility among the members of the IDP group, especially among the young, to change their social status within the society. Thus, this thesis argues that the level of in-group belonging also varies among generations. Accordingly, exposition to alienation and discrimination as well as the stigmatization of the IDP identity resulted in a change and transformation of the nature of the group. The IDPs have the tendency to develop a positive version of their identity by correlating their

groupness with their homeland and the positive aspects of their group such as sedulity, cultural norms and unity.

1.3. The Reason behind Analyzing the Georgian IDPs with the Social Identity Theory

This thesis focuses on the group-based distinction of the Georgian IDPs from the rest of the Georgian society even though they have the same features with the host community, i.e., they hold Georgianness as their prior social identity. Hence, in this thesis, their distinctiveness is elaborated as an issue of identity. Since identity is a creation of the reciprocal relationship of self and society, it occurs through social interaction (Jenkins, 2004: 5; Stets and Burke, 2000: 224), with which we can classify ourselves within social context. Sometimes we see the commonalities and tend to unify with the other or we see the differences and thus distance ourselves from the other (Stets and Burke, 2003: 1-4). The differentiation of interaction forces self to be fragmented. Therefore, the multi-layered structure of self is organized by multiple identities, which comes to surface under different circumstances or with different positions we hold in society. It means that there is a hierarchical structuring between our identities, and we categorize/identify/classify some of our identities (whether individual, social or collective), as more prior/salient to the others. Given the fact that all our identities are interwoven and are all social -since they are the products of social interaction- what is referred to as “social identity” in this thesis is an issue of categorization. The concept of social identity helps to analyze the notions of self, identity and identity construction within a group membership perspective. Membership to a group provides individuals with a sense of belonging and consequently self-awareness (Stryker and Serpe, 1994; La Barbare, 2014). In other words, a social group can only exist with group members that identify themselves with that particular group and that have a similar approach to life and to the events happening to them (Cinoğlu and Arıkan, 2012: 1123-1125). For instance, in order to highlight the effects of shared difficulties on the

identification process of the displaced Russians, Pilkington states that “because of the difficulty of the problems they face and the lack of ‘roots’ in their new places of residence, migrants come to play for each other the role of family, kin and friendship networks they have left behind.” (1998: 167).

As internal displacement is a form of migration and migrant identity is one of the most inquired topics in social sciences, the initial aim of this thesis was to consider the theoretical approaches that specifically focus on the migrant identity. The studies which investigated migrant identity construction largely concentrated on the immigration cases that took place in the Western geographies, where (im)migrants come into different social contexts (Rouse, 1995; Padilla and Perez, 2003; Pfeifer et al., 2007; Kinefuchi, 2010; La Barbare (ed.), 2014; Bughra and Becker, 2005; Timotijevic and Breakwell, 2000; Adamson, Triadafilopoulos and Zolberg, 2011; Krzyżanowski and Wodak, 2008; Kazmierska, 2003). In these studies, distinctiveness of migrant from host communities has an excessive impact on the identification process of the migrant groups. The more their features differ from the host community (i.e. culture, religion, language, and ethnicity), the more their migrant identity becomes apparent. Henceforth, these studies primarily explore both individual and collective responses of migrants to the in-group and out-group interactions. The responses of migrants, which determine the salience of group boundaries, are diversified either as a clash or a negotiation with the host society, resulting in different forms of migrant identities e.g., transnational (Tsuda, 2012; Vertovec, 2010; Rouse, 1995), diasporic (Tsolidis (ed.), 2014; Safran, 1991), acculturated or assimilated (Padilla, 1980; Padilla, 1987; Padilla and Perez, 2003; Canabiss and Cameron, 2017).

Moreover, in order to analyze the identification processes of migrants at both inter-personal and intergroup levels, several concepts are widely used in the literature such as “individual, social and institutional belonging” (Bretell, 2015, Krzyżanowski and Wodak, 2008), “homeland” (La Barbare, 2015; Ralph and

Staeheli, 2011), “generational differences” (Keefe and Padilla, 1987; Krzyżanowski and Wodak, 2008) and “social stigma/labeling” (Padilla and Perez, 2003). The findings of the studies mostly coincide with the Georgian case. As stated earlier, during the fieldworks conducted in Georgia, labeling and negative connotations directed to the IDPs by the host community are among the most mentioned facts by the interviewees. Furthermore, the perception of homeland and the perception of belonging to the new places of residences were diversified among the 1st, 1.5th¹³ and 2nd generations of IDPs. Therefore, the above mentioned concepts are effective analytical tools and they were useful in this thesis. However, as these studies predominantly establish the foundation of intergroup interaction on the distinctiveness of the migrant and the host communities and focus on the effects of distinctiveness on migrants’ distant ethnic, religious and cultural identities, they disaccord with the case of the Georgian IDPs.

In search for a more accurate approach that would shed light on an in-group and out-group distinction within a society which shares common features, I found out that the most relevant approach was of Tajfel and Turner’s ‘Social Identity Theory’ (Tajfel and Turner, 1978; 1986). This theory formulates social identity as a part of self which is derived from group membership. In Social Identity Theory, Tajfel and Turner mainly argue that the core determinant of individuals is to sustain positive self-esteem, and group membership becomes a source which both restores and revitalizes the self-esteem we seek for by providing individuals with a sense of belonging. The Social Identity Theory suggests that people are inclined to categorize their social world (as us and them) and accordingly locate themselves in a group through three stages, namely “social categorization”, “social identification” and “social comparison”. Membership to

¹³ The first generation IDPs are those who were born at their homeland and were adults during the migration process. What is referred to as the 1.5th generation is the migrants who were born at their homeland but experienced migration when they were children. Thus, they typically carry the characteristics of both their homeland and their new places of residences. The 2nd generation migrants were born in the new places of residences to the parents who experienced migration (Olczyk and Kristen, 2016: 16).

a group but not to another helps individuals to maintain their self-esteem. Therefore, people on the one hand tend to favor the in-group they feel belonging to and on the other hand they maximize the differences with the out-group. Even though within a relevant social context the competitive nature of the intergroup relations may result in one group to be the superior and the other to be the inferior, there is no certainty that groups may fall into a social conflict.

Social psychologists Tajfel and Turner developed the Social Identity Theory by performing controlled laboratory experiments and they claimed that even in such an embryonic environment, the participants of the experiment would incline to in-group favoritism and out-group differentiation. Since their theory was formulated on a micro level analysis, some questions may be raised related to its applicability to a more complex social context (Jenkins, 2004: 90). Nonetheless, today the Social Identity Theory is utilized by many disciplines of social sciences including international relations and has been proven to be useful in many research studies (Larson, 2017; Hymans, 2002). As Hogg and Ridgeway state, although there are challenges, interdisciplinary studies have already benefited “cross-fertilization research on groups, identity, and behavior” (2003: 98).

Besides its efficiency in terms of explaining the group formation and identification processes of the Georgian IDPs, this theory further provides clarification on the behavioral patterns of in-group members (i.e. social mobility and social change). It also has a systematic approach to the conditions leading to the transformation or the disintegration of a group (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Therefore, this thesis utilizes the fundamental version of the Social Identity Theory, not the other theories derived from it which investigate the various reasoning (i.e. cognitive, motivational and emotional) of group membership and the identity salience of group members such as “self-categorization theory” (Turner, 1985; Turner et al., 1987), “optimal distinctiveness theory” (Brewer,

1991), “uncertainty-identity theory” (Hogg, 2000), and “intergroup emotion theory” (Smith and Mackie, 2015; Mackie, Smith and Ray, 2008; Smith, 1993).

1.4. Methods

As a single case study, this thesis analyzes the Georgian IDPs with an interpretivist approach. Therefore, besides documentary resources, understanding the subjective knowledge gathered from agencies is crucial (Della Porta and Keating, 2008). The social context, in which the Georgian IDPs’ social identity formation occurs, is aimed to be searched by exploring the causal relationship between the selected variables. In particular, the main concepts that have significant effects on the perception of the IDPs are inquired, i.e. otherness, groupness, similarity, difference, belonging, solidarity, ethnic conflict, *de facto* states, homeland and displacement. To this end, process tracing, documentary research and field research methods were adopted.

Within the scope of documentary research, official documents regarding Georgia’s legislation on the IDPs (laws, regulations, statements), reports prepared by international organizations (CoE, UN, UNHCR, World Bank, Norwegian Refugee Council) on the Georgian IDPs, and annual reports, surveys, case studies, recommendations and policy papers of local non-governmental organizations (i.e., Caucasus Research and Resources Center, Georgia’s Reform Associates, Synergy Network, the Institute for the Study of Nationalism and Conflicts) and Public Defender of Georgia were used.

Process tracing is a research method that traces in detail the causal mechanisms within a case aiming to understand how they operate (Levy, 2002; Bennet and Elman, 2007; Venneson, 2008). Since process tracing contains both “inductive and deductive study of events and sequences within a case” (Bennet and Elman, 2007: 183), it becomes an effective analytical tool for both “theory-testing and theory-building purposes” (Beach, 2017). With this method, I aimed to

investigate several issues. Firstly, by examining the historiographies of all three ethnic groups (Georgians, Abkhazians, and South Ossetians), I intended not only to detect the events that triggered the ethnic conflicts, but also to understand their points of view and perceptions. I also aimed to investigate the events which affect the salience of the IDP group identity, and this method gives an opportunity to test the applicability of the Social Identity Theory on the case of the Georgian IDPs.

Through the fieldwork method, I aimed to observe the distinctive physical environments that the IDPs have been living in on the one hand, and to conduct semi-structured in-depth interviews on the other. My aim was to select the interviewees from among the IDPs as the in-group agency, and from among the state officials, politicians, academicians and NGO (non-governmental organization) experts as the out-group agencies. The interviews with the in-group agencies, namely with both the old and the new IDPs, were predominantly conducted in house visits. The majority of the interviewed IDPs were residing in compact settlements such as old school dormitories, hospitals, hotels, and deserted buildings. Besides a few exceptions, the living conditions of these compact settlements were relatively poor. In this sense, conducting fieldwork gave me an opportunity to observe the impact of the living spaces and the conditions of the IDPs on their identity construction, perception of homeland, and perception of belonging.

The reasons for using semi-structured in-depth interviewing vary. Firstly, through first-hand data gathered from the interviewees, researchers can test their “theoretical variables of interest” (Galletta, 2013: 9).¹⁴ Since the responses of the interviewees are not limited with a “yes or no type answer”, this method enables researchers to hear the own words of the interviewees (Longhurst, 2016: 145). Thus, the gathered data includes interviewees’ life experiences and their

¹⁴ See also: Leech B. (2002). “Asking Questions: Techniques for Semistructured Interviews”, *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 35(4): 665-668.

perceptions on the inquired issues. Also, this type of a method is more appropriate to address sensitive topics (Fylan, 2005: 67). Semi-structured interviewing helped me to understand the perceptions, feelings and thoughts of the interviewees on the related research. Considering the fact that the migration stories and the experienced difficulties in the aftermath of the migration period are quite sensitive and personal topics for the IDPs, this method helped me to maneuver when needed as many of the interviewees were still carrying post-trauma distress signs of the war and displacement. In this sense, the questions were prepared in a manner of delicacy and any possible negative effect of the interviews on the IDPs was avoided as much as possible.

Besides the IDPs, whose perceptions provided the core data to this research, the insights of the out-group agencies (especially official figures and experts) were of great importance. Considering the time limit of the field research, their expertise provided a compact and rapid understanding of the IDP issue in Georgia, which helped distinguishing the relevant and outdated themes of the researched group.¹⁵ Also, unlike the structured interviews, the flexibility of this method allows researchers not only to modify their questions during the interview in case they are not clear enough for the respondent (Fylan, 2005: 67), but also to add/reconstruct new question themes that were not discovered in the preliminary research to the research based on the information provided by the interviewees (Blanford, 2013).

1.4.1. Preliminary Research, the Selection of the Target Groups, and the Questions Themes

The preliminary research consists of two parts: preliminary research and the selection of both the target groups and the question themes. In the first part, I conducted a general documentary research on the Georgian IDPs and narrowed

¹⁵ For further information on expert interviews see: Bogner A.; Beate L. and Wolfgang M. (ed). (2009). *Interviewing Experts*. Hampshire: Palgrave.

down the variables which I thought were affecting the identify formation of the Georgian IDPs as a social group. In the second part, I specified the target groups and the question themes for the in-depth interviews. As stated earlier, the literature on the Georgian IDPs consists of either descriptive case studies or preventive/protective strategy reports. Therefore, I first reviewed the existing literature on the Georgian IDPs such as scientific articles, surveys, case studies, reports, recommendations, and policy papers.¹⁶ After the compilation and interpretation of the data gathered during the preliminary research, I focused on several issues in my first fieldwork. These issues can be listed as the extent of the division between the IDPs and the local Georgians, the level of integration of the IDPs to the society, the interaction of the in-group and the out-group agencies, the policies of the Georgian state, NGOs and international organizations, the extent of the solidarity among the IDPs, the economic situation of the IDPs, as well as their perception of solidarity, homeland, conflict, possibility of return and the futures of the two *de facto* states.

I selected the target groups under two main divisions: in-group and out-group agencies. The in-group agencies were divided into three target groups; early-comers: 1) the IDPs from Abkhazia, 2) the IDPs from South Ossetia who fled in the early 1990s, and 3) the late-comers: the IDPs from South Ossetia who came right after the ‘5-Days War’ in August 2008. The out-group agencies are composed of academicians, experts, NGO members, political figures and

¹⁶ For further information on scientific articles, see: Walicki, 2011; Mitchneck, Mayorova and Regulska, 2009; Salukvadze et al., 2013; Røkke, 2012; Rekhviashvili, 2012; Dunn, 2012; Koch, 2012; Dunn, 2014; Dunn, 2018; Tarkhan-Mouravi and Sumbadze, 2006; Kabachnik, Regulska and Mitchneck, 2012; Zimmerly, 2009; Tarkhan-Mouravi, 2011. For further information for institutional reports and policy papers, see: Caucasus Research Resources Center, 2009; Caucasus Research Resources Center, 2010; CoE, 2002; CoE, 2006a; CoE, 2008; CoE, 2009a; CoE, 2009b; CoE, 2009c; CoE, 2012a; CoE, 2018; Georgia’s Reform Associates, 2014; Government of Georgia, 2010; Human Rights Watch, 2011a; Human Rights Watch, 2011b; ISNC and the Synergy Network, 2015; NRC/IDMC, 2005; NRC/IDMC, 2006; NRC/IDMC, 2007; NRC/IDMC, 2009; NRC/IDMC, 2011a; NRC/IDMC, 2011b; NRC/IDMC, 2013; NRC/IDMC, 2018; The Public Defender of Georgia, 2010; The Public Defender of Georgia, 2013; The Public Defender of Georgia, 2015; The Public Defender of Georgia, 2016; The Public Defender of Georgia, 2017; The Public Defender of Georgia, 2018; The World Bank, 2016; The World Bank, 2017; UN and the World Bank, 2009; UNHCR, 2009; UNHCR, 2015a; UNHCR, 2015b.

government officials. Some questions were directed to both in-group and out-group members, and some were designed separately. For the in-group agencies, the themes of the questions were basically divided into five sections, which are 1) personal history of migration; 2) economic conditions (accommodation, living conditions, employment); 3) social conditions (education, interaction with the society, integration, alienation/discrimination, solidarity, perception for locals, locals' perception for IDPs, perception for other IDP groups, homeland, belonging to the place they migrated from or belonging to the place they migrated to; 4) political conditions (interaction with the government/ the NGOs/ the opposition parties, expectations from the state/the NGOs, awareness of social rights, initiatives that are taken by them; and 5) perception of their future regarding the relations with the *de facto* states, willingness and the possibility to return, and their future expectations.

Except for the first theme, these questions were also directed to the out-group agencies, in addition to the questions related to their expertise on the IDPs. The out-group agencies were also expected to answer these questions both by expressing their own point of view and by explaining their perception of how the IDPs would answer. In some cases, some interviewees belonged to both parties. For instance, sometimes I had the chance to interview NGO experts and politicians who had IDP background.

1.4.2. Fieldworks

Between 2014 and 2017, I carried out five fieldworks during which I conducted 85 in-depth interviews in total.¹⁷ Mostly the interviews took an average of 1-1.5

¹⁷ Three out-group interviewees (two experts and one academician) were visited twice in different fieldwork periods. The main reasons for these repeated meetings were first to clarify earlier fieldworks' data and second to learn the untouched parts of the dissertation regarding the conflicted ethnic groups (Abkhazians and South Ossetians). Therefore, Interviewee 82 and 85, Interviewee 74 and 81, and Interviewee 79 and 80 are the same persons.

hours, the shortest of which was around 15-30 minutes¹⁸ and the longest extending to more than 3 hours. 32 of these interviews were conducted with prominent people and experts, five of whom were IDPs; hence, they were also in-group members. The remaining 53 interviews were conducted with the IDPs. From 58 interviewed IDPs (including 5 prominent people with IDP background), 40 of them were women and 18 of them were men. Interviewees were between the ages of 18 and late 80s, which gave me the opportunity to observe three different IDP generations. Thus, again from among 58 interviewed IDPs, 47 of them are 1st, eight of them are 1.5th and three of them are the 2nd generation IDPs. Of the 58 interviewed IDPs, 52 were the old IDPs, 43 of whom were from Abkhazia and 9 of whom were from South Ossetia. The remaining six IDPs were the new IDPs that came from South Ossetia during the 2008 War.

As mentioned above, except for ten IDP interviews (including five IDP/predominant people interviews at their offices), 48 IDP interviews were carried out at the IDP settlements. Because of the space problems at those settlements, some of the interviews were held with the whole family, but all of the interviewees answered the questions individually. The settlements of the early-comers are mainly located at the city center and some at the outskirts of Tbilisi, while the settlements of late-comers from South Ossetia were 40 km away from Tbilisi and close to the South Ossetia border. In sum, I have been at 12 different IDP settlements, two of which were visited twice (The visited settlements are portrayed in Chapter Seven).

¹⁸ All the interviewees were informed before the interviews that if they feel any sorts of distress and do not want to continue the interview, we would stop right away. None of them stated that they do not want to answer the questions or stop the interview. Yet, as mentioned earlier, for some IDPs, more than 30 years have passed, and calling back the unpleasant memories led to agony. Therefore, as soon as they showed any signs of distress, I immediately ended the interview. Therefore, three to four interviews lasted quite short, between 15 to 30 minutes.

1.4.2.1. The First Fieldwork (November 6, 2014 - December 11, 2014)

I conducted my first fieldwork between November 6 and December 11, 2014. Before heading to my first fieldwork, I arranged several expert interviews, some of whom were my personal network from my earlier research. During the first fieldwork, my main objectives were reaching the planned contacts, finding a native speaking translator, interviewing with the IDPs, and establishing the necessary networks from NGO experts and state officials for my second fieldwork. The reasons behind the planning of state officials' and NGO experts' interviews to be conducted in the second fieldwork were to process the data that was gathered from the IDPs and the experts, and thereby being aware of the main IDP problems on the one hand, and simply the time limitations for the fieldwork on the other. As a result, during the first fieldwork in 2014, 47 interviews were conducted. 16 of the interviewees were academicians, political figures, and NGO experts. Of these 16 people, three of them were IDPs from Abkhazia. The remaining 31 interviews were with the IDPs (composed of both early-comers from Abkhazia and South Ossetia and late-comers from South Ossetia).

1.4.2.2. The Second Fieldwork (September 26, 2015-October 22, 2015)

In my second fieldwork, which was held between September 26 and October 22, 2015, I conducted interviews with NGO experts, state officials including one from MRA and a staff member of Public Defenders' Office, as well as the IDPs. The aim of this fieldwork was to compare the perceptions of the IDPs with the out-group agencies and also to understand the official attitude towards them, which was one of the main indicators affecting the IDPs' notion of belonging and group identity. 20 interviews were conducted in the second fieldwork, nine of which were carried out with the out-group agencies. Of these nine interviewees, one expert was an IDP from Abkhazia. The remaining 11 people were again IDPs (only one of these interviewees was a late-comer from South Ossetia and the rest were from Abkhazia).

1.4.2.3. The Third (October 29, 2016-December 9, 2016), Fourth (April 2, 2017-April 9, 2017) and Fifth Fieldworks (November 26, 2017- December 3, 2017)

I conducted my third field research between October 29 and December 9, 2016, fourth field research between April 2 and April 9, 2017, and the final fieldwork between November 26 and December 3, 2017. The final three fieldworks, which were relatively shorter visits to Georgia compared to the previous two, were carried out to remedy the deficiencies in the gathered data and to elucidate the necessary details. In 2016 fieldwork, the interviews were held with one academician and five IDPs from Abkhazia. In the fourth fieldwork, I only conducted three interviews; one was an academician and the remaining two were the experts working on conflict resolution and dialogue with the *de facto* states. One of these experts was an IDP from Abkhazia. In my fifth and final fieldwork, I conducted interviews with one academician, two experts, and six early-comer IDPs (one from Abkhazia and five from South Ossetia).

1.4.3. Selection of the Translator and the Limitations of the Fieldwork

The interviews were conducted both in English and Georgian. While I carried out the out-group agency interviews in English, most of the IDP interviews were conducted with the help of a translator. Since language barrier may constitute a serious problem in fieldworks, the selection of a translator was extremely crucial. In order to find a translator, I received the support of an academician from the Department of Psychology at Tbilisi State University, who also was familiar with my research topic since she had several research studies on the Georgian IDPs with a gender perspective. She introduced me to a translator who was an M.A. student at the same department and who had previously worked as a translator on this specific topic. More importantly, this translator herself was a 1.5th generation IDP from Abkhazia. She knew all the settlements that the IDPs were living in and she had a personal experience and background about the

problems of the IDPs. Although it seems to be disadvantageous to be a stranger, who does not know the language and needs a translator, the consequences of my interview experiences were quite the opposite, because of two main reasons. First, if I knew the language and conducted the interviews myself, being a researcher who does not have the same cultural background would most probably create loopholes. However, the translator gave me many hints and insider information about the IDPs and this helped me to organize my interviews more efficiently. Secondly, as she was a Georgian (Megrelian) and an IDP gatekeeper, the IDP interviewees felt at ease and told more than they would tell to a stranger.

During the fieldworks, the real challenge was to arrange interviews with state officials and NGO experts. The changes in the political agenda of Georgia had an impact on these arrangements. The attention of both local (NGOs and state officials) and international actors (INGOs -international non-governmental organizations-, supranational organizations) to the IDP issue declined after the War in 2008. Although the problems of the IDPs remained important, after the passing years, the interest in the IDP issue decreased. The vast majority of the predominant people, who were once working on the IDPs, ceased to focus on that topic, which caused a delay in my out-group agency interviews, especially the ones with officials, in my second fieldwork and a rescheduling of my fieldwork plans.

1.5. Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is composed of eight chapters. The first chapter, the introduction, aims to give a general outlook of the studied social group, present the main questions and the arguments of the thesis, as well as why the Social Identity Theory was chosen as the theoretical basis for this study. Then, it details the methodological framework of the thesis by presenting detailed information about the fieldwork process.

The literature review and the theoretical framework are presented in the second chapter. The chapter starts with an elaboration of the IDP concept and investigation on how it is addressed in both the international and Georgian literature. In the second part of the second chapter, the theoretical framework is detailed. After highlighting the discussions on identity in social sciences, the main identity categories and approaches to the concept of identity are evaluated. Thereinafter, the distinction between a social category and social group is clarified. This chapter also inquires the effect of external definition on the construction of a devalued/stigmatized identity. The chapter ends by examining the Social Identity Theory in detail and its adaption to the Georgian IDPs' identification process.

The following three chapters focus on the roots of ethnic conflicts between Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia and also the consequences of these conflicts regarding the IDP situation in Georgia. Chapter Three starts with an introduction, which draws the framework for the chapter itself and the upcoming two chapters. Rather than giving a chronological listing of the IDP waves and the related conflicts, what is intended in these chapters is to investigate the nation building processes of the conflicting parties. After the introduction, a brief display of the Caucasus region is given. Then the chapter explores the narratives of these ethnic groups including their myths, historiographies, antiquity debates and their interaction throughout their early histories. This chapter argues that the 'Russian effect' has an immense role on the identity construction of these three nations; hence, the first part of the following chapter (Chapter Four) elaborates on the Tsarist period in Georgia. This era is also important to shed light on the emergence of the 19th century nationalism in Georgia, as well as for its impact on Abkhazian national consciousness regarding their mass deportation from their homeland. Chapter Four continues with the evaluation of the short period of independence of Georgia (1918-1921). This period has a significant place in the Georgian collective memory, since it was, in a sense, the first modern state and nation building experience of Georgia. However, it was also the first period in

which the Georgians and the South Ossetians faced with each other at an armed conflict. The last part of Chapter Four focuses on the Soviet period and its effect on Georgian, Abkhazian and South Ossetian identity (re)constructions through the nationality policies that created a hierarchy among the titular nations and their minorities. Thus, the chapter elaborates on the historical process which carried Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia to ethnic conflicts. Chapter Five concentrates on the early years of independence and its impacts on the peoples of Georgia. The political, economic and social conditions are detailed considering their effects on the society. Following that, the chapter analyzes the main armed conflicts resulting in the IDP flows such as the Georgian-Ossetian and the Georgian-Abkhazian Conflicts along with the May 1998/Gali events, 2004 Enguri Market incident, and the '5-Day War' of 2008.

Chapter Six briefly touches upon the initiatives that are taken by the Georgian state, civil society and international actors regarding the IDP situation in the country. Chapter Seven, which presents the fieldwork findings, aims to elaborate on the contemporary situation of the Georgian IDPs and the factors that shape their identity construction. The chapter focuses on the in-group agencies, their peculiarities, in-group and intergroup relations, as well as their perceptions on IDP identity. This chapter also aims to give the perception and the approaches of the out-group agencies towards the Georgian IDPs. To this end, a part of the chapter investigates the relations of the IDPs with three major out-group agencies: society, state and the civil society. Based on the above mentioned findings, the evolution of the IDP concept as a social identity and the behavioral patterns of the Georgian IDPs are evaluated in the last part of this chapter. Chapter Eight covers the concluding remarks and the assessments on the applicability of the Social Identity Theory to the Georgian IDPs.

CHAPTER 2

A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON THE IDPS AND THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL IDENTITY

2.1. The Concept of IDP and Its Place in the Literature

As mentioned earlier, after the Cold-War period, the forced migration issue became a hot topic in social sciences and in the international arena in the early 1990s as millions of people were forced to migrate from their habitats. Since then, the forcibly displaced population continues to escalate as millions are added to the existing forcibly displaced population each year. In addition to the increasing numbers of the displaced and the need for sufficient, immediate and preventive/responsive action plans, another important issue is to sustain the full integration of the forced migrants to their host societies since there is a high possibility of integration crisis. In some cases, even when the (im)migrants belong to the same ethnic/religious/cultural communities with their hosts, integration problems may still emerge. If the process is not effectively handled by the state, it is highly probable that the problem will continue for decades. As also stated in this thesis, Georgia is still facing an analogous IDP challenge, even after many years.

Forced migrants are categorized under different concepts such as refugee, stateless, asylum-seeker, IDP or IDP-like. The vast majority of them are composed of the IDPs¹⁹ and there is not a legally binding definition of the IDP at the international level. However, in April 1998, the UNHCR released a report entitled “Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement”, in which the IDPs are defined as:

¹⁹ UNHCR. “Populations”, <http://reporting.unhcr.org/population> (Accessed: January 1, 2018).

Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border.²⁰

The definition highlights two important facts. First, the displacement is a necessity; i.e., it is not a voluntary act. Second, it occurs only within a country's internationally recognized borders (Mooney, 2005: 10). As mentioned above, the definition does not impose any legal obligation; therefore, the IDPs, unlike refugees, neither hold any special status for not crossing their state borders, nor have any international agencies or international treaties that specifically deal with them.²¹ The rights and the status of refugees, on the other hand, are guaranteed under the multilateral treaty of the UN, the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees in 1951 and the Refugee Protocol in 1967.²² Hence, a refugee crisis can be interfered as soon as refugees cross the borders of their own country. In this context, although they are as vulnerable as refugees, the IDPs attract less attention at international level. Many states ignore the IDP issue and do not take necessary measures for the protection of those people in need as it is an issue of sovereignty (Weiss, 1999: 363-364).

In the light of the above mentioned facts, the early research on internal displacement and the IDPs mainly focused on two significant subjects. First, researchers aimed at defining the concept of IDP, which has both political and scientific aspects (Barutciski, 1998; Rutinwa, 1999; Mooney, 2005); and second, they focused on establishing preventive and protective strategies because due to

²⁰ UNHCR (2004). "Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement" (2nd Edition), <http://www.unhcr.org/protection/idps/43ce1cff2/guiding-principles-internal-displacement.html> (Accessed: January 1, 2017).

²¹ UNHCR (2001). "Refugee Protection: A Guide to International Refugee Law", <http://www.unhcr.org/publications/legal/3d4aba564/refugee-protection-guide-international-refugee-law-handbook-parliamentarians.html> (Accessed: January 1, 2017), p.26.

²² UNHCR. "Refugee Figures" <http://tinyurl.com/65s4rbp> (Accessed: March 1, 2017).

the humanitarian dimension of the issue, there was a need for rapid solutions. Thus, the early studies on the IDPs were predominantly conducted by the supranational organizations, which primarily aimed at defining the problem to lead a way to the adaptation of a protective international legal framework.²³ Accordingly, in the existing literature, the studies on the IDPs are composed of either descriptive case studies or response strategies due to the humanitarian dimension of the issue. These studies mostly dwell on specific case studies with a focus on why and how displacement happens, under which circumstances the IDPs have been living, how INGOs, NGOs and global/regional institutions react to this problem, and what kind of strategies and legal regulations can be developed at both national and international levels (Deng and Cohen, 1998a; Deng and Cohen, 1998b; Vincent and Sorensen, 2001; Banerjee, Chaudhury and Das, 2005).²⁴ It is also important to note that, although there are some studies that concentrate on the IDPs based on a theoretical framework, the number of such studies is quite limited when compared with other migrant groups, e.g. immigrants, refugees, diaspora communities, labor migrants, and illegal migrants; hence, there is a significant gap in the related literature.²⁵

²³ Cohen, Roberta (1991). *Human Rights Protection for Internally Displaced Persons*. <http://repository.forcedmigration.org/pdf/?pid=fmo:727> (Accessed: February 25, 2017); UN Secretary General (1992). "Analytical Report of the Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons", <http://repository.un.org/handle/11176/188685> (Accessed: March 1, 2017). UNHCR, *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, 22 July 1998, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3c3da07f7.html> (Accessed: 08.07.2020).

²⁴ For further information on legal and human rights-related studies on the IDPs see: Deng, Francis M. (1995). "Frontiers of Sovereignty: A Framework of Protection, Assistance, and Development for the Internally Displaced", *Leiden Journal of International Law* 8(2): 249-286; Hampton, Jamie (1998). *Internally Displaced People: A Global Survey* (ed.). London: Earthscan; Lee, Luket (1996). "Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees: Toward a Legal Synthesis?", *Journal of Refugee Studies* 9(1): 27-42; Brun, Cathrine (2005). "Reserach Guide on Internal Displacement" Forced Migration Online <http://www.forcedmigration.org/research-resources/expert-guides/internal-displacement> (Accessed: April 29, 2018); Phuong, Cathrine (2004). *The International Protection of Internally Displaced Persons*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

²⁵ A remarkable sociological research study which focuses on the displacement in the post-Soviet space is worth mentioning. Hilary Pilkington's *Migration, Displacement and Identity in Post-Soviet Russia* (1998), which is based on a two-year field research, elaborates on the displacement

The studies on the Georgian IDPs, on the other hand, are mainly composed of institutional reports, surveys, books, recommendations, and policy papers (of state, think-tanks, supranational organizations, NGOs, INGOs and the Public Defender's Office in Georgia) which vastly concentrate on the accommodation problems and socio-economic conditions of the IDPs²⁶ as well as on the attitudes of the Georgian IDPs towards conflicts between Georgia and the two *de facto* states.²⁷ In comparison to the institutional research and publications, the scholarly literature that specifically focuses on the Georgian IDPs is scarce. Yet, there is still a number of academic studies conducted within different disciplines of social sciences such as anthropology, sociology, geography and psychology,

of 25 million ethnic Russians from other Soviet Socialist Republics in the aftermath of the collapse of the Union to the Russian Federation. She explores the identity formation of the displaced Russians as 'other' in the process of the reconstruction of the post-Soviet Russian identity within the Federation with a specific focus on the state's regional migration policies.

²⁶ For the research on the socio-economic conditions and accommodation problems of the Georgian IDPs, see: Tarkhan-Mouravi, Giorgi (2009). *Assessment of IDP Livelihoods in Georgia: Facts and Policies*. Tbilisi: UNHCR/DRC. <http://www.unhcr.org/4ad827b12.pdf> (Accessed: April 29, 2018); Tarkhan-Mouravi, Giorgi and Sumbadze, Nana (2003). *Working Paper on IDP Vulnerability and Economic Self-Reliance*. UNDP: Tbilisi; Institute for Policy Studies (2008). *Rapid Needs Assessment of Internally Displaced Women as a Result of August 2008 Events in Georgia*. Tbilisi: IPS; Caucasus Research Resources Center (2010). *IDPs in Georgia*. Focus Group Report, Tbilisi. http://crrc.ge/uploads/tiny_mce/documents/Completedprojects/IDPs_in_Georgia_Focus_Group_Report.pdf (Accessed: April 20, 2018); Caucasus Research Resources Center (2009). *Survey on Social Economic Situation in IDP Settlement and Adjacent Areas*. <http://www.crrccenters.org/20525/Survey-on-Social-Economic-Situation-in-IDP-Settlement-and-Adjacent-Areas> (Accessed: March 1, 2018); Caucasus Research Resources Center (2010). *IDPs in Georgia*. Focus Group Report, Tbilisi. http://crrc.ge/uploads/tiny_mce/documents/Completedprojects/IDPs_in_Georgia_Focus_Group_Report.pdf (Accessed: April 20, 2018); The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2008). *A Heavy Burden - Internally Displaced in Georgia: Stories from Abkhazia and South Ossetia*. Tbilisi: IDMC; Georgia's Reform Associates (2014). *Alternatives to Durable Housing Solutions: Privately Accommodated IDPs in Georgia. Policy Paper*. Tbilisi: GRASS <http://grass.org.ge/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/IDP-POLICY-PAPER-FINAL-SERGI-4-1-2014.pdf> (Accessed: April 29, 2018).

²⁷ For research on frozen conflict between Georgia and two *de facto* states and its impact on the IDPs, see: International Crises Group (2013). *Abkhazia: The Long Road to Reconciliation*. Europe Report No: 224; Caucasus Research Resources Center (2010). *IDPs in Georgia Frequencies*. CRRC Survey, Tbilisi. http://www.c-r.org/downloads/IDPs%20in%20Georgia_Frequencies_Undated_ENG.pdf (Accessed: April 20, 2018); Grono, Magdalena F. (2011). *Displacement in Georgia: IDP Attitudes to Conflict, Return and Justice*. Tbilisi: Conciliation Resources.

which approach different aspects of internal displacement in Georgia. These studies on the IDPs and internal displacement predominantly concentrate on the integration/isolation (Walicki, 2011; Mitchneck, Mayorova and Regulaska, 2009; Salukvadze et al., 2013), group solidarity (Røkke, 2012; Rekhviashvili, 2012), humanitarian aid (Dunn, 2012; Koch, 2012; Dunn, 2014; Dunn, 2018) and frozen conflict (Tarkhan-Mouravi and Sumbadze, 2006; Kabachnik, Regulaska and Mitchneck, 2012; Zimmerly, 2009; Tarkhan-Mouravi, 2011) dimensions of the related topic.²⁸ Although the literature may seem limited, these publications - both institutional and academic ones- shed light on the IDP issue in Georgia; and therefore, they are extremely useful for the purpose of this thesis.

2.2. Identity in Social Sciences

The notion of identity has a widespread range of use to define and categorize many aspects of our lives and is applicable to various contexts it is integrated into.²⁹ Since the notion of identity extended to our everyday life, it attracted the attraction of scholars, and today identity has become one of the main issues of concern in social sciences. There are significant definitions, approaches and theories especially in sociology, psychology, social psychology, philosophy and anthropology to study identity, which is a useful tool to know who is who, who we are, how others perceive who we are, how we perceive others, and how we perceive others' perception of us.

²⁸ For further information on the academic studies on IDPs see: (Sulava 2010; Åhlin 2011; Kurshitashvili 2012; Kabachnik et al. 2013; Kabachnik et al. 2014).

²⁹ Despite accepting the fact that many of our identities overlap with each other, Jenkins itemizes our identities according to the fields they are referred to such as “personal individuality” (the authenticity of selfhood), “life-style” (a broader field that covers both individual and collective affiliations that reflects our self-expression like our sub-culture, sexual preference and consumer choices), “social position and status” (a category that both differentiates people individually and collectively and provides unity for taking action and organizing mass mobilization e.g., class, gender, ethnicity, culture, age, disability), “politics” (a form that refers to collective organization of political action that generally generates as a single issue oriented collectivity as in the case of women’s rights) and finally “bureaucracy and citizenship” (includes one’s membership to a country via passport and ID cards, which regulates various aspects of her/his everyday life such as nationality to social welfare, taxation to freedom of movement and so on) (2000:2-3).

In the existing literature, there is a disaccord among scholars on when studies on identity gained ground in social sciences. For instance, while Jenkins objects the idea that identity is a relatively new phenomena and he argues that an established literature on identity was rooted in the early 20th century most notably by James, Cooley, Mead and Simmel (2004: 11), Brooks states that when it was coming to 20th century there was a process started by philosophers such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau who approached “identity as an enigma and an object of quest and questioning” (2013: 10). On the other hand, Bauman argues that identity was not a pivotal issue and a theoretical solicitude for the “founding fathers of sociology” (2004: 24). He further suggests that it was only “an object of philosophical mediation” and not a central matter for people a few decades earlier (Bauman, 2004: 17). Brubaker and Cooper also claim that the individual-based identity studies aroused interest especially in the United States during the 1960s as a result of the “mass society” problem regarding individual-society relations in the aftermath of the World War II. In the late 1960s, the Black Power Movement had an impact on the inquiry on group-based identities. Particularly, the research on ethnicity and class-based identities reached a peak (2000: 3).

The studies which gained momentum predominantly in the 1960s started to be in the line of fire by many scholars. For instance, in the 1970s, Mackenzie stated that identity “is a word derived out of its wits by overuse” (quoted in Hoppenbrouwers, 2010: 30). Coles, similarly, criticized the studies for turning the term into a cliché (quoted in Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 3). One of the main critiques in the literature came from Brubaker and Cooper, in this regard. In their famous article ‘Beyond “Identity”’, they highlighted the overuse of the term, especially after the 1980s when race, class, and gender- what they call “holy trinity”- were integrated into the identity literature (2000: 3). They claimed that assigning too much meaning to the term, using it as a category for analysis or conceptualizing it with different understandings, meanings and affiliations meant weakening its very own meaning. According to the researchers, because the term

is widely used and has now both “hard” and “soft” meanings, it is far from being an effective tool for social analysis (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 1-2).

However, many scholars such as Wetherel (2009), Lawler (2014), and Jenkins (2004) maintain that identity has an established place in social sciences and it is impossible to dismiss this concept anyway. For instance, as an answer to Brubaker and Cooper, Jenkins says that “the genie is well and truly out of the bottle” and “identity is already an established part of the sociological tool kit” (2004: 9). In parallel, Wetherel puts emphasis on the controversial nature of identity in both sociology and psychology theories. She states that “the empirical territory ‘identity’ marks out is too important to dismiss or neglect” by arguing that while in our contemporary world the multifaceted and fragmented identities based on “life-style” and consumer choices are on rise, significance of more stable identities (such as religious, ethnic and cultural) are far from vanishing (2009: 1). The reason why identity is still a valid concern in social sciences is mooted by Lawler. Since our identities are fluid and multi-layered, they are open to constant change and therefore to danger. The more they are at risk of transition and change, the more they become a matter for us, and thus, identity continues to be a core issue in the human world (Lawler, 2014: 1-5).

Here rises a question. Since identity expands in our everyday life and in social sciences, can we conceptualize a unifying definition for it? Lawler (2014: 10) and Jenkins (2004: 4-5) highlight the etymology of the term to point to the duality of its meaning. Because the root of the term comes from ‘*identitas*,’ a Latin word derived from ‘*idem*’ meaning ‘same’, its first denotation refers to sameness. Its second meaning explains the characteristics of objects including people and things; therefore, identity refers to the distinctiveness/uniqueness of the objects. In other words, the meaning of the word includes both similarity and difference. In order to draw attention to its multiplicity, Jenkins ascribes identity as a multi-dimensional categorization of societies in both individual and collective levels (2004: 34), while Lawler argues that identity “refers to a range

of phenomena” which although linked to each other, may also diverge from one another (2014: 8).

Indeed, identity includes both similarity and difference, as well as individuality and collectivity. Given that it is almost impossible to separate one from the other, the multi-layered nature of the term prevents scholars from generating a unifying definition. According to Wetherel, it is the concept itself causing its definition to be “ambiguous” with a wide range of uses (2009: 1). Since identity extended to all spheres of social sciences, some scholars aimed at preventing the term from becoming more complex. As Brewer states, they intended to “bring some order to this conceptual anarchy” (2001: 116). For instance, by putting ‘self’ at the center of analysis, Stets and Burke (2000) tried to merge the identity and social identity theories with a singular perspective. A similar attempt of comparing and contrasting different approaches was also made by Hogg, Terry, and White (1995). In accordance with these scholars, Jenkins highlighted the role of social interaction because for him identifying oneself and the other is a “matter of meaning, and meaning always involves interaction, agreement, disagreement, convention and innovation, communication and negotiation”. Hence, he claims that the ‘social’ in ‘social identity’ is “redundant” and we can refer to all variations of identity simply as identity (2004: 4). As detailed above, there have been attempts to merge the expanded identity literature in a more simplified context. However, an important obstacle emerges as a result of the interdisciplinary cross-fertilization of the term in that sometimes the same concepts may refer to different phenomena in different disciplines. Thus, some scholars disagree about merging the identity concepts. For instance, Lawler claims that since there are different theoretical approaches, “it is important not to try” merging all conceptual approaches into one because the meaning of identity depends on how it is perceived (2014: 7).

2.3. Categories of and Main Approaches to Identity

Despite all the polyphony in the literature, there are some prevalent categorizations of identity that refer to our varied parts of self-concept. The basic distinction is about the singular and plural aspects of the identity. While Giddens categorizes identity in sociology as ‘self-identity’ (personal identity) and ‘social identity’ (2001: 28), Thoits and Virshup (1997) call them as ‘me identities’ and ‘we identities.’ Despite highlighting the entanglement of these categories and accepting all variations of identities as social, Jenkins also talks about ‘individual’ and ‘collective’ identities (2008: 38).³⁰

Today, all pioneered by sociologists or social psychologists, three variations of identity approaches are most frequently referred to (Adriot and Owens, 2012), which are identity theory (Stryker 1968; McCall and Simmons 1978; Burke 1980; Burke and Stets 2009), social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel and Turner, 2010; Turner et al., 1987), and collective identity theory (Melluci, 1989; Melluci, 1995). The former one, identity theory, investigates the self-categorization and behavior processes of ‘me identities’ through social interaction, whereas the latter two inquire the role of group membership and intergroup interaction on the identification and behavior processes of ‘we identities’.³¹ Although social identity theory will be dwelled on in Section 2.5, it is still of importance to give some brief information on both identity theory and collective identity theory by highlighting from which perspectives and for what

³⁰ According to Jenkins, the ‘human world’ is a place where individual and collective identities “meet and melt” (2008: 38). His model of identification acknowledges the fact that both individual and collective identities are mutually important. While the former focuses on uniqueness, the latter emphasizes similarity; however, it is also important to note that both identities are entangled to each other and whether individual or collective, all our identities emerge as a result of the interaction/interplay of similarity and difference (2008: 38-39).

³¹ Marilynn Brewer, the founder of “optimal distinctiveness theory”, also agrees that all our identities are social and she conceptualizes the above-mentioned categories with different wordings, which are “person-based social identities”, “relational social identities”, “group-based social identities”, and “collective identities” (2001: 117-119).

purposes they analyze the notion of identity and differ from the social identity theory.

2.3.1. Identity Theory

Identity Theory is a micro level social psychology theory that was pioneered by Sheldon Stryker (1968). Influenced by symbolic interactionism, what Stryker's identity theory inquires is the influence of society on both self-categorization and behavior of the individual (Stets, 2006). In his model, individuals have a tendency to approach things, with the meanings they attribute to them. Since the attributed meanings emerge through and as a result of social interaction, these meanings are open to alteration. Accordingly, as the self has the reflexivity of a complex social world, humans have multifaceted and organized identities, each of which has different meanings in one's self-concept.

Stryker's understanding of 'structural symbolic interactionism' differs from the 'traditional symbolic interactionism' of Mead (1934) and Blumer (1969), for whom society is flux and open to constant change. What Stryker argues is that society is relatively stable, ongoing and organized, and through socialization with the other we learn our place in the social context and become who we are (Burke and Stets 2009: 35-36). In this kind of a social structure, the categorization of the self occurs as an "occupant of a role" (e.g., being a student at school or a salesperson at a firm); and the meanings and expectations that are intertwined with these roles form a set of standards that guide the behavior (Stets and Burke, 2000: 225). An important aspect of Stryker's theory is the hierarchy among our organized role identities what he calls as 'hierarchy of salience'. According to him, if there is a relevant social context and if the individual has commitment to that particular role, this identity becomes the highest in rank among others and consequently it emerges through that particular social interaction (Hogg, Terry and White, 1995: 258; Desrochers, Andreassi and Thompson, 2002).

An important extension and referenced identity theory belongs to McCall and Simmons (1978), who are the pioneers of the 'role-identity theory'. They argue that since the self has a multi-layered structure and it is composed of different role identities we hold within society, there is a 'hierarchy of prominence' among them. The prominence of an identity is dependent on three variables: the support it gets from the society, one's commitment to that particular identity and the "extrinsic and intrinsic rewards" it receives for that identity (quoted in Stets and Burke, 2003: 11). In other words, "a role-identity's prominence reflects the relative value it has for his or her overall conception of one's ideal self. In this way, one's prominence hierarchy is equivalent to one's ideal self" (Owens et al, 2010: 481). The main distinction between the identity theory and the role-identity theory is that unlike McCall and Simmons, Stryker argues that the hierarchy between our identities is based on salience rather than prominence because according to him, based on the context, our identities may activate whether we value them or not (Stets and Burke, 2003: 12). As disputed by Stets and Burke, individuals do not only hold roles in society; hence, their selves are not only composed of their role identities. "They are also members of some groups (and not others)" therefore they have also group based identities (2003: 30).

2.3.2. Collective Identity Theory

The Collective Identity Theory is pioneered by sociologist Alberto Melluci (1989). Collective identity is a key concept, most notably referred to in the literature that concentrates on 'identity politics' and 'social movements' (Brewer, 2001: 119; Flesher Fominaya, 2010: 393). This type of an identity contains "a shared sense of 'one-ness' or 'we-ness'" among its group members (Snow, 2001), who develop it via shared experiences/interests/perceptions as well as positioning themselves against the other. Collective groups are also in "an active process of shaping and forging" their group image (Brewer, 2001: 119); yet, they must be acknowledged by the other(s). In this sense, Melluci

explains the collective identity as “the capacity for autonomous action, a differentiation of the actor from others while continuing to be itself. However, self-identification must also gain social recognition if it is to provide basis for identity” (1995: 47).³² A collective group may be composed of individuals with different social and/or personal backgrounds; however, because of uniting for a common cause and/or a common threat, their collective identity may suppress their other identities (Snow, 2001). The difference of collective identity from social identity is that it has the potential to mobilize its members. In this sense, one cannot argue that all social identities have ability to activate this kind of a potential. The case of the Georgian IDPs is an example to this situation. Although they formed a kinship-based solidarity among relatives and neighbors, they were unable to construct political solidarity and thus a collective identity.

2.4. A Necessary Distinction between ‘Social Group’ and ‘Social Category’

As all social groups do not necessarily transform into a collective group, not all collections of people constitute a social group. In this sense, many scholars (Rabbie and Horwitz, 1988; Jenkins, 1994, 2008; Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Smith A.D., 2002) highlight the importance of the distinction between a ‘social group’ and a ‘social category’. While a social category, according to Rabbie and Horwitz (1988: 117), is “a collection of individuals who share at least one attribute in common”, a social group is a “cognitive entity” that is recognized and found meaningful by its members (Tajfel, 2010a: 80). Hence, what distinguishes the latter from the former is the sense of belonging and self-definition of the group members with that particular group. Jenkins suggests that this distinction is very much in line with Marx’s approach of ‘class in itself’ and ‘class for itself’. A group which is categorized by others as ‘a category in itself’ does not necessarily in need for recognition of the others. Therefore, a

³² According to Eisenstadt and Giesen (1995), there are three kinds of ‘boundary construction’ that exist for collective identity which are cultural, primordial and civic.

collectivity that is owned and recognized by its members becomes ‘a category for itself’ (Jenkins, 2000: 9).

As mentioned earlier, one of the main inquiries of this thesis is to investigate whether to conceptualize the IDP identity as a social identity form in Georgia or not. Based on the related literature and the data gathered from the fieldworks (which indeed will be shared in the following chapters), it may be stated that the IDP identity would hardly be defined as a collective identity since it did not turn into a political identity and has little chance to turn into a social movement. However, on the opposite pole, can IDP identity be approached as a social category? Or is there a cognitive entity, a sense of belonging among the Georgian IDPs? To answer these questions, the acts of social categorization and social identification are crucial mechanisms since they are key acts for us to simplify and map our world (Tajfel, 2010a: 80).

The categories we create are composed of “prototypical characteristics” abstracted from the supposed members of that category (Ashforth and Mael, 1989: 20). The individuals belonging to a category may or may not carry some of the prototypical characteristics since these characteristics are meta-contrast ideal types rather than real types (Hogg, 2006: 36). In a way, the act of categorization is a “process of depersonalization” (Hogg, 2006: 37) which chastens individuals to a prototype instead of approaching them as idiosyncratic subjects. Social identification, on the other hand, is the perception of an attachment and belonging to a collectivity and recognition of oneself as an “actual or symbolic member” to that group (Ashforth and Mael, 1989: 20). The act of social identification is in a way a type of categorization, but we cannot always talk about vice versa, since all categorizations may not have resulted in a group formation.

To be more precise, as Tajfel and Turner assert (2004: 283), if the act of social categorization transforms into social identification, then it means we are talking

about a “relational and comparative” process. Through social identification, we not only classify our environment but also regulate our social action.³³ In other words, the members of a social group identify themselves “as similar to or different from, as better or worse than, members of other groups” (2004: 283). This interactional process designates the formation of a group’s social identity and affects the salience of the group boundaries. In this sense, Barth (1969) has a similar approach to Tajfel and Turner. In his research on ethnicity, he also inquired the role of social interaction on the construction of group identification, group differentiation and group boundaries. Barth (1969) argues that group identity is established through negotiation with other group(s) at the group boundaries, and collective ‘internal and external definitions’ have an impact on this negotiation process. Jenkins similarly calls these interactional processes as the “internal-external dialectic of collective identification” and he further suggests that while “group identity is the product of collective internal definition” (Jenkins, 2008: 105), collective external definition offered by the other(s) is generally internalized by the in-group members (Jenkins, 2000: 9).

As mentioned earlier, although external definition is not enough to form a social group, at times it may go beyond influencing both the structure and the salience of a group identity. For instance, Brubaker and Cooper investigate the constructivist approach and identity and ask if our identities are constructed through how we would handle the “coercive force of external identification.” (2000: 1).

The external definition directed to one’s group identity by the out-group may comprise positive or negative connotations, and if they willingly or unwillingly happen to be internalized by the in-group, this internalization most likely occurs either through negotiation or resistance. Therefore, the external definition that is

³³ Tajfel further argues that “stereotypes arise from a process of categorization. They introduce simplicity and order where there is complexity and nearly random variation” (Tajfel, 1981: 132). Thus, they help us clear the vague boundaries between groups or they create new differences between groups, which creates new boundaries.

provided by the other(s) needs further clarification regarding its impact on internal identification of one's social group, especially since the data provided by the fieldwork of this thesis indicates that the external definition on the IDP identity in Georgia has an extensive impact on the social identity formation of the Georgian IDPs. In this context, what referred to as out-group also varies. As it may be another group that is relevant at that time and context, it may also be an authoritative body that has the power of imposition (Jenkins, 2000: 21). For this reason, while elaborating on the role of external definition, the attitude of the Georgian state and the civil society towards the IDPs is also analyzed in Chapter Six besides the interaction between the host community and the IDPs.

2.5. The Impact of External Definition on the Internal Dynamics of Identity Construction

The external definition with negative connotation and its effect on individuals' either personal or social identities are one of the most studied fields of sociology. With specific focus on stereotype, prejudice and social stigma, the most profound works belong to the labeling theorists such as Edwin Lemert, Howard Becker and Erving Goffman. They reject the hegemonic view of their era that 'deviance' produces social control. They argue that in fact deviance is the product of social control (Jenkins, 2008: 74; Vance, 2013). In other words, via social roles, society determines and labels what are deviant behaviors and what are deviant/stigmatized/spoiled roles and identities. For instance, Lemert (1951) propounded a distinction between 'primary' and 'secondary' deviance. While the former indicates the first/basic act of deviance that may have varied reasoning such as biological or psychological, the latter occurs as a result of social reaction (Roberson and Azaola Garrido, 2015: 70). The secondary deviance is an important indicator for the identity of an individual or a group since it sheds light on the internalization of the external definition to that particular identity. According to Lemert, the label provided by society is most likely adopted by the individual and this labeling affects the behavior of the individual as this adoption

becomes a mechanism of “defense, attack, or adjustment to the overt and covert problems” that occurred as a result of societal reaction (Lemert, 1951: 76). In the 1960s, a similar approach was established by Becker. As deviant groups, he worked on dance musicians and marijuana smokers. According to his theory (1963), labeling affects both the labeler and the labeled within the society. The labeler labels the “deviant” individuals/groups via prejudices, biases and stereotypes and causes them to become deviant eventually, which leads both parties –the labeler and the labeled- to construct behaviors accordingly (Gold and Richards, 2012: 144-145).

Erving Goffman also utilized the labeling perspective and used the concept of stigma for multiple situations. In other words, he did not limit his research with the ‘deviant’. In his book titled “Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity”, Goffman ascribed stigma as an “attribute that is deeply discrediting” (1963: 3) and that is given by others, which causes the possessor of the stigmatized feature to be despised socially.³⁴ With the meaning he attributed to stigma, Goffman presented an organizing concept which, on the one hand, shows how classification of the disadvantaged people (including discriminatory social reflexes i.e. attitudes and practices) occurs through social interaction, and on the other explains how stigmatized people cope with their disvalued characteristics (Tyler and Slater, 2018: 729). In other words, he focused both on the external and internal dynamics of the stigmatized identity construction.

As mentioned above, a stigmatized identity may refer to various “discredited” social categories (Carneva, 2007: 10) as it may be directed to one’s sexual,

³⁴ As Goffman took labeling perspective out of the spectrum of the ‘deviant’ and broadened the framework of the devalued identities and hence introduced a very effective analytical tool, many researchers started to utilize the concept of ‘stigma’ in their studies. The usage of the term has been expanded in a multidisciplinary manner in social sciences and applied to various examples, which heightened the criticisms. These criticisms are similar to one’s utilization of the ‘identity’ concept. Many scholars point out that like the concept of identity, stigma has also become “underdefined and overused” (Manzo, 2004: 405; Livingston and Boyd, 2010: 2150; Pescosolido and Martin, 2015: 104).

ethnic or religious identity, and it may also be associated with features that turn into a source of “minority standing and powerlessness” in a relevant context (Padilla and Peres, 2003: 45). Stigmatized individuals are aware of the fact that if their discredited identity happens to be revealed, they may face negative reaction from the society, and in case the individual holds a stigmatized identity that is more visible, the salience of this identity increases. However, in some cases the signs of the stigmatized identity are less visible and not recognizable *prima facie* (Goffman, 1963: 48). In order to cope with the situation that arises from their devalued identity and to protect their self-esteem, individuals develop certain strategies. For instance, according to Goffman’s point of view, there is a gap between the “virtual” and “actual” identities of people and the stigma lies between this gap. Goffman argued that with an aim to conceal the stigmatic features they possess, people tend to control the information about themselves which may reveal their actual identity (1963: 41-43; Carneva, 2007: 10). Another strategy he emphasized is amalgamating with other individuals who share the same stigma. To be a part of such a social group averts the social comparison with the in-group members and hence helps individuals restore their self-esteem and prevents their isolation. Furthermore, solidarity among such a group helps individuals to cope with the negative outcomes of the shared stigmatized identity (Padilla and Peres, 2003: 48; Carneva, 2007: 10-11).

The reason why special attention is paid to the concept of ‘stigma’ here is that it coincides with the fieldwork data of the IDP identity in Georgia. During the interviews, some IDPs stated that they are reluctant to reveal their IDP identity when they are interacting with the non-IDP Georgians. The underlying reason for not mentioning their IDP identity is that they do not want to be “seen less” and they want to avoid possible discrimination. Furthermore, some IDPs stated that because they “understand each other better”, they generally prefer to socialize within their own group (including preferring their children to marry the IDPs, helping the IDPs in need etc.), which corresponds with Goffman’s

approach on the reasons to the formation of a group identity that shares the same stigmatized features.

Similar to Goffman, the notion of self-esteem is a core element of the Social Identity Theory of Tajfel and Turner. According to them, the primary impetus of individuals is to possess high self-esteem, and group membership is the causative agent to it since it provides a sense of belonging and protection. In other words, in a social context, where intergroup relations are under the influence of constant competition, individuals tend to search for a place that has a revitalizing effect (or at least poses no threat) to their self-esteem. Thus, the Social Identity Theory not only points out the positive attributions of group membership to the individuals' identity construction, but also offers an explanation on the reverse scenarios. For instance, sometimes devalued social identities may not provide necessary positive attributions to their members due to their inferior position at the social echelon. Therefore, the Social Identity Theory also investigates the conditions leading to the transformation (or disintegration) of a social group, as well as to the fluctuations in the sense of belonging among in-group members, considering both the inter-personal and intergroup dimensions of social interaction (Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

2.6. A Theory of Intergroup Relations

The Social Identity Theory (SIT) was presented by Henry Tajfel and John C. Turner in 1979 when they published an article titled “An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict”.³⁵ This article, which offered a new theoretical formulation on how group membership affects the self-concept of an individual, is today accepted as one of the pivotal contributions not only to social psychology but

³⁵ After Tajfel passed away in 1982, an updated version of the article titled “The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior” was published in 1986. In this thesis, the one published in 1986 was more frequently used.

also to many disciplines of social sciences.³⁶ The SIT was indeed a product of decade-long research conducted by Tajfel with the contribution of Turner and their colleagues.

2.6.1. The Background of the Formation of the Social Identity Theory

In his early research, Tajfel aimed to provide explanation to certain human behaviors in social structures, i.e. ethnocentrism, prejudice, and discrimination (Postmes and Branscombe; 2010: 6-7). His field of inquiry was very much in line with his personal experience. Tajfel was a middle class migrant who had Polish-Jewish origin. Before the WWII broke out, he was a university student at Sorbonne in France. In 1940, while serving in the French army, he was captured as a war prisoner by the Germans. Meanwhile, almost all of his close circle died in the Holocaust. When the war was over, for many years he volunteered for the rehabilitation of war victims, particularly the children. Then, Tajfel migrated to England and won a university scholarship, and in 1967, he was appointed as the chair of the Department of Social Psychology in Bristol University.³⁷

In his studies, Tajfel revealed that prejudice was a product of the social cognitive process, and by stereotyping their own and counter social groups, individuals tend to differentiate social categories (1969). Hence, Tajfel started to investigate the intergroup relations and the role of social categorization on this (Tajfel et al., 1971). In 1972, he wrote a book chapter titled “Social Categorization”, in which he gave hints about the upcoming SIT. In the chapter, Tajfel defined social identity as “the individual’s knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group

³⁶ Although Tajfel sided with the appellation of the ‘Positive Distinctiveness Theory’, Turner and Brown (1978) named it as the ‘Social Identity Theory’ (Turner and Reynolds, 2010: 16). In fact, since it did not give the hint about positive distinctiveness analysis, Tajfel was not in favor of the term (Turner and Reynolds, 2010: 16).

³⁷ For detailed information: Britannica, *Henry Tajfel*, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Henri-Tajfel> (Accessed: October 6, 2018).

membership” (1972: 292). As he introduced his definition of social identity for the first time, he shared his hypothesis on the basic human motivation which, according to him, was to achieve high self-esteem and a positive social identity; and a social group can be a source to maintain that (Hogg, 2001: 186).

In the meantime, John C. Turner got accepted to the Bristol University. In 1972, he wrote a review paper³⁸ related to the above-mentioned research findings of Tajfel.³⁹ In his paper, Turner explained the dynamics of social categorization and intergroup relations that are leading to out-group discrimination and in-group favoritism with a process he called “social competition” (Tajfel, 1982: 12; Turner and Reynolds, 2010: 15). This was the beginning of their collaboration. Turner and Tajfel had similar approaches towards the nature of human interaction in their scientific studies. While they were studying the subjects regarding social resentment such as prejudice, discrimination and ethnocentrism, unlike the dominant doctrine of “individualistic conception of human mind”, they dwelt on the role of group and group membership dynamics on identity construction (Turner and Reynolds, 2010: 13-14). Hence, they avoided focusing on the above-mentioned subjects within the perspective of individualism and reductionism (i.e. deviance, irrational/pathological individual psychology) (Tajfel, 2010b; Turner and Reynolds, 2010: 18; Postmes and Branscombe, 2010: 6-7; Hogg et. al., 1995: 259). In fact, this approach had already been pioneered by Muzafer Sherif (Muzaffer Şerif) and his colleagues earlier, in the 1950s.

Sherif, who was one of the predominant figures that developed the discipline of social psychology, focused on the ‘social level’ of prejudice, discrimination and

³⁸ This paper was published in 1975. Turner, J. C. (1975). “Social comparison and social identity: some prospects for intergroup behavior.” *European Journal of Social Psychology* (5), 5-34.

³⁹ Turner had a working class background in London. Thus, Tajfel and he had different social backgrounds as they had different “dominant social categorizations” -ethnicity for Tajfel and class for Turner- (Turner and Reynolds, 2010: 14).

in-group bias. His famous “Robbers Cave Experiment” (1954)⁴⁰ paved the way for his Realistic Group Conflict Theory, which suggests that intergroup relations are based on the competition and the struggle for the scarce resources. The conflict of groups’ interests both shapes the intergroup relations as well as the positive attachment to the in-group. Thus, such conflicts concretize the identification of the self with the group it belongs to (Sherif, 1954, 1958, 1961). From this point of view, according to Sherif and his colleagues, in order to understand the intergroup attitudes, the focal point had to be pointed out to the group level analysis rather than the individual level.

In this regard, Tajfel and Turner lean to the Sherif’s approach on the role of group dynamics. As a matter of fact, “they were certainly, in principle Sherifians” (Turner and Reynolds, 2010: 18) and as they manifested in the SIT, their theory was not aiming to replace the Realistic Group Conflict Theory, but to “supplement” it in certain aspects (Tajfel and Turner, 2010: 174). For instance, according to Tajfel, there was an a priori distinction between two extreme behaviors. While one side of the extreme was the “pure” form of a behavior between two or more individuals based on solely interpersonal interaction, the other extreme was the “pure form” of intergroup behavior. According to Tajfel and Turner, in his studies, Sherif only focused on the second extreme: the intergroup behavior (Sherif, 1967: 62; Tajfel and Turner, 2010: 180). They indeed shared Sherif’s approach on intergroup behavior; however, they did not neglect the interpersonal interaction. Yet, Tajfel pointed out that it is

⁴⁰ Sherif and his colleagues gathered 22 twelve-year old boys from similar backgrounds (ethnic, religious, age and class) at a summer camp and divided them randomly into two groups. None of the boys either had known each other prior to study or aware of the existence of the opposite group. In the first days of the camp, boys in each group developed a certain bond within their own groups (i.e. group name, flag, t-shirts). In the following days, both groups were introduced to each other and were led to compete in several activities over trophy. The competition created out-group hostility and in-group biasness. Out-group hostility started with verbal assaults and continued with some direct actions (i.e. massing counter-groups cabins or stealing private objects etc.). The hostility only cooled down when boys were expected to overcome common assignments. Only then, the boys showed signs of cooperation. https://www.age-of-thesage.org/psychology/social/sherif_robbers_cave_experiment.html (Accessed: October 7, 2018).

unlikely to witness the pure forms of both extremes (especially the interpersonal one) in our social world. Thus, behaviors occur in between the “interpersonal-intergroup continuum of social interaction.” Tajfel explained it as follows (2010a: 107):

All of the “natural situations” (and also experimental) fall between these two extremes, and the behavior towards people who are categorized as members of the in-group or the out-group will be crucially affected by the individuals’ perception (or rather interpretation) of the situation as being nearer to one or the other extreme.

In this sense, Tajfel and Turner both argued that as we are social beings, explaining a social phenomenon could not be reduced to the single mind of an individual or could not be generalized to a collective decision. In other words, Tajfel and Turner paid attention to the initiatives taken by the individuals but only within the framework of group membership. Therefore, Tajfel and Turner argued that the Realistic Group Conflict Theory fell short of explaining the processes that are “underlying the development and maintenance of group identity” and the “subjective aspects of group membership” (Tajfel and Turner, 2010: 174).

On the other hand, Tajfel and Turner agreed with Sherif regarding the fact that the level of intergroup conflict increases as it gets closer to the second extreme (intergroup behavior). Yet, they also claimed that if “institutionalized, explicit and objective” interests are predetermined, Sherif’s reasoning on “conflict of interests” would naturally emerge (2004: 277). Due to this reason, Tajfel and Turner claimed that Sherif did not need to pay attention to the possible effects of inter-individual relations. In parallel to this, Tajfel and Turner argued that realistic or instrumental reasoning would not be the sole explanation of intergroup relations. In other words, although ‘institutionalization’, ‘explicitness’ and ‘objectivity’ of an intergroup conflict may provide the sufficient conditions, they do not necessarily explain the social behavior of the individuals belonging

to distinct groups.⁴¹ Therefore, in their research they investigated the possibility of discrimination in an environment where there is no conflict of interest. In order to do that, they used a method called ‘the minimum group paradigm’.

The Minimum Group Paradigm is a method developed by Tajfel and his colleagues in the early 1970s, which aimed to detect the minimal conditions conducive to intergroup discriminations. The small scale laboratory experiments showed that a mere division of participants to different groups (as Group X and Group Y) was sufficient to generate in-group favoritism and out-group differentiation. In these experiments, each participant, who had no distinguishable characteristics, was provided with a code number (i.e. Subject 16 of Group X or Subject 9 of Group Y) and was expected to distribute the given objects (i.e. money) as they wished to the other participants. The only thing that the participants knew was which group they and other participants were in. Even though the participants did not know the other participants prior to the experiment and thus did not have any sorts of hostility or conflict of interest, they tended to distribute the given objects to their own group members. The findings of these experiments were a proof for Tajfel and his colleagues that a conflict of interest was not a necessity for intergroup discrimination. A “mere perception of belonging” of subjects to the distinct groups was enough for in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination (Tajfel and Turner, 2004: 277-278, 281; Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel et al., 1971; Ashforth and Mael, 1989: 22).

In the light of the above-mentioned reasons, in search for a more comprehensive understanding of social behavior and the role of group membership on the identity construction of the self, Tajfel and Turner aimed to integrate both individual and collective aspects of social interaction in the SIT (Turner and

⁴¹ In fact, contrary to expectations, conflict of interest may not necessarily lead to intergroup conflict. Drawing on different research on ethnocentrism (Milner, 1975: 181; Giles and Powesland, 1975), Tajfel and Turner maintained that in stratified social contexts, where there is enough reason for discrimination due to conflicts of interests among distinct groups (i.e. minority and majority), there are evidences that inferior groups have a tendency not to dispute with superior out-groups (Tajfel and Turner, 2004: 284-285; Taşdemir, 2011: 125).

Reynolds, 2010: 18). As the SIT equally dwells onto both subjective and objective dimensions of the in-group and out-group attitudes, it was not only applicable to my case study, but also coincided with my research findings since the perceptions of both groups (the IDPs and the locals) were not always easy to explain solely by the objective reasoning of intergroup conflict.

2.7. Social Identity Theory

Tajfel and Turner acknowledged the fact that neither the studies on intergroup behavior nor social conflict were pioneered by them. These paradigms were already in the scope of social psychology and other social sciences disciplines. What distinguished their approach was how they integrated the social identification process to these paradigms (Tajfel and Turner, 2004: 289). Tajfel and Turner state that there are three social cognitive stages (social-categorization, social-identification and social comparison) leading to the development of ‘positive group identity’ (Tajfel and Turner, 2004: 281-286). These three stages (especially the former two) are already detailed in the earlier sections of this chapter, yet a quick throwback would be beneficial to elaborate on their approach to the process.

2.7.1. Social-Categorization, Social-Identification, Social Comparison

As mentioned earlier, social categorization is a “cognitive tool” helping us to classify and categorize our social environment and to locate our position in it. Thus, the first thing we do is to categorize ourselves and others as we encounter them (Tajfel and Turner, 2004:281). Categorizing oneself into a group and not into another is a process of self-evaluation. Tajfel and Turner refer to this stage as social identification. Since individuals seek for high self-esteem, identifying oneself with a particular group ensures a sense of distinctiveness; and the more this identity is a source of high prestige, the more salient it becomes. The salience of a group identity is also directly proportional to the salience of the out-

group identity that the group is in comparison/competition with (Ashfort and Mael, 1989: 24-25). The result of the comparison with the out-group leads to the differentiation of one's group from the other. The reason behind the act of differentiation is to achieve superiority over the out-group.

Tajfel and Turner note three main variables that may have an effect on the intergroup differentiation in stratified social contexts. They determine the first variable as the internalization of group identity. For them, although it is effective, external definition of a group is not enough for a group's self-definition. Tajfel and Turner specify the latter two variables as the mutual value dimension between the groups (similarity, proximity) and the "situational salience" of the social context (relevancy at the context). In other words, in the above-mentioned social structure, each and every social group does not perform a reciprocal comparison because it may only occur under the circumstances of an evaluative significance of intergroup relations and a relevant social context (Tajfel and Turner, 2004: 284). Thus, Tajfel and Turner assert that in stratified societies, intergroup comparisons most likely result in one group to be superior and the other to be inferior, and this inequality triggers both groups to develop certain strategic behaviors to protect/maintain positive social identity (2004: 281).

2.7.2. In Search for A Positive Social Identity: The Behavioral Patterns of Distinct Social Groups in Stratified Societies

In the SIT, Tajfel and Turner further claim that a conflict of interest in a stratified society crystallizes the boundaries between the superior and inferior groups. Conflict-based interrelations, which are caused by "scarce resources (i.e. power, prestige or wealth)", decrease the perceived similarities, and thus, it stimulates antagonism among the groups. In these circumstances, the superior groups often tend to preserve the status quo and maintain their superiority. Accordingly, in order to maintain a positive group identity, inferior groups aim

to change the circumstances in their favor. Either because of the success of the inferior group or a change in the context of scarce resources in a positive direction, the boundaries among the groups may become vague. Both of these scenarios would pose a challenge to the dominance of the superior group. Thus, the dominant group may develop new differentiations against the subordinate group to protect its own status (Tajfel and Turner, 2004: 280-281). The fieldwork data of this thesis shows resemblance to these arguments. For instance, many interviewees (mostly the in-group members) claimed that especially in the times of economic hardship, the hostility among the groups tend to increase and at times of relative economic stability, many IDPs stated that they are again exposed to alienation on and off (particularly regarding the state support they receive, i.e. monthly IDP allowances, housing and other social benefits). As the IDPs described, this differentiation was likely to be generated by the out-group through negative labeling and certain accusations (i.e. leaving their homeland to enemy, becoming an economic burden to society, etc.).

Tajfel and Turner handle the strategies of inferior groups in a much complex manner. In order to do that, they first establish a framework. As mentioned at the end of the previous section, Tajfel and Turner built their approach of behavioral choices through the interpersonal-intergroup continuum. Parallel to this, the framework they developed is another continuum which is based on a system of beliefs. According to Tajfel and Turner, the continuum of belief systems is again comprised of double-edged extremes. While they locate social mobility on the one extreme, they place social change on the other. The two continuums they state encompass and overlap with each other (interpersonal behavior with social mobility and intergroup behavior with social change) (Tajfel and Turner, 2004: 278-279). In other words, while low sense of belonging and notable dissatisfaction among individuals cause them to develop individual strategies of social mobility, strong uniformity within a group and/or a social context which does not allow social mobility leads to the group strategy of social change (Figueiredo et al., 2014: 15-16).

2.7.3. Social Mobility

In the SIT, Tajfel and Turner define social mobility as an individual-based motivational strategy. As intergroup conflict becomes inevitable in stratified societies, social mobility does not occur easily. Nevertheless, Tajfel and Turner also emphasize that since our societies are mostly “flexible and permeable”, they may still allow room for individuals to change their social group to a certain extent. In this sense, if one’s social group does not provide a positively evaluated identity, she/he may choose to integrate into a more dominant social group through the means she/he possesses “(i.e. talent, hard work, good luck)” (Tajfel and Turner 2004: 278, 286-287; Figueiredo et al., 2014: 16). In the case of the Georgian IDPs, the trend of social mobility is observable in some segments of the group, even though the possibility of mobility seems quite difficult due to the social hardships (both objective and subjective reasons). During the fieldwork, it was observed that while the vast majority of the IDPs were living in compact settlements, some of the IDPs were living separately. In addition, some of the interviewed IDPs were holding prestigious positions in the society (regarding occupation and/or welfare). Thus, the salience of their IDP identity was vague compared to those with low-income and/or who live compact. One cannot claim that they all succeeded in social mobility since some of the interviewees pointed out that although they were holding high positions in the society, they were occasionally exposed to out-group differentiation and were reminded of their IDP past.

2.7.4. Social Change

According to Tajfel and Turner (2004: 278-279), in a context of “marked stratification”, although individuals may desire to “divest themselves of an unsatisfactory, underprivileged, or stigmatized group membership”, they also believe that being out of the group they belong to is sometimes impossible. This belief is caused by either objective (i.e. extensive conflict of interest) or

subjective reasoning (i.e. they would not handle the possibility of being considered as “betrayers” by their present social group). Therefore, group members may choose to take group initiatives to change their inferior position within the society. In this sense, Tajfel and Turner formulize ‘social change’ under two sub-strategies: ‘social creativity’ and ‘social competition’ (2004: 278). Social creativity is a defense mechanism developed by the inferior group against negative comparative situations. If inferior groups do not generate a sense of positive distinctiveness during the intergroup differentiation in conflict-based circumstances, they may redefine/recast the “elements of the comparative situation” (Tajfel and Turner, 2004: 287). Tajfel and Turner propound three strategies to social creativity. The first strategy is to carry the out-group comparisons to new dimensions, to where inferior groups think they are advantageous. The second one is to convert the negative attributes/distinctions to the positive ones, and the last strategy is to change the superior out-group to an inferior one that the in-group is in competition with (Derks, Van Laar and Ellemers, 2007: 16; Ashforth and Mael, 1989: 24). During the field research of this thesis, a generalized attitude for the third strategy was not observed among the IDPs, however, there were strong signs about the former two. For instance, a vast majority of the IDPs had a tendency to develop a positive version of their identity by correlating their groupness with positive distinctions i.e. diligence attachment to cultural norms and solidarity and attachment to their homeland. Attaching a sentimental value to their homeland is associated with the group denotation they have, because almost all of the IDP interviewees identify and denominate themselves with the region they migrated from rather than the labels that are directed by the out-group.

Finally, Tajfel and Turner define the second dimension of social change as “social competition.” Either because of objective or subjective reasons, when a social context causes a hierarchy among social groups, it is most likely that the comparison between two groups evolves into a competition (2004: 287). As this competition may turn into a high tensioned conflict, it may also result in a social

change, in which the positive distinctions of the inferior group are acknowledged by the out-group. Most of the time, the former is more likely to happen compared to the latter one because of the perception of insecurity in both groups (Tajfel and Turner, 2004: 287-289; Derks, Van Laar and Ellemers, 2007: 16). In other words, while the superior group feels insecure about losing its high status (and hence the resources) to the inferior group, the inferior group feels insecure about the ongoing status quo, which hinders the inferior group from possessing positive distinctiveness. This kind of a social context may trigger both groups to generate “unified group actions” (i.e. social movement) (Tajfel and Turner, 2004: 279).

2.7.5. Possible Outcomes

Based on the perspective of above-mentioned strategies and within the framework of the stratified social context that the groups are in interaction with, Tajfel and Turner foresee different possible outcomes for intergroup conflict. The first possibility is closer to the inter-individual extreme of the continuum. If the group members are not satisfied with the social identity they have and thus want to leave their group through mobility to a superior group, this means that there is an expansion of reduction in the sense of group-belonging and thus, a “disintegrative process in motion” (Tajfel and Turner, 2004: 288). As a result, it is unlikely to expect either collective action or escalation at the group status in the long term. Furthermore, this may even lead to the dissolution of the social group.

The other possibility is closer to the intergroup end of the continuum. In a condition, when certain subjective and/or objective barriers prohibit individuals’ mobility to other groups, social creativity takes effect (Tajfel and Turner, 2004: 288). In this context, Tajfel and Turner further claim that the subordinate groups most likely tend to adopt the third option of social creativity strategy, which is changing the group they are in conflict with. As mentioned earlier, although it is

observed that IDPs adopt the former social creativity strategies occasionally, the one Tajfel and Turner suggest was not observed during the field research of this thesis.

The members of a social group may choose any of the mentioned strategies depending on at which end of the continuum (both behavior and belief system) they are close to and to what extent the social context is flexible and permeable. In other words, as some group members may prefer acting in the periphery of social change, some who are dissatisfied with their group identity may prefer social mobility. Different attitudes of IDP generations are a vivid example to that. The fieldwork data of this thesis showed that since they were mostly born and raised in Tbilisi, the IDP identity of the 2nd generation IDPs is less salient compared to the 1st and 1.5th generations of IDPs. The 1st and 1.5th generations own their community-based identity because of the previous experiences of tense intergroup conflicts with the host community and the time they spent in their homeland. In other words, the Social Identity Theory allows for investigating the behavioral patterns of in-group members, besides explaining certain processes of group identification, formation, transformation and dissolution.

2.7.6. The Following Studies on Intergroup Relations and the Reason for Abiding by the Classical Version of the SIT

The Social Identity Theory pioneered a new perspective on intergroup relations and hence paved the way for new theories in this field. The theories which are influenced or derived from the SIT and which are well-accepted in social sciences focus on the different aspects (cognitive, motivational and emotional) of the intergroup relations and identity formation processes such as the Self-categorization Theory (Turner, 1985; Turner et al., 1987), the Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (Brewer, 1991), the Uncertainty-identity Theory (Hogg, 2000), and the Intergroup Emotion Theory (Smith, 1993; Mackie, Smith and Ray, 2008; Smith and Mackie, 2015).

The Self-categorization Theory (Turner, 1985; Turner et al., 1987) is a more detailed and extended version of the SIT in terms of its emphasis on the cognitive mechanisms of social identity. In other words, the Self-categorization Theory clarifies the cognitive processes of group members and how their group identity salience increases via depersonalization. For such a clarification, Turner and his colleagues utilize the meta-contrast principle and argue that people have a tendency to attribute certain affiliations to their in-group and also to other out-groups. The characterization of in-group and out-group occurs through stereotyping. A prototypical in-group identity is established when the in-group members assimilate into their group and depersonalize themselves. By doing so, they see the commonalities more and differences less with their group members, which increases the salience of their group identity. Accordingly, they also approach out-group within a stereotypical perspective, which leads them to see the out-group differences more. This kind of a cognitive process eventually affects the intergroup behavior.

It would not be wrong to state that the most known and well-accepted motivational theories of group identity and intergroup relations in social psychology are the Optimal Distinctiveness Theory and the Uncertainty-Identity Theory. While both focus on the motivational aspect, they differentiate from one another on how and in which framework they elaborate on this motivation. While the Optimal Distinctiveness Theory focuses on the emotional dimension, the Uncertainty-Identity Theory emphasizes the cognitive dimension (Taşdemir, 2011: 125). The Optimal Distinctiveness Theory proposed by Marilynn Brewer in 1991 proposes that individuals have two basic and opposite needs, which should be in a balance. These needs are inclusion/assimilation to in-group and differentiation/distinctiveness from the out-group (Leonardelli et al., 2010: 66). Hence, people seek belonging and feel emotional attachment to the groups which provide them optimal distinctiveness and accordingly differentiate the other in the same level (Brewer, 1991; Taşdemir, 2011: 130). The Uncertainty-Identity Theory (or the Subjective Uncertainty Reduction Theory), on the other hand, was

developed by Hogg and his colleagues (Hogg, 2000; Hogg and Abrams, 1993, Hogg and Mullin, 1999). Similar to the Optimal Distinctiveness Theory, this theory also investigates the motivational aspect of group identity process and intergroup relations. Hogg and his colleagues agree with Tajfel and Turner and state that people seek for self-enhancement, but what is more, they also have the motivation and the need to “reduce subjective uncertainty about one’s perceptions, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors and, ultimately, one’s self-concept and place within the social world” (Hogg and Terry, 2000: 124). In order to reduce the uncertainty, people tend to assimilate themselves to the in-group prototype via self-categorization. Since this prototype is “conceptual” in a certain extent, it also provides a source for validation to group-members in their construction of self-concept (Hogg and Terry, 2000: 124). Once individuals clear the uncertainty on their identity construction by belonging to a certain social group, they also find it easier to make behavioral choices.

Some scholars also focus on the emotional aspect of identity suggesting that the changes in emotions or emotion levels for in-group or out-group may affect intergroup relations as well as the salience level of social identity. In order to analyze the role of emotion, the Intergroup Emotion Theory (Smith and Mackie, 2015; Mackie, Smith and Ray, 2008; Smith, 1993) was developed by Smith and Mackie. This theory is based on both social identity theories and appraisal theories, suggesting that emotion is not necessarily an individual-level phenomenon and sometimes can be traced through social group membership. Emotions which are driven from appraisals from certain objects and events in a certain environment can affect our social identity. In other words, group-based emotions may affect our cognitive process and actions, which eventually shape our in-group and out-group relations (Smith and Mackie, 2015).

Here, a question may arise on the utilization of the oldest and the original version of social identity theories for this thesis. The above-mentioned theories mainly investigate which cognitive, motivational and emotional variables help increase

group-identity salience. Hence, they elaborate on variables that contribute to the social identity construction of individuals. As this thesis aims to explain certain processes affecting the IDP identity construction, it also approaches to this identity type with a strong emphasis on the impact of external definition. This thesis addresses the Georgian IDPs as an inferior group compared to the local Georgians; thus, it argues that not all Georgian IDPs have the strategy/aim to increase the salience of their group identity. As mentioned earlier, the generational differences within the IDP community on adaptation of the IDP identity shows that social change seems to be another strategy/aim among different segments of the Georgian IDPs. For this reason, the pioneer theory of intergroup relations, namely the Social Identity Theory, was adopted in this thesis considering its power on explaining not only group identification and formation but also group identity transformation and dissolution.

In the light of the theoretical framework, the in-group and intergroup attitudes of the Georgian IDPs are discussed in Chapter Seven in detail. However, before that, it is important to investigate the roots of both the objective and subjective dimensions of the stratified social context the IDPs live in. To this end, the historical background of the forced migration needs to be explained. However, what is intended in the following chapters is not to give a chronological listing of the migration waves of the Georgian IDPs to Georgia proper. Rather, the aim is to investigate the roots of the ethnic conflicts between the counterparts of the ethnic tensions, which resulted in the occurrence of an ethnic cleansing-like situation of the Georgians both in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The history of conflict, which resulted in 1/6 of the Georgia's population to leave their homelands, would shed light on the economic, social and political catastrophe the Georgian society faced, and thus would assist to gain a better insight into the social context that the Georgian IDPs and the host society interact in.

CHAPTER 3

IN THE LIGHT OF NARRATIVES AND COUNTER NARRATIVES ON ANTIQUITY AND TERRITORIAL SOVEREIGNTY

Histories are based on memories organized into narratives. Whatever actually happened is far less important than how it is remembered. What is remembered, what has been forgotten or repressed, provides the template through which the world is understood. Nationalist violence or inter-ethnic cooperation and tolerance depend on what narrative, what tales of injustice, oppression, or betrayal are told. Tellers of tales have enormous (though far from absolute) power to reshape, edit, share their stories, and therefore to promote a future of either violence or cooperation (Suny, 2001: 864).

When the successor states of the Soviet Union entered their path of independence, they were not the only ones who sought for national sovereignty. Since it was the epoch during which Union's central authority was loosening at the periphery, the signals of potential conflicts were becoming more vivid. Those who were seeking independence, whether titular or not, in an urge to claim their national sovereignties underwent their state and nation-building processes in parallel to each other. This meant not only the (re)construction of their national identities, but also the (re)construction of the identities of 'other(s)' who were posing a threat to their nationhood and the land. For instance, the Georgian national consciousness and collective memory have a strong emphasis on 'survival against the enemies'. The conceptualization of the enemy has a broad range that includes both external and internal ones. According to the popular ethnocentric rhetoric of the early 1990s, in its past, Georgia has not only struggled against external enemies such as Muslims (most notably the Turks and Iranians) and Russians but also against the internal enemies, the 'traitors'. These traitors were Abkhazians and Ossetians, who have collaborated with the Bolsheviks in the late 1910s and early 1920s. Thus, they (at least Ossetians) were perceived as 'ungrateful guests' that betrayed the trust of the Georgian nation

(Sammut and Cvetkovski, 1996; Chikovani, 2008: 802).⁴² This rhetoric is pretty much in line with Eric Hobsbawm's interpretation of the collapse of the Soviet Union. He saw the collapse as a potential for disaster for the successor states and argued that the absence of the Soviet regime would mean the absence of the "scapegoat" which before was harnessing the notion of nationalism. Following the dissolution, post-Soviet nations embarked on a search for an 'other' to blame for their "predicament" (Hobsbawm, 1992: 174). In other words, for many successor states, their ethnic minorities and for many ethnic minorities, their titular states became the 'other'/'the scapegoat'. Hence, in order to understand the current form of the frozen conflicts between the counter parts in Georgia, a special focus on the national narratives and historiographies of these ethnic groups is necessary.

Ernest Gellner argued that the form of nationalism that flourished in the post-Soviet states was a reflection and continuation of the 19th century nationalism, which did not fully mature back then because it was interrupted by the Bolshevik Revolution and was 'frozen' during the Soviet period (Goshulak, 2003: 494). In the case of Georgia, it is visible that the revival of the contemporary nationalist narratives and the national historiography were deeply influenced by the nationalist movements in three periods. These periods can be listed as the 19th century Georgian Enlightenment period under the hegemony of the Russian Empire, the short independence period between 1917-1921, and finally the 70 year-period under the Soviet rule. Thus, one can argue that the Russian control in different periods and under different regimes had an immense effect on the national identity construction of both Georgia and its minority nations, as well as on the ethnic disputes. For instance, in the aftermath of the war in 2008, in order to point to the reasons and the real culprit(s) of the August

⁴² Even sometimes 'the Western World', which the Georgians are believed to be a part of, is perceived as a threat to the very nature of Georgianness, in terms of intervening in Georgia's cultural and religious norms and values (Batiashvili, 2012: 195).

War and the prior conflicts, the Catholicos-Patriarch of all Georgia Ilia II gave the following statement:

In the 1920s, when the Communists invaded independent Georgia, they distributed some parts of our territories among the neighbouring states and without any historical or legal grounds they created the autonomous republics of Ajara, Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the remaining parts. By doing so they planted the time-bombs that were to go off as soon as the occasion arose. Now the time has come. Even though the Soviet Union no longer exists, the ideology and fabricated history that has been instilled in the minds of residents of the above-mentioned regions for 70 years, and over 100 years of Tsarist rule before that, disposed the residents of these regions against Georgia, thereby creating an illusion that they had been invaded by the Georgian state.⁴³

Thus, one can argue that the modern Georgian historiography is a continuation of the 19th century Georgian historiography, and the Georgian national narrative is a product of Russian dominance. Witnessing the occupation of the Tsarist Russia and its assimilation policies especially on the Georgian Orthodox Church, the language, and the historical memory created a reaction among many Georgians (Chikovani, 2008: 799). Nevertheless, this reaction was only limited to a small urban intellectual coterie since the rural population were then identifying themselves by their religious and/or regional affiliations (Suny, 1989a: 506; Suny, 2001: 874). The era under the dominance of the Russian Empire created its intellectual and political elites, who are today accepted as the founding fathers of the Georgian nation. Those elites not only sowed the seeds of Georgian national consciousness, but also pioneered the establishment of the first democratic republic of Georgia as the authority gap after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 gave them a chance for declaring independence (May 1918- February 1921). This attempt is perceived as a milestone for the current Georgian national narrative, despite its short existence.

⁴³ A quote from the opening speech of the Catholicos-Patriarch of all Georgia Ilia II at a conference named 'Causes of War Prospects for Peace', which was held by the Holy Synod of the Georgian Orthodox Church and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in 2009.

Interruption by the Soviet hegemony and its Marxist historical materialism were a setback for Georgian nationalism, yet they were not enough to erase its ethnocentric nature. On the contrary, the Georgians created a new narrative via modern myths and history-telling, which glorified the long past Georgian history as well as the unique and ancient Georgian identity. As the regime would not allow exposing any sorts of nationalist attitude in the public sphere, the Georgians preserved their ethnocentric narratives in their private lives. In other words, their national history coexisted with the official Marxist history. Moreover, Soviet affirmative action policies for nationalities such as right to self-determination and *korenizatsiia* (indigenization policy) had a massive impact on the identity construction of not only the titular groups but also the minorities due to the eventual hierarchy they created. Additionally, in the last period of the Union, when the policy of *perestroika* was adopted, it opened room for exposition of the ethnocentric narratives of both titular and minority groups in the public sphere. Although these narratives were imbalanced, since titular nations (such as Georgia) had historically well-grounded and privileged position in comparison to their minorities (such as Abkhazians and South Ossetians), this imbalance did not set back the minority nations.⁴⁴ As the narratives continued to clash, they became over politicized, which eventually fueled ethnic conflicts (Chikovani, 2008: 801).

⁴⁴ Georgian language (*Kartuli Ena*) has its own alphabet since the 5th century. According to Gachechiladze (1997: 17), pupils can still read scripts from 1.500 years ago. Besides Armenian, Georgian was one of the rare examples which had a chance to preserve its alphabet during the Soviet Period (Aydingun and Asker, 2012: 161). Both Ossetian and Abkhazian languages had an intervention by the Tsarist Russia for the creation of written forms. A Cyrillic script for Abkhazian language was created by Baron P.K. Uslar in the 1860s. Only after the early 20th century it is possible to talk about the evolvement of Abkhazian written language (Hewitt, 2013: 170; Haarman, 2012: 297). In 1844, the Ossetians started to use a Cyrillic alphabet which was developed by Andreas Sjøegren. See: "Ossetian (ирон æвзаг / дигорон æвзаг)", <https://www.omniglot.com/writing/ossetian.htm> (Accessed: 14.01.2020). Although there is evidence on earlier Abkhazian and Ossetian writings, these were in other languages such as Greek, Ottoman Turkish, Arabic and Georgian. Therefore, one can suggest that since the Georgians have their written language and hence history, they have an advantage in historical debates.

As a result, scholarly work of the late Soviet and early independence period of the successor states was strongly influenced by essentialist and primordialist notions, which sharpened the group boundaries of the nationalities (Kemoklidze et al., 2012: 1618; Suny, 1999: 140-141). We see it in the works of many scholars from Caucasus, who worked on the antiquity debates. In their work, they devoted themselves to providing answers to questions such as ‘Where is their homeland really?’, ‘Who are the in-group members of their nation and who are not?’, ‘Who is the original inhabitant of the claimed land?’, ‘Who had the first political formation in the claimed land?’, and ‘What is the position of the ‘other(s)? Are they the original inhabitants of the region or are they the new comers?’ (Sammut and Cvetkovski, 1996: 6; Suny, 1999: 145). Suny points out that even the nations which had deep-rooted millennial tradition of written history like the Georgians were involved in such antiquity discussions (Suny, 2001: 146). Kemoklidze and her colleagues (2012: 1617) defined this type of scholarly work as “muddied” for being biased and over politicized. Some others additionally argued that this perception led to the “Balkanization” of the Caucasus since the multi-ethnic Soviet Union was in a transformation of divided mono-ethnic entities (Blank, 1993: 13-15; Allakhverdiev, 2007: 10-11; Prebilič and Grošelj, 2006; Akkueva, 2008: 255).

The level of rise in the primordialist tendencies in the post-Soviet states was not foreseen by the modernization theorists (whether Marxist or not).⁴⁵

⁴⁵ The modernization paradigm was pioneered by social scientists such as Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm, who linked the evolution of nations to industrialization. Ernest Gellner approached nationalism within a functionalist frame. According to him, nationalism was beneficial for a state because states were in need of a unified language and shared culture, and nationalism was the missing ingredient for this unification. That is why, he stated that “it is nationalism which engenders nations, not the other way around” (Gellner, 1983: 55). However, for him, nationalism also had a negative attribution. He argued that nationalism did not have an effect on the awakening of the self-consciousness of nations; rather, it invented them. Thus, it also invented nations which did not exist earlier (Gellner, 1964: 168). Hobsbawm linked nationalism to capitalism, and according to him, via ‘invented traditions’ the ruling elite was channeling the energy of the masses to another direction that was away from their own interests. Similarly, Benedict Anderson perceived nations as ‘imagined communities’ due to their socially constructed nature, to which members had strong sense of belonging for their commonality (Kumar, 2010: 395-396). Furthermore, Anderson claimed that those who migrated

Modernization paradigm, on the one hand, criticized the primordialist approach for fixating identities and thus for being unable to evaluate the level of identity fluctuation (Kumar, 2010: 394). On the other hand, it argued that modernity would bring an end to the chauvinistic nationalism via “international division of labor, mobility, and mass education” (Suny, 1989a: 504; Connor, 1987: 197). For Gellner, nationalism had to be handled as a ‘practical necessity’ rather than being elaborated by sentiments and affections, and for theorists like Anderson and Hobsbawn, it was invented by elites who had their own agendas in maximizing their own interests (Suny, 1989a: 505). Thus, Gellner argued that ethnic mobilization was a method used by minorities to sustain ‘economic prosperity’ (George, 2009: 27).⁴⁶ However, for some, the modernization approach fell short in explaining the post-Soviet outcomes. For example, according to George (2009: 27), first of all, the forced industrialization policy’s adoption in the Soviet Union differentiated it from the Western industrialization and modernization cases in which ethnic groups were diversified due to their economic levels and classes. Nevertheless, the overall aim of the Soviet Union and its industrialization process was to create a classless society with the equality of all. For this reason, the regime was undergirded by affirmative-action programs, such as the right to self-determination and *korenizatsiia*, aiming at upgrading the conditions of the disadvantaged ethnic minorities to the standards of the advantageous ethnic groups within the Union (George, 2009: 27). However, as the late history shows us, during the Soviet period, ethnicity continued to be one of the markers of the conflict of interest among the groups. In other words, Soviet affirmative actions had a paradoxical and substantial role on the national awakening of many non-Russian groups, whether they were

to urban cities with languages other than the majority’s, started to be marginalized and thus formed the economically disadvantaged social strata of the society.

⁴⁶According to George (2009: 96), approaching ethnic mobilization that occurs, for instance, due to sustaining economic prosperity is not quite applicable to Georgia’s conflict with South Ossetia. She states that this perception explains the Abkhazian case, which is one of the most developed and rich regions of the Union; hence, acquiring the region is of importance for the ethnic groups. However, South Ossetia is one of the poorest regions of the Union; thus, she argues that attaining the region meant more than economic prosperity for the counterparts.

titular or minority nationalities. Following the theoretical and methodological footsteps of the modernization theorists, some scholars such as Rogers Brubaker, Yuri Slezkine, and Ronald Grigor Suny, who took their education in the Soviet Union, aimed at investigating the paradoxical and substantial role of the Soviet Union. They pointed out that, while Russification became one of the primary goals of the regime, the policies regarding non-Russian nationalities also became influential especially in the post-Stalin era. Both of these policies on the one hand resulted in the assimilation of the smaller ethnic groups within titular nations (most notably within Russians), and widened the loophole between the titular and minority nationalities through establishing a hierarchy among them on the other. Suny argued that titular nations got the edge on their minorities. Their intellectuals had a better opportunity to promote their own language and culture; their political elites had higher positions in the Soviet bureaucracy; and their society had better job and education opportunities in their own republics. All these factors inevitably caused resentment among the ethnic minorities (Suny, 2001: 871-874). Thus, as Souleimanov states (2013: 115), although “Soviet policy of ‘friendship of peoples’ prevented the potential tension in its 70-year-long existence with its strict taboo on public discussions, mutual dislike of certain ethnic groups prior to and during the regime survived till the dissolution of the Union and evolved to their current forms.

Perhaps because of the difficulty in writing the historical complexity of the conflicts in the Caucasus region due to the variety of narratives of different ethnic groups, there is a tendency to approach Georgia’s frozen conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia by focusing on their close history in recent scholarly writing. To be more precise, a significant number of studies is hovering over the political turmoil of the late Soviet and the early independence period of Georgia starting from Gorbachev’s *glasnost* and *perestroika* policies, which definitely and undeniably are a turning point for the fate of the Soviet nationalities. However, these policies were not the reason for the conflict. They rather lit the fuse for those ethnic groups, who had to bury the hatchets during the Soviet

period.⁴⁷ In the light of the above mentioned discussions, what is intended in this chapter and in the following two chapters is neither to give a chronological listing of the migration waves of the Georgian IDPs, nor to find out one and only true party; it is rather to investigate the roots of ethnic conflicts between the counterparts of the tension, which resulted in the occurrence of an ethnic cleansing-like situation of the Georgians both in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Accordingly, it is intended to inquire which historical phases affected the (re)construction of certain concepts in the post-Soviet nation-building processes such as nation, nationalism and the other(s). Thus, it is aimed to investigate the perceptions and the narratives of the conflicting parties on certain landscapes (homelands), historical moments and sometimes historical figures which and who are believed to have triggering effects on the conflict history. This would not only allow for understanding the perceptions of the IDPs, the host community and the conflicting minority groups, but also help to interpret the social contexts at which the displacements took place.

3.1. The Caucasus: A Land Fought for and Claimed by Many

Prometheus the titan, who remained neutral towards the Greek Gods during the Great Titan Wars, held his grudge against them in secret. And when the time came, he created humans. He thought that ungrateful and troublesome humans would be the doom of the Gods. Nevertheless, the humans were weak and like animals, so he stole the fire and gave it to them. Humans then started to cook and make tools, they improved and they became arrogant. The god of sky and thunder, Zeus, was so furious that he captured Prometheus and gave him a punishment. His punishment was to be chained to a mountain, at which an eagle would tear and eat his daily-regenerated livers for eternity (Can, 1970: 10-11).

It is narrated that Prometheus was chained to none other than the Great Caucasus Mountains (Allen, 1892: 54; Raggio, 1958: 45; West, 1979: 146-148). A majestic mountain range for a proud and gigantic titan... As in this myth, the

⁴⁷ In fact, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, of the 180 'explosive zones', the most brutal ones were induced in the Caucasus. The most notable conflicts occurred between Russia and Chechnya, North Ossetia and Ingushetia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, Azerbaijan and Lezgis, and finally the conflicts of Georgia with Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Guseynov, 1996: 3).

Caucasus is home to many myths of many civilizations. This magnificent geological structure divides not only the region into north and south, but also the destinies of the region's inhabitants.

The Caucasus region is situated in an area of 440,700 square kilometers between the Caspian Sea to the east and Black and Azov Seas to the west. The northern part of the Caucasus ends at the Kuma–Manych depression, whereas the southern part ends at the borderlines of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan with Turkey and Iran. Hence, it can be argued that the Caucasus region, as a whole, is vastly comprised of geographical borders, with an exception of the southern end, where a part of the borders was drawn with the Treaty of Kars in 1921 (Coene, 2009: 3). Based on its geographical positioning, Akkiewa states that the region has both 'bridge' and 'barrier' characteristics (Akkiewa, 2008: 255). Being a bridge made the Caucasus a conflict zone open to never-ending external threats. To be more precise, from ancient times to modern times, for economic, political and security reasons, the region witnessed the struggle of great powers including Byzantines, Iranians, Arabs, Mongols, Turks, Russians, Germans, Brits and Americans (Hill, 2010: 1-3).⁴⁸

On the other hand, the 'barrier' structure of the Caucasus isolated local communities and led to a quite diversified ethnic composition, both in the

⁴⁸ The Caucasus region had a variety of Great Silk Road routes, which within time developed, changed and disappeared mainly due to the wars, political struggles and environmental conditions. (Khalilova et. al., 2017: 1). For instance, when Byzantium and Persian empires started a war in the 6th century, the previous route which passed through Iran became unprofitable and therefore the Caucasus region gained significance. In order to bypass Iran, Byzantium aimed to develop an alternative route at the northern part of Caucasus. This new route, which passed through the Caspian Sea, directed its path to Iberia (Eastern Georgia) and continued to Byzantium from Poti located at the Black Sea Coast. This route was active till the 15th century and many regional powers tried to control this trade route through endless wars. See: UNESCO. "Georgian and the Silk Roads", <https://en.unesco.org/silkroad/countries-alongside-silk-road-routes/georgia> (Accessed: 4.12.2019). "Georgia and North Caucasus on the Silk Road", [https://www.advantour.com/silkroad/georgia .htm](https://www.advantour.com/silkroad/georgia.htm) (Accessed: 4.12.2019).

northern and the southern parts.⁴⁹ In order to explain the diversity of ethnicity in the region, Suny quoted from Strabo that in the ancient Greek, one could encounter at least seventy different tribes that gathered to trade at Dioscurias (today's Sukhumi). Thus, Suny states that "for that reason, it [the Caucasus] is called the Mountain of Languages" (Suny, 1994: 4).

The contemporary geopolitical characteristic attributed to the region was shaped around the 18th and the 19th centuries. According to Coene, the reason was the Russian control (Coene, 2009: 3). After the annexation of the South Caucasus, right after the northern part, both regions were approached as administrative units by the Tsarist Russia (Ismailov, 2006: 10). Hence, the term Transcaucasia (*Zakavkazye*) meaning 'beyond the Caucasus' or 'Farther Caucasus' started to be used for the southern part, whereas the northern part was referred to as Ciscaucasia (*Predkavkazye*) meaning 'Hither Caucasus' (Gvozdetsky et. al. 2019a). Although the term North Caucasus is still used by the international community, today the term Transcaucasia is less preferable (especially after the dissolution period of the Soviet Union) by the local intellectuals and politicians since it was imputing the perspective of Moscow. Thus, the term was replaced by

⁴⁹ The ethnic composition is more fragmented in the North Caucasus, since it has a harder and separated geography than the southern side. The ethnic groups of the North Caucasus are as follows: Abaza, Abkhaz, Adygei, Agul, Andi, Avar, Azeri, Balkar, Chechen, Cherkess, Cossacks, Dargin, Dido, Dzhuhur, Ingush, Kabardin, Karachai, Kumyk, Lak, Lezgi, Nogai, Osset, Rutul, Shapsug, Tabasaran, Tsakhur and the Mountain Jews (Krag and Funch, 1994: 6). The South Caucasus people living in three independent states are composed of the titular nations and their minority groups. According to the official websites of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, the ethnic composition is as follows: Armenia is almost a mono-ethnic state with the majority of 98.1% ethnic Armenians. The remaining 1.9% population is a composition of Russians, Yezidis, Kurds, Assyrians, Greeks, Ukrainians and Jews. See: The Government of the Republic of Armenia (Official Website) "Demographics", <https://www.gov.am/en/demographics/> (Accessed: 4.12.2019). The 90.6% of Azerbaijan is the ethnic Azeris and the remaining 9.4% of the population are Lezgis, Russians, Armenians (around 120 thousand in Nagorno-Karabakh and 30 thousand outside of Nagorno-Karabakh, including Baku), Talyshes, Avars, Meskhetian Turks, Tatars, Ukrainians, Tsakhurs, Georgians, Kurds and Udins. See: The Republic of Azerbaijan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Official Website). "Cultural Diversity in the Republic of Azerbaijan", <http://www.mfa.gov.az/en/content/114> (Accessed: 4.12.2019). According to the data gathered from the 2014 general census, the population of Georgia is 3.224.600. While the ethnic Georgians are the 86.8% of the general population, the remaining 13.2% is composed of ethnic minorities who are Azeris (%6,3), Armenians (%4,5), Russians (%0,7), Ossetians (%0,4), Yazidis (%0,3), Ukrainian (%0,2), Kists (%0,2), Greeks (0,1), Assyrians (0,1) and others (%0,4) See: (Geostat, 2016: 8).

“South Caucasus”, which according to its users was more appropriate in reflecting the regional characteristics and values (Ismailov, 2006: 11; Coene, 2009: 4).⁵⁰ The contemporary South Caucasus is constituted by Armenia, Azerbaijan (including Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic), Georgia (including Adjara Autonomous Republic) and three *de facto* regions Nagorno-Karabakh (in the internationally recognized borders of Azerbaijan), Abkhazia and South Ossetia (in the internationally recognized borders of Georgia).⁵¹

As mentioned earlier, the Caucasus Mountain Range in a way divided the destinies of the North and the South Caucasus populations. The peoples of the North Caucasus were exposed to direct subjugation of the Tsarist Russia and were perceived as “less civilized” and more suspicious by the authorities (De Waal, 2012: 1710). The “southerners”, on the other hand, have differed from their northerner neighbors, especially due to their “persistent intellectual strain” on a shared culture, which according to De Waal is a prerequisite for a regional identity (2012: 1711). The influence of intellectuals is visible in the region. They may disagree on many issues, especially regarding the true owners of the land and the antiquity of their ethnic group. One thing they agree on is the idiosyncratic nature of their region. However, besides the consensus on the shared culture among the societies, the geography plays an important role on the ongoing conflicts, which must be highlighted once again.

⁵⁰ Ismailov and Papava (2008: 283) suggest a different naming for South Caucasus. They state that due to the historical, economic and political characteristics, there should be three sub-regions in the Caucasus: North, Central and South. While the northern part refers to the original North Caucasus, the Central Caucasus is composed of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, and the South Caucasus refers to Iran’s and Turkey’s bordering regions to the Central Caucasus. Yet, this is a discussion of another research inquiry.

⁵¹ Caucasus. (n.d.) *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia, 3rd Edition*. (1970-1979). <https://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Caucasus> (Accessed: 15.12.2019). North Caucasus region, still a part of the Russian Federation, is composed of Adygea, Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, the Karachay-Cherkess Republic, North Ossetia-Alania, Krasnodar and Stavropol Krai along with the portions of Kalmykia and the Rostov Krai (Guseynov, 1996: 1). See: Caucasus. (n.d.) *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia, 3rd Edition*. (1970-1979). <https://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Caucasus> (Accessed: 15.12.2019).

Between the South and the North Caucasus, the barriers are less visible at three points where Abkhazians, Ossetians and Lezgis live; therefore, these three ethnic groups have ties with both areas (De Waal, 2012: 1710). While Abkhazia has a connection with the Russian Federation mostly via the Black Sea coastline, South Ossetia is connected to North Caucasus via mountain passages called Daryal and Mamison Ravines. Lezgis live at both sides of Derbent Ravine, which connects Azerbaijan to Dagestan (Özgül and Ceylan, 2017: 30-31). All three ethnic groups, Abkhazians, South Ossetians and Lezgis, had tension with the titular nations.⁵²

3.2. Historical Narratives in the Making of Georgian Identity: Who Are Georgians, Where is Georgia, What is Their Early History?

God distributed all the lands he created to the all nations, except the Georgians; since they were then feasting with wine and songs. When God came upon them for rebuking, the *tamada* (the toastmaster) of the feast lightened the mood and invited God to enjoy with them. God loved the carefree nature of the Georgians and decided to give them the land he saved for himself. Georgia was established on this land.⁵³

The auto-ethnonym of the Georgians is *Kartvelebi/Kartvelians*, and the name they use to refer to their land is *Sakartvelo*, meaning ‘the land that belongs to *Kartvelians*’. While some popular etymology suggests the word *Kartveli* was derived from Kartlos, the folk hero/pagan god, many scholarly works argue that the word is a reflection of a proto-Georgian tribe called *Karts* (Mikaberidze, 2007: 3; Coene, 2009: 59). The ethnic identity of the Georgians is linked to *Kartvelian* or South/*Ibero*-Caucasian language group, which is neither a member

⁵² Throughout the Soviet period, the Lezgis aimed for the reunion of all the Lezgis in Azerbaijan and in Dagestan. Similar to other ethnic secessionist movements in the dissolution period of the Union, the Lezgis also founded a popular front called *Sadval* in 1990. In 1994, *Sadval* was held responsible by the Azerbaijani government for a bomb attack at the Baku Subway, which caused the death of 27 civilians. As a result, in 1996, Russian and Azerbaijani authorities made a joint operation to disperse *Sadval* (Matveeva, 2002: 17; Notholt, 2008: 7.17; Krag and Funch, 1994: 23).

⁵³ A modern myth for the Georgian land (Suny, 1994: 1; Goltz, 2008: 10).

of Indo-European, Altaic nor Finno-Ugric language families (Gachechiladze, 1997: 51-53). This Caucasian language group is a distinct one due to its isolation for over four thousand years (Suny, 2009: 3). The *Kartvelian* language group has three ancient members: Georgian (*Kartvelian*), Svan (*Svanuri*) and Zan (*Zanuri*). It is argued that while the Georgian language has about five to six millennial of history, the Zan language is divided into two language groups over time as Laz (*Chanuri*) and Megrelian/Mingrelian (*Megruli*). Only these two have mutual intelligibility (Coene, 2009: 70; Hewitt, 2014: 291). The Svan language is spoken by Svanetians, whose historical land is Svaneti, located in the northern part of Georgia, sided by the Caucasus Mountain range. The Laz people are the natives of the southern side of the Black Sea coastline and now predominantly live in Turkey. Megrelians⁵⁴ call their land *Samegrelo*⁵⁵ which is located at the Western Georgia (bordering Abkhazia) and was once a part of the Kingdom of Colchis (Mikaberidze, 2007: 460). Yet, today, the Georgian language is spoken by the vast majority in Georgia. As a result, Georgianness (*Kartveloba*) became an umbrella identity for all the Kartvelian ethnic groups.

Today, modern Georgia/*Sakartvelo* (69,700 sq. km) is located under the Great Caucasus Mountains, surrounded by Russia on the north, Azerbaijan on the southeast, Armenia and Turkey on the south and Black Sea on the west.⁵⁶ On 9

⁵⁴ As Megrelian became a sub-Georgian identity over the years, this group had quite notable political figures who shaped the late history of the Georgian nation, such as the chief of the Soviet Secret Police (NKVD) Lavrentiy Beria, the Georgian dissident and national hero Merab Kostava, and the first president of post-Soviet Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia (Kirtzkhalia, 2013). According to Hewitt (2014: 292), as the Megrelians identify themselves as Georgians, it becomes a source of conflict between them and the Abkhazians, since the Abkhazians prefer to perceive the Megrelians as a distinct ethnic group rather than a sub-ethnic group of the Georgians. He also argues that, this is one of the reasons why the Megrelians had integration problems in Abkhazia, as the Abkhazians consubstantiate them with the ‘enemy’.

⁵⁵ After Egrisi and Abkhazia, Samegrelo became a part of the united Georgian Kingdom, which was established in the 11th century AD. In 1803, Tsarist Russia took control over the region (Mikaberidze, 2015: 460).

⁵⁶ The historical land of the *Kartvelians* was Central Georgia, which today is known as Kartli (Mikaberidze, 2015: 3).

April 1991, independent Georgia adopted the name *Sakartvelos Respublikis*, which, in 1995, was renamed as *Sakartvelo*. The name *Sakartvelo* is a reference to the first republic which existed between 1918 and 1921 and before that, to the era of David the Builder (*Agmashenebeli*) (Gachechiladze, 1997: 51-53). Yet, the first state-like entity of the Georgians dated far back in history (Souleimanov, 2013: 71). The first Georgian tribal confederation Diaukhi (Diaeni, Diochi) was established around the 12th century BC, while a second union called Kolkha (Kolkhis or Kolkheti), appeared around the 13th century BC (Coene, 2009: 93; Mikaberidze, 2007: 7).

The first Georgian Kingdom was established around the 8th-7th century BC in Western Georgia, which was named the Kingdom of Colchis. The people of Colchis are believed to be the direct ancestors of both the Megrelians and Laz/Chan people (Mgaloblishvili, 2009: 17). Then, the Colchis Kingdom expanded to the lands of Diaukhi and added some important port cities to its territory, such as Dioscurias (Sukhumi) and Phasis (Poti).⁵⁷ The new Kingdom was renamed as the Kingdom of Egrisi and it started to appear as Aia (or Aea) in Greek sources and mythology. The most notable examples are the Princess Medea and the Golden Fleece (Coene, 2009: 93; Mikaberidze, 2007: 7).⁵⁸

⁵⁷ According to Mgaloblishvili (2009: 17), the historical land of Western Georgia spread to the Araxes valley in the South and Rustavi-Telavi in the East, and it comprised the lands of Abkhazia and Adjara.

⁵⁸ Today a statue of a majestic woman holding a golden fleece is situated at the very center of Batumi, Georgia. This is the statue of Medea, who was famous for her beauty but more famous for her intelligence and wisdom. She was the princess of Egrisi. She appeared in Homer's *Odyssey* as an enchantress/healer/witch who fell in love with Jason, the leader of the crew called Argonauts that came to seize the golden fleece from Medea's father King Aeëtes (Can, 1970: 233-237; Mikaberidze, 2015: 7). The Golden Fleece, a symbol of royalty, belonged to King Aeëtes and he had no intention to hand it over to Jason. But rather than refusing his request, he told Jason that if he wanted it, he had to finish the task ahead. What Jason did not know was the task was nearly impossible to achieve. However, Medea prepared an ointment for him to make him stronger. She helped Jason to fulfill his mission and then fled with him and appeared in several more myths in which she performed witchcraft. Remarkably, besides the Georgian modern myths, some historians also argue that the etymological root of the word 'medicine' comes from Medea (Shengelia, 2000: 64; Shengelia, 2018: 55). Read more: "Medea" <http://www.mythencyclopedia.com/Le-Me/Medea.html#ixzz601A4JNXE> (Accessed: 20.09.2019). Also, an interesting anecdote is that Merab Kostava and Zviad Gamsakhurdia

The other Georgian kingdom, known as Kartli (also known as Iberia in the Greek literature), was established in the eastern part of Georgia in around the 4th and 3rd centuries BC under the reign of Parnavaz I. Its capital was Mskheta, and the Kingdom involved important regions such as Kartli, Kakheti, Samtskhe and Javakheti (Coene, 2009: 95; Mgaloblishvili, 2009: 17). Both Egrisi and Kartli were directly affected by the struggle among Rome, Pontus and Persia in the 2nd century BC. In the 1st century BC, several Georgian principalities, including Abasgia and Lazica, were formed and went under the control of Rome.⁵⁹ The struggle of regional powers, the Persian and Byzantine Empires, continued in the following centuries, till the end of the 7th century when Arabs occupied the entire region (Mikaberidze, 2007: xxvii).⁶⁰

Between the 4th and early 7th centuries, important developments occurred related to the identity construction of the Georgians. One of these developments was that in the 5th century the Georgians created their own alphabet⁶¹. Another development was the acceptance of the Orthodox Christianity as the state religion in the 4th century (Gachechiladze, 1997: 55).⁶² After Christianity was introduced by Saint Nino of Cappadocia to Iberia, Christianity became “a basis

published an underground periodical in 1975 which was named as *Okros Satsmisi*, meaning the ‘Golden Fleece’ (Nahaylo and Swoboda, 1990: 190; Vilius, 2018: 13).

⁵⁹ It is pointed out by Mikaberidze (2015: 7) that in 65 BC, Roman General Pompey the Great ordered to search both the Golden Fleece and Prometheus in the historical land of Georgia.

⁶⁰ In 591, with the treaty signed between the Byzantine and Iranian Empires, Iberia was divided. Mtskheta laid in the control of Byzantine, whereas Tbilisi went under the control of Iran (Suny, 1994: 24-27).

⁶¹ In the 4th century, first the Armenian Kingdom and then the Georgian Kingdom established their own local alphabets. Suny argues that the alphabet of the Albania Kingdom and Georgia were set out by Mesro Mashtots, an Armenian, who also created the Armenian Alphabet (Suny, 1994: 22-23).

⁶² The Georgian Orthodox Church became autocephalous in 466 and it split from Armenian Church in the years of 607–608 (Mikaberidze, 2015: xxviii).

for an emerging national unity as well as cementing cultural and political ties with the Eastern Roman Empire in Constantinople” (Gvosdev, 2000: 1). Also, the Georgian narrative accepts the fact that conversion to Christianity was the beginning of the orientation towards the West (Mikaberidze, 2007: 11).

In 645, just 13 years after the death of Prophet Muhammed, the Arabian Horde entered Tbilisi, and along with Armenia, Georgia went under the Arab control (Suny, 1994: 27). Kartli Iberia upraised against the Arabs together with Armenia and the Albanian Kingdom, which is narrated to be a resistance of Christianity against the Muslim rule and its ruler Marwan Ibn-Muhammed. In Georgian history books, Marwan is referred to as Marwan *Qru* (Marwan the Deaf), as he was “deaf to the voices of the victims” (Suny, 1994: 28; Mikaberidze, 2007: 15). The Arab hegemony between the 7th and 9th centuries was perceived as the “decades of devastation” by the Georgians since almost all the Georgian aristocrats were killed by Arabs and there was no nobility left to rule the region (Suny, 1994: 29).⁶³

In the 11th century, a new threat was born. The Seljuk raids not only diminished the existence of Byzantium in the region but also forced the inhabitants to escape to the mountains. During this period, which is known as *Didi Turkoba* (the great Turkish trouble), it is narrated that the cities turned into forest, where animals ran wild (Suny, 1994: 34). The ongoing troubled times were stopped thanks to David the Builder (1073-1125). He refused to pay taxes to Turks and declared a war at the age of 16. On August 12, 1121, David won the fight against the Muslims together with the Armenians, Qipchaks, Ossetians and Shirvans. The ‘Great Victory’ (*Dzelava Sakvirveli*) is still celebrated by the Georgians in mid-August each year (Suny, 1994: 36). With this victory, he not only reunited the Georgian land and took Tbilisi back, but also expanded the Georgian land to its largest borders (Gachechiladze, 1997: 56-57; Gvosdev, 2000: 1). Thus, he is considered

⁶³ During the Arab control, Arabs were more interested in the trade roads and big cities. Therefore, the rural areas (like Abkhazia) were relatively freer (Suny, 1994: 29).

as the ‘Architect of the Golden Age’. In 1184, another ruler marked the history of Georgia and sustained the Golden Age of the country. Queen Tamar, also referred to as *Mepe* Tamar (King Tamar), was the first woman ruler of Georgia. She not only helped Byzantium establish the Empire of Trebizond, but also repelled the Seljuks back to Anatolia. Her reign is accepted as the most prosperous era of the Georgian history. It is narrated that “peasants lived like nobles” in her time (Suny, 1994: 39-40). For this reason, the famous poet Shota Rustaveli devoted one of the most notable Georgian literature piece of all times, *The Knight in the Tiger’s Skin*, to her. However, the times of prosperity were interrupted once more, this time by the Mongols. In 1220, the Mongols entered the Caucasus, which marked a period of devastation that continued till 1402. The Mongolian invasion caused the disintegration of the Kingdom into smaller kingdoms and princedoms (Suny, 1994: 41; Gvosdev, 2000: 1-2; Mikaberidze, 2007: 24).

The 15th century brought yet another danger. After capturing Constantinople and ending the Byzantium Empire in 1453, the Ottoman Empire was rising in Anatolia. The fall of Constantinople has an important place in Georgian historical narrative, since it is perceived as an incident that broke the bond between Georgia and the Christian/European/Western World (these three concepts or identity is often used interchangeably in the Georgian literature). The Ottomans surrounded Western Georgia from the west, first by seizing the Empire of Trebizond in 1461 and then making Crimea its vassal in 1475 (Mikaberidze, 2007: 24). In the 16th century, this time the Safavid Dynasty rose in Persia and posed a threat to Eastern Georgia. Between the 16th and the early 19th century, encircled by the Muslim states, Georgia became a land of conflict, which caused further fragmentation of the Georgian authority. While Princedoms of Imeretia, Megrelia, Guria, Svaneti, and Abkhazia had perpetual struggles in Western Georgia, Eastern Georgia separated into two kingdoms: Kartli and Kakheti (Gvosdev, 2000: 1-2; Mikaberidze, 2007: 24-26). To protect from the Muslim states, the Georgians asked for help from another Orthodox Christian state, the

Russian Empire. Subsequently, Georgia and the Russian Empire signed the Treaty of Georgievsk in 1783. This treaty induced Georgia's annexation by the Tsardom in 1801 (Köksal et al., 2019: 323; Grdzeldze, 2010: 170).

3.3. Historical Narratives in the Making of the Abkhazian Identity: Who are the Abkhazians, Where is Abkhazia, and What is Their Early History?

The Abkhazians were hosting and entertaining their guests, and in their side, it was improper to leave the table before them. Thus they missed God's distribution of lands to nations. God appreciated the hospitality of the Abkhazians and did not want to send them empty-handed. Therefore, he made a place for them with leftover rocks. That is why the Abkhazian land is "steep and thorny" yet the Abkhazians loved their hard land anyway. Nonetheless, God forewarned the Abkhazians to protect their land. If they won't, He would take the land back.⁶⁴

The auto-ethnonym of Abkhaz is *Apsua*, and the name Abkhazians refers to their ancient land *Apsny*, meaning the land of Abkhaz.⁶⁵ The term Abkhaz, according to Gia Anchabadze, is an alo-ethnonym designated by other nations

⁶⁴ A modern Abkhazian myth quite similar to the Georgian one, with small nuances (Krylov, 2012; Benet, 1977: 1).

⁶⁵ Abkhazia has undergone drastic demographic changes in its history. As a result of the mass deportation of the Abkhazians in the 1860s, their population dropped from 140.000 to 58.000 in 1886 (Matveeva, 2002: 7; Coene, 2009: 60). According to the last Soviet census of 1989, the Abkhazian ASSR had a total population of 537,000. According to the same census, 45.7% of Abkhazia's population were ethnic Georgians, whereas the ethnic Abkhazians constituted only 17.8% of the population in their homeland. The percentage of the ethnic Abkhazians was very close to the percentages of Russian and Armenian minorities as the Russians constituted 16% and the Armenians constituted 15% of the population in Abkhazia (Chervonnaia, 1994; Zverev, 1996). During the 1992–1994 active conflict period, many minority groups experienced forced migration. According to the 2011 figures, the demographic composition of Abkhazia is as follows: Abkhazians are 122.175 (50.8%), Armenians are 41.907 (17.4%), Georgians are 46.499 (19.3%), Greeks are 1.382 (0.6%), Russians are 22.064 (9.2%), Estonians are 605 (0.3%), Turks are 351 (0.1%), and Abazins are 355 (0.1%) people. See: "Население Абхазии", <http://www.ethno-kavkaz.narod.ru/rnabkhazia.html> (Accessed: 05.02.2020). It is estimated that currently there are also 600.000 ethnic Abkhazians living in Turkey. "Turkish Abkhazians enjoying independence of their far away country" abkhazworld.com, 20 October 2008, <https://abkhazworld.com/aw/diaspora/172-turkish-abkhazians-enjoying-independence-of-their-far-away-country> (Accessed: 09.02.2020).

including Georgians, Russians, Turks, Persians and Greek.⁶⁶ Although the Abkhazians are considered as one of the ancient habitants of the Caucasus, there are heated local debates regarding their ethnic origin. Especially starting from the late and post-Soviet periods, some nationalist Georgian historians started to argue that the Abkhazians were actually one of the proto-Georgian tribes along with Kartvelians, Megrelians, Taos, Svans and others. Furthermore, today's Abkhazians, who adopted the 'proto-Georgian' Abkhaz identity, are actually the descendants of the North Caucasian tribes (such as Kabardeys and Balkars) that migrated to Abkhazia between the 17th and the 19th centuries (Shoshitashvili et al., 2009: 40; Anchabadze 2013; Mikaberidze, 2007: 64; Souleimanov, 2013: 116). In return, Abkhazian historians counter this assertion by arguing that the cultural continuity of the Abkhazians has existed in Western Caucasus since the 3rd millennial BC, and there have not been any significant demographic changes in the region since the 2nd millennial BC (Chirikba, 1998b: 37-47); thus, the real late comers to the region are the Georgians and not the vice versa (Mikaberidze, 2007: 64). Despite the overwhelming debates, according to Chervonnaia (1994), the Abkhazians must be considered as a nation for being a stable community in terms social, cultural, ethnic and psychological characteristics.

The Abkhazian language belongs to the North Caucasian language family. It is a branch of Abkhazo-Adyghian, which belongs to the West Circassian language group. West Circassian language group is composed of Abkhazian, Abazin, Adyghe, Kabardino-Circassian and Ubykh⁶⁷ languages, and thus, the Abkhazian language differs from the *Kartvelian* language family (George, 2009: 99; Mikaberidze, 2007: 64; Chervonnaia, 1994; Hewitt, 2014: 263; Matveeva,

⁶⁶ "Gia Anchabadze: "In XII-XIII Centuries Term "Abkhaz" Had Three Meanings"". *Interview*, abkhazworld.com, 20 February 2013, <https://abkhazworld.com/aw/interview/87-gia-anchabadze-in-xii-xiii-centuries-term-abkhaz-had-three-meanings> (Accessed: 09.02.2020).

⁶⁷ In 1992, the Ubykh language became extinct due to the death of its last native speaker in Turkey (Coene, 2009: 72).

2002:7). Between the 1st and 2nd centuries, Christianity entered Abkhazia and until the Ottoman occupation in the 16th century, it became an important cultural element. However, Islam spread in the region starting from the 16th century. Therefore, the Abkhazians are associated with both religions. Today, while the majority of the Abkhazians in Abkhazia are Orthodox Christians⁶⁸, the majority of the Abkhazian diaspora are Muslims (Mikaberidze, 2007: 64; George, 2009: 99; Coene, Frederik. 2009: 60). Yet, one cannot argue that religion is a predominant identity marker for the Abkhazians, in comparison to the customary laws called *Apsuara*, meaning “being Abkhazian”. *Apsuara* is the unwritten codes of the Abkhazians, which are not only a way of expressing the national consciousness, but also are embedded in the daily lives of the Abkhazians through customs, beliefs and principles.⁶⁹ Derluigian (1998: 265) states that, along with the kinship and clan relations, cultural codes play a significant role on Abkhazian identity construction. These complex structures of clan-based kinship and customs differentiate the Abkhazians from their Georgian neighbors, whose identity is established on historical region/principality and dialect.

Today, Abkhazia, which has a total area of 8.7 thousand square kilometers (equals to the 13% of Georgia), is located at the western side of Black Sea and comprises the North-West of Georgia. It is in between the Psou and the Inguri rivers. While Psou separates the Abkhazian land from the Russian Federation, the Inguri river separates it from the Samagrela and Svaneti regions of Georgia (Gamacharia et al., 2011:6; Beradze et al., 2009: 10; George, 2009: 99). The Abkhazian territory continues to be one of the hot topics between the Georgian

⁶⁸ Abkhazia (Sukhumi-Abkhazian eparchy) is canonically under the jurisdiction of the Sukhumi-Abkhazian eparchy of the Georgian Orthodox Church. In 2009, the Abkhazian Orthodox Church declared its separation from the Georgian Orthodox Church. Yet, this declaration was not recognized by the Georgian and the Russian Orthodox Churches. See: “Russian Orthodox Church Respects Georgian Church Authority over Abkhazia, S.Ossetia”, Civil Georgia, 16 September 2009, <https://old.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=21469&search=abkhaz%20church> (Accessed: 09.02.2020).

⁶⁹ “Culture of Abkhazia”, *Abkhazworld*, <https://abkhazworld.com/aw/abkhazians/culture/1073-culture-of-abkhazia> (Accessed: 09.02.2020).

and Abkhazian sides. While the Abkhazians argue that the region is their ancient land of ethnogenesis, some Georgian historians claim that the region was populated by the tribes that had Georgian origins and that it was a part of the Kingdom of Egrisi.⁷⁰ Thus, this indivisible region of Georgia did not differ from the other historical-ethnographic parts of Georgia (Khorava, 2009: 18; Beradze et al., 2009: 10; Shoshitashvili et al., 2009: 40).⁷¹

Historians such as Anchabadze, Chervonnaya, and Zverev argue that without any doubt, Abkhazia is the historical homeland of Abkhazians (Anchabadze quoted in Achba, 2013; Chervonnaya, 1994, Zverev, 1996) since there is historical evidence (especially in the Assyrian, Greek and Roman sources) proving the antiquity of the Abkhazians in the region “under the ethnonyms Abasgoi and Absili or Apsili” (Chervonnaya, 1994). However, any claim suggesting that the Abkhazians were the only inhabitants of the region is also not accurate. According to Chervonnaya (1994), ancient Abkhazians lived side by side with ancient Georgian groups (especially with Mingrel-Chan and Svan people); thus, they had “complex ethnocultural interaction”.

According to Mikaberidze (2017: 65), in the 1st millennium BC, first the Colchis Kingdom and then the Kingdom of Egrisi had the control of Abkhazia. In 65 BC, the Roman Empire took all Western Georgia under control, including Abkhazia, and continued its domination until the 4th century. In the same century, Abasgia went under the domination of the Kingdom of Egrisi, and its rulers started to be appointed by the King of Egrisi. During that period, Abasgia collaborated with Egrisi against the Byzantines and Sasanids (Mikaberidze, 65; Chervonnaya, 1994). In the 7th century, the Byzantine Empire managed to separate Abasgia

⁷⁰ According to Kemoklidze and her colleagues (2012: 1617), right after the forced migration of the Abkhazians in the 1860s by Tsarist Russia, the Georgian intellectuals started to argue that the original owners of the land were the Georgians.

⁷¹ This perspective attracts harsh criticism from the Abkhazian side and is interpreted as a stereotype which eventually puts the Abkhazians to a position of “guest” on their own land, who should “enjoy Georgian hospitality and kindness” and “be grateful” (Akaba, 2011b: 12-18).

from Egrisi and made it its own vassal. Under the reign of Leon II, Western Georgia once again reunited, this time under the Abkhaz Kingdom (George, 2009: 99; Mikaberidze, 65; Beradze et al., 2009:10). This unity puts Abkhazians into the minority position besides the Georgian tribes including Megreles, Laz people, and Svans (Chervonnaya, 1994).

In 978, Bagrat III of the Bagrationi dynasty, the son of a Georgian father and an Abkhazian mother, ascended the throne and unified Abkhazia and Georgia. The Georgian chronicles address him as the King of the Abkhazians and Georgians (*apxazta da kartvelta mepe*) (George, 2009: 99; Mikaberidze, 2007: 65; Hewitt, 2008: 184). The period of unification ended by the Mongol invasion in the 13th century, which caused Abkhazia to become an independent principality under the Chachba/Sharvashidze dynasty (Hewitt, 2008: 184; Cade, 2009: 8-9).⁷² In the 14th century, the Abkhazians engaged with Genoese for trade, and the region experienced prosperity and wealth for a century. However, the century of prosperity was interrupted by the feudal wars of the 15th century (Cade, 2009: 8-9). The feudal wars divided Georgia into several kingdoms, and Abkhazia recognized the sovereignty of the Megrelian authority (Mikaberidze, 2007: 65; Beradze et al., 2009:10).⁷³ Between the 16th and the early 19th century, Georgia and thus Abkhazia became the center of Turkish-Persian struggle. In 1578, Abkhazia ended up to be a vassal of the Ottoman Empire (Cade, 2009: 8-9).⁷⁴ As a result of the authority loophole in the Ottoman Empire, Abkhazian ruler Chachba became a sovereign prince in 1780 (Lak'oba, 1999: 67-68).

⁷² Chachbas, also referred to as Sharvashidzes in the Georgian variant, is considered as a local dynasty which can be traced back to the 12th century. While the Georgian writings suggest that they are ethnic Georgians, the Abkhazians argue that the dynasty is of Abkhaz origin (Derluguian, 1998: 264; Lak'oba, 1999: 67).

⁷³ In the 17th century, a war broke out between the Abkhazians and the Megrelians. The Megrelians' victory led to reunification with the Abkhazians (Cade, 2009: 8-9; Beradze et al., 2009:11).

⁷⁴ It is estimated that under the rule of Ottomans, 20% of the Abkhazian population converted to Islam (Cade, 2009: 8-9).

Then, the Russians came. As a result of the expansion of the Russian Empire in Georgia, including Kartli-Kakheti, Guria, Imereti and Megrelia, Abkhazia entered the influence zone of the Russian Empire. Consequently, in 1810⁷⁵, the Abkhazian ruler Giorgi Sharvashidze signed a treaty with Tsarist Russia, with which Abkhazia accepted to be a protectorate of the Empire. In 1864, the annexation of Abkhazia was finalized. Abkhazia's principality status was abolished and restructured as a region under the jurisdiction of Kutaisi Province (*Gubernia*) (Mikaberidze, 2007: 66; Hill, 2010: 114; Markedonov, 2013: 21).

3.4. Historical Narratives in the Making of the Ossetian Identity: Who are the Ossetians, Where is South Ossetia, and What is Their Early History?

After his father's murder by other Narts⁷⁶, Batraz, the legendary Nart warrior, was so furious that he was thirsty for vengeance. He brought all the misfortune to his kind; killed them with his sword, under the hooves of his horse and by the plagues he sent. Yet it was not enough to slake his thirst. Then the desperate Narts asked God's help, so God send his holy angels and saints and many diseases upon Batraz. But nothing has stopped him, except that he thought it was enough. He showed mercy to the last remaining Narts and decided to die on his own will.⁷⁷ When he died, God dropped three tears after him. The tears

⁷⁵ Chirikba (2009: 18-31) claims that since Stalin's decision on making Abkhazia a part of Georgia in 1931, Abkhazia had a long state history which started with the Leonides' reign between the 8th and the 10th centuries, and then continued by the Chachba reign from the 13th century to 1864. According to Chirikma, in 1810, the independent Abkhazian principdom went under the control of the Tsarist Russia as a separate entity from the neighboring Georgian principdoms.

⁷⁶ According to the Caucasian mythology, the Narts are semi-divine heroes and ancestors of the Caucasian peoples (Tavkul, 2007: 1573; Isenko, 1999: 53-60). Nart sagas are inseparable pieces of "Abazin, Abkhaz, Circassian, Ossetian, Karachay-Balkar, and to some extent Chechen-Ingush folklore" (Abaev, 2016: lii). Although some characters and events resemble, all ethnic groups have their own characteristic elements embedded in their own versions. The origin of the Ossetian version bears the traces of the legends of the northern Iranian tribes (Scythians, Sarmatians, and Alans) who are claimed by the Ossetians as their ancestors. The epics have also the traces of European, Turko- Mongolian, and Caucasian elements (Abaev, 2016: liv).

⁷⁷ Like Prometheus, who rebelled against the new generation of Gods and was defeated and punished by them at the end, Batraz also battled against the new emerging Christian god, his angels and saints. Subsequently, the tale of 'Batraz's death' is narrated as the "passing away of paganism" and the dominance of Christianity in Ossetia (Abaev, 2016: xxxviii, xli-xlix).

landed at Tseisk Gorge, North Ossetia⁷⁸ and there, arose three shrines called Rekom, Milaki-Gabrta and Taranjelos (Colarusso et al., 2016: 307-310, 417-421).

Osset/Ossetian is not an auto- but an alo-ethnonym. The root of the word has Georgian origin (*Ovs/Osi*), which then was adopted by other nationalities (Bubenok, 2007: 127; Bora, 2009: 13). Due to the difference in their dialects, the Ossetians have two main sub-ethnic groups; the Irons, mostly living in North Ossetia and South Ossetia, and the Digors living in the western part of the North Ossetia (Coene, 2009: 61).⁷⁹ According to Bubenok (2007: 121), The Ossetians went under a renovation of group identity construction in the 1980s as a result of the conflicts they had encountered with Ingushetia in the North and Georgia in the South. As a divided nation by geography and administrative borders, an identity which would act as a glue was “tempting for Ossetian intellectuals”. The Alan⁸⁰ identity, therefore, not only provided a sense of ‘uniqueness’ to the Ossetians, but also bonded the two divided groups of the South and the North with the same historical heritage (Smith et al., 1998: 63). In fact, the Alans are accepted as the ancestors of the Ossetians in many sources. They are an ancient Iranian nomadic tribe, and the descendants of Scythians/Sarmatians came to Caucasus more than two thousand years ago (Coene, 2009: 61; Sammut and Cvetkovski, 1996: 7). The reason for the consensus is based on the linguistic characteristics of the Ossetian language. Ossetian, with its two main dialects,

⁷⁸ “Saints and patrons of Alanya. A unique monument to St. George the Victorious in Vladikavkaz, Ashvina and Uastirdzhi” (n.d.), <http://enfant-magazine.ru/en/npravilnyjj-vzglyad/svyatyie-i-pokroviteli-alanii-unikalnyi-pamyatnik-georgiyu-pobedonoscu-vo/> (Accessed: 16.02.2020).

⁷⁹ There are some studies arguing that there is a 3rd sub-ethnic group called Tualag, who live in South Ossetia (Taşçı, 2019: 21; Bubenok, 2007: 127). Yet, others suggest that Tualag is only a dialect, very close to Iron with only a phonological difference between them (Hettich, 2002: 3).

⁸⁰ Alans can be traced in the Chinese (people: *Asi*, land: *Alanliao*) and Roman records (people: *Alan*, land: *Aorsi*) as early as the 1st century BC (Bora, 2009: 12-13).

Iron and Digor⁸¹, belongs to the Northeastern Iranian branch of the Indo-European language group (Coene, 2009: 74; Sammut and Cvetkovski, 1996: 6). Regarding their religious denominations, it is estimated that only 15% of the Ossetians (most dominantly Digors) are Muslims due to the influence of their Kabardian neighbors. Starting from the 10th century, due to the activities of first the Byzantine and then of the Georgian and Russian missionaries, Orthodox Christianity spread among the Ossetians (Bora, 2009: 13). Nonetheless, the ancient Ossetian traditional religion called True Faith, *Uatsdin* in Ossetian, is still followed by the vast majority. Hence, one can argue that the old and new faiths are intermingled in the Ossetian culture.⁸²

South Ossetia, with a total area of 3.900 square kilometers, is situated at the southern side of the Caucasus Mountain range and is only connected to North Ossetia through the Roka Mountain Tunnel. It is surrounded from east, south and west with Georgia proper (Sammut and Cvetkovski, 1996: 5; George, 2009: 97). Just like the alo-ethnonym of Osset, the toponym of “South Ossetia” was generated by other nations: the Tsarist Russia in the 19th century, which corresponds to Shida Kartli, Racha and Imereti regions of Georgia, respectively. Only in 1922, the region gained administrative borders, when it became an autonomous region under the Georgian SSR. In 1990, Georgian authorities dismissed the status of the region, thus resulting in South Ossetians’ declaration of independence. Since the 2008 War, South Ossetia is considered as a *de facto*

⁸¹ The Digor dialect of Ossetian is one of the least changed version of the Scythian language. See: “Osetler Kimlerdir.” (n.d.) Translated by Haluk Özcan, Alan Kültür ve Yardım Vakfı, <http://www.alanvakfi.org.tr/osetler-kimlerdir> (Accessed: 16.02.2020).

⁸² For instance, the most vivid example is the merge of the Orthodox Figure Saint George with Uastyrdzhi, the patron of the male sex and travelers of the old religion. See: Edwards, M. (2016). “Ossetians in Georgia, with their backs to the mountains”, *opendemocracy.net*, 30 August 2016, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/ossetians-in-georgia-with-their-backs-to-mountains/> (Accessed: 18.02.2020); “Ossetians” (n.d.), <http://ossetians.com/eng/news.php?newsid=436&f=3> (Accessed: 18.02.2020); “Saints and patrons of Alanya. A unique monument to St. George the Victorious in Vladikavkaz, Ashvina and Uastirdzhi” (n.d.), <http://enfant-magazine.ru/en/nepravilnyj-vzglyad/svyatye-i-pokroviteli-alanii-unikalnyi-pamyatnik-georgiyu-pobedonoscu-vo/> (Accessed: 16.02.2020).

state in the literature (Bubenok, 2007: 119; Coene, 2009: 40). Although South Ossetians perceive themselves as the “southern branch of the Ossetian nation” and aim to unite with North Ossetia in the final stage, they at the same time view separation and independence from Georgia as a “safeguard” against the Georgian oppression (Sammut and Cvetkovski, 1996: 7; Saparov, 2010: 100). Thus, after North Ossetia’s official name was changed to “Republic of North Ossetia-Alania”⁸³ in 1994, South Ossetia followed its northern cognate and changed its name to “Republic of South Ossetia-State of Alania.” with the 2017 referendum

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According to the 1989 census which was conducted just before the ethnic clashes, a total of 98.527 people were living in South Ossetia, and the Ossetians constituted 66.61% (65.232) of this population, whereas the Georgians constituted the other 29.44% (28.544). The remaining 4% was composed of the Russians, Armenians and Jews. In the administrative center, Tskhinvali, the Ossetians had a majority with 74.5% (31.537) and the Georgians constituted 16.3% of the population (6.905) (Sammut and Cvetkovski, 1996: 5).⁸⁵ In 2015,

⁸³ “North Ossetia Profile”, *BBC News*, 21 April 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-20210708> (Accessed: 18.02.2020).

⁸⁴ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2018 - South Ossetia*, 5 October 2018, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5bcdce1db.html> (Accessed: 18.02.2020).

⁸⁵ Akhlagori (referred to as Leningori by South Ossetia) has a special condition considering the rest of South Ossetia. The region, with a majority of ethnic Georgians, was a part of the Dusheti district of Georgia till the 2008 War. However, after 2008, the Georgian state lost control over the region and Akhlagori went under the control of South Ossetia (Jasutis and Skardžiūtė-Kereselidze, 2014: 6). The residents of the region have a special status in that only they are allowed to pass through the borders with special permission. In 2019, the Ossetian authorities closed the ‘so-called’ border; however, in 2020, they let the Akhlagori residents, who are not the holders of Ossetian passport and are receivers of Georgian pension, to pass once in two months from the Razdakhani checkpoint. In 2002 census of Georgia, the population residing in Akhlagori was as follows: Of the total 7.703 people, 1.110 were Ossetians, 6.520 were Georgians, 20 were Russians and 37 were Armenians. However, it seems that these figures have changed after the 2008 War. The 2015 census of South Ossetia shows that the overall figures of the ethnic Georgians in South Ossetia proper is less than the above mentioned figures. “Население Южной Осетии”, <http://www.ethno-kavkaz.narod.ru/rnsossetia.html> (Accessed: 05.02.2020). See: “South Ossetia: Ethnic Georgians Alarmed at New Passport”, *ReliefWeb*, 11

the South Ossetian authorities finalized their first census since 1989 and according the data, the population of the region dropped to a total of 53.532 people, and the Ossetians made up 89.9% (48.146) of the population and the Georgians were 7% (3.966) (Svanidze, 2016).

‘Being the real owner of the land’ and ‘the antiquity’ debates of the Ossetian historiographers with their Georgian counterparts make writing the historical roots of the Ossetians in South Ossetia quite difficult. For the Georgians, the region has a historical significance and a spiritual importance, and since the region’s autonomy was granted by the Bolsheviks, the Ossetians have no right to the land and thus it should return to Georgia (König, 2009: 240; Saparov, 2010: 100). Although there is a consensus between the conflicting parts on the historical roots of the Ossetians, that they are the descendants of Scythian/Sarmatian tribes, what engenders the heated debates is the disagreement on where and when the Ossetians first migrated. The Ossetian historians argue that they were present in South Caucasus for almost two millenniums and the Ossetians fought against the external threats side-by-side with the Georgians. Even in the 12th century, Queen Tamar married to the Ossetian Prince David Shoshlan. Georgian historians, on the other hand, accept the fact that the Ossetians were in the Caucasus for at least two thousand years, but it was not the southern but the northern side of the Caucasus Mountains

June 2010, <https://reliefweb.int/report/georgia/south-ossetia-ethnic-georgians-alarmed-new-passport> (Accessed: 17.10.2020); “De facto regime closed so-called Akhagori border”, 7 February 2020, *Report News Agency*, <https://report.ge/en/society/de-facto-regime-closed-so-called-akhagori-border/> (Accessed: 17.10.2020); “Res Agency: Residents of Akhagori, who receive pensions in the Georgian-controlled territory, will be allowed to cross the so-called "border" once in two months”, *IPN*, 31 January 2020, <https://www.interpressnews.ge/en/article/105602-res-agency-residents-of-akhagori-who-receive-pensions-in-the-georgian-controlled-territory-will-be-allowed-to-cross-the-so-called-border-once-in-two-months/> (Accessed: 17.10.2020); “Russian-controlled Tskhinvali allows pensioners from Akhagori to visit rest of Georgia once in two months”. *Agenda.ge*, 31.01.2020, <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2020/303> (Accessed: 17.02.2020).

(Sammut and Cvetkovski, 1996: 7). In 1983, Shevardnadze labelled the Ossetians historiography as “glorifying moribund attributes of antiquity” (Kaufman, 2001: 93).

In the 1st century AD, the Alans established their first kingdom in the Azov area of the North Caucasus; however, the Hun attacks in the 4th century AD forced them to migrate to the northern foothills of the Caucasus Mountains. In the 5th century, they subjugated to the Iberian Kingdom (Coene, 2009: 98; Topchishvili, 2009b: 4; Bora, 2009: 13). According to Vernadsky and Dzanty (1956: 217), between the 10th and the 11th centuries, the Alans took the control of a great amount of land in the North Caucasus, as well as a small portion of land in the South Caucasus. In the 12th century, one can see that the Alan rulers consociated with other states (Russians and Georgians) via royal marriages.

In the following century, the Mongol attacks dramatically changed the demography in the Caucasus. In a danger of annihilation, the Ossetians first migrated to the mountains and then to the South Caucasus (Curtis, 2004: 85). According to the Georgian sources, the Ossetians tried to occupy the land but in the 14th century, were repelled by the Georgian King Giorgi. Between the 15th and the 16th centuries, the Ossetians migrated to the Dvaleti region of Georgia causing the assimilation of a Georgian tribe called Dvaletians. Then, in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, the Ossetians resettled in the lowlands in Georgia, namely Shida Kartli, where they were offered empty lands and deserted villages by the Georgian rulers (Topchiashvi, 2009a: 116; 2009b: 5-7; Souleimanov, 2013: 62; Sammut and Cvetkovski, 1996: 7-8). Therefore, the Georgians mostly refer to the region where the Ossetians now live as *Samachablo*, driven from the late Georgian Princedom called Machabeli or the Tsinkhvali Region (Bubenok, 2007: 120).⁸⁶ In 1774, North Ossetia and between 1821 and 1830 today’s South

⁸⁶ The term *Samachablo* was propounded by Gamsakhurdia, whereas Shevardnadze often used the term ‘Tsinkhvali Region’ in official declarations (Bubenok, 2007: 120).

Ossetia region were annexed by the Tsarist Russia. The Ossetians, unlike their Northern and Muslim neighbors, welcomed the Russian rule and saw it as a protector and Christian ally.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Minorities at Risk Project (2004). *Chronology for Ossetians (South) in Georgia*. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/469f388dc.html> (Accessed: 23.09. 2019).

CHAPTER 4

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE ETHNIC CONFLICT IN ABKHAZIA AND SOUTH OSSETIA

4.1. The Impact of Tsarist Russia on the National Projects of South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Georgia

The Russian rule over South Ossetians, Abkhazians, and Georgians had affected their national identity constructions in different aspects and at different levels. The seeds of the Ossetian national ideology were planted in the 19th century under the rule of Russian Empire. As stated in the previous chapter, the first Ossetian script was formed in 1840s, and the North Georgia started to be referred to as South Ossetia by the Russian authorities. An Ossetians intellectual class, who were mostly educated in Russia, was observed to have appeared during the Russian rule. One of the most notable members of this group was Kosta Khetaguro. Today, he is accepted as ‘the founding father of the Ossetian literature’ though he was not favored by the regime and was sent to exile twice.⁸⁸ Moreover, several small scale uprisings occurred in South Ossetia, but as a matter of fact, the South Ossetians did not revolt against the Russian Empire and were perceived as the ally of the Tsardom.⁸⁹ South Ossetians were confronted with Georgians due to on socio-economic conditions as the landless South Ossetians were situated at the bottom of the social hierarchy. This was one of the

⁸⁸ “I’ve known no happiness, but I’d give my freedom/ Which I am used to, like happiness to prize/ If I might pave one step the way to freedom/ That road waiting for the people lies.” A poem by Khetaguro, written in exile. See: (Guriev, 2004, as cited in Kulaeva, (n.d.)).

⁸⁹ Gerstle, D. J. (2006). “South Ossetia’s Vladikavkaz Connection”, December 27, 2006, <https://eurasianet.org/south-ossetias-vladikavkaz-connection> (Accessed: 20.02.2020); Stewart, E. (2008). “Timeline: South Ossetia: A look back at South Ossetia's turbulent past”, August 8, 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/aug/08/georgia.russia5> (Accessed: 20.02.2020).

main reasons for them to side with the Bolsheviks, which eventually triggered the first real ethnic conflict between the South Ossetians and Georgians after the Bolshevik Revolution. Even so, the Ossetian identity construction cannot be said to have flourished as explicitly as the Abkhazian and the Georgian cases.

An analysis of the Tsarist period in Abkhazian historiography shows that the era has a significant impact on the Abkhazian national ideology. This ideology is constructed on the notion of survival from the assimilation and colonization policies of both Russians and Georgians (Nodia, 1998: 19-20). The Abkhazian historiography, however, blames the Georgianization policies more than the Russification policies, since Abkhazian discourse suggests that the Georgian expansion to the Abkhazian land was an ‘opportunist’ attempt. These Georgianization attempts, according to Abkhazian sources, were the origin of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict which resulted in armed confrontation in the early 1990s (Achugba, 2004; Akaba, 2011a: 8-9).

Probably, the biggest impact of the Tsarist Russia was on the Georgian nationalism. The nature of the impact was quite paradoxical (Suny, 1994: 114). As discussed in the previous chapter, the Georgians believe that they are an integral part of the West/Europe/Christian World and the Georgian historiography repeatedly mentions that after the Constantinople fell, the Georgians found themselves surrounded by the Muslim empires (Gachechiladze, 1997: 56). Although, as Gvosdev puts it (2001:1), “in terms of history, language, ethnicity and culture, the Georgian and Russian peoples are quite dissimilar”, Georgia got absorbed into the empire anyway because the empire was perceived by Georgian authorities as both a gate that was opening to West and a protector against the Muslim World (Suny, 1994: 122; Gvosdev, 2000: 1). Another important fact about the Russia’s annexation was that it united the Georgian land under a single political authority and thus secured the Georgian ethnos (Suny, 1994: 296; Grdzeldze, 2010: 170). However, the Empire also came with an imperial and colonizing agenda. It was also the ‘dominant other’ which was

imposing Russification policies, posing a threat to eradication of the Georgian culture. The oppression inevitably generated a reaction and caused the emergence of a political elite, who were aiming at “a unified national front” (Sabanadze, 2010: 72-73).

4.1.1. Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia: Under the Rule of the Russian Empire

By the onset of the 19th century, the annexation of Georgian lands began. The Georgian kingdoms of Kartli-Kakheti, the Western Georgian principalities, the Kingdom of Imereti, Guria, Megrelia, Svaneti, and Abkhazia were incorporated into the Russian Empire in 1801, 1803-1809, 1810, 1828, 1857, 1858, and 1864, respectively. Furthermore, following the defeat of Ottomans by Russians, after the 1806-1812, 1828-1829, and 1877-1878 Russo-Turkish Wars, other regions went under the control of the Russian Empire, including Meskheta, Javakheti, and Adjara (Mikaberidze, 2007: 31; Hille, 2010: 63-64). Consequently, one of the pillars of the Georgian historical narrative, ‘the unification of the land’, was finally materialized, yet not under the Georgian but under the Russian authority. As a result, the Russification of the land, the administrative structure, and the society have begun.

4.1.1.1. Changes in the Administrative Structure

The Georgian land were divided into two administrative provinces (*gubernia*): the Tbilisi province (*Tiflisskaia gubernia*) and the Kutaisi province (*Kutaiskaia gubernia*). While the former consisted of nine districts (*uezd*) (Tbilisi, Gori, Telavi, Signaghi, Tianeti, Dusheti, Borzhomi, Akhaltsikhe, and Akhalkalaki) and one region (*okrug*) (Zakatala), the latter had eight *uezds* (Kutaisi, Shorapani, Racha, Ozurgeti, Zugdidi, Senaki, Lechkhumi and Sukhumi) and one *okrug* (Batumi) (Mikaberidze, 2007: 31; Hill, 2010: 63-64). Between 1842 and 1849, South Ossetia took the status of *okrug* and thus experienced a form of

independence, but then it merged in the Gori *uezd*. According to Saparov (2010: 112), this was the only time the toponym ‘Ossetia’ was used as an administrative entity in the South Caucasus. The status of being a principality allowed Abkhazia to experience a *de facto* autonomy between years 1810 and 1864. However, in 1864, the principality status of Abkhazia was abolished, and Abkhazia became a military unit. Two years later, it was incorporated into Sokhumi *uezd* (Beradze et al. 2009:11; Markedonov, 2013: 22; Chervonnaya, 1994).

4.1.1.2. Russification Policies in Social Life

The year 1811 was the start of a downturn for the Georgian Orthodox Church. Implementation of the Russification policy towards this institution triggered the awakening of the Georgian national consciousness. That year, the autocephalous status of the Georgian Orthodox Church was lifted, and it was integrated to the Russian Orthodox Church. Varlam Eristavi was appointed by the Russian Holy Synod, and he became the Exarch of Georgia (Suny 1994, 57–59; Kekelia 2015, 122; Gnolidze-Swanson, 2003:10). However, after six years, he was replaced by an ethnic Russian, Exarch Theophilact (Longley, 2000: 202). The reforms were targeted not only at the economic and institutional spheres of the Church but also at its bond with the Georgian society (Köksal et al., 2019: 323; Keskin 2017, 21–22). For instance, the Russian authorities aimed to erase the Georgian language not only from the ceremonies and rites but also from the churches. Furthermore, ceremonies which were dedicated to the Georgian saints were halted (Suny 1994, 84–85; Abashidze 2006, 128; Köksal et al., 2019: 323; Keskin 2017, 21–22; Bubulashvili 2006, 139). The pressure on the Georgian Orthodox Church eventually fueled a reaction among the intellectuals of Georgia, and quite paradoxically, created a national awakening in the following decades (Saitidze 2006, 173–176; Keskin 2017, 18).

Meanwhile, the missionary activities of the Russian Orthodox Church among Ossetians were quite successful. Although these activities started in 1743 with

the permission of Empress Elizabeth and continued with the establishment of the Clerical Commission of Ossetia in 1745, they peaked following the subordination of the Georgian Orthodox Church to Russian Orthodox Church in 1811. In 1815, the Clerical Commission of Ossetia was reestablished with the headquarter being in Tbilisi (Gnolidze-Swanson, 2003:9-10).⁹⁰

Missionary activities and Russification in Abkhazia were also widespread. In line with the the Russification policy, Abkhazia underwent a re-Christianization period. In addition to the forced migration of the Muslim Abkhazians from their homeland between 1864 and 1878, the remaining ethnic Abkhazians, who were “strayed from the fold”, reconverted to Orthodox Christianity through the missionary activities held by the Clerical Commission of Ossetia between 1860 and 1885 (Gnolidze-Swanson, 2003: 13; Derluguian, 1998: 264). In 1910, not a single Muslim was recorded in the Gali district of Abkhazia, a region with a Georgian/Megrelian majority then (Gnolidze-Swanson, 2003: 14). There had been similar examples of political maneuvers of the Abkhazian elite before that as well. For instance, foreseeing the Ottoman’s declining power in the region, in 1810, Sapar-bei Sharvashidze “declared his alliance with Russia and converted to Orthodox Christianity together with his nobles”, (Gnolidze-Swanson, 2003: 13; Derluguian, 1998: 264). In 1851, the Russian authority put Abkhazia under the jurisdiction of the Imeretian Diocese, but in 1885, ‘Sukhum Diocese’ was established (Matsuzato, 2009: 245).⁹¹

⁹⁰ Matsuzako argues that the attitude of the Georgian Exarchate under the Russian Orthodox Church towards Abkhazians and South Ossetians was diversified, at least in the eyes of Ossetians. Ossetians thought that the Georgian Orthodox Church aimed to give its ‘spiritual supervision’ to Abkhazians, whereas they approached Ossetians as “helpless, wild Pagans or pathologic Pagans” (Matsuzako, 2010b: 273).

⁹¹ After the recognition of the autocephaly of the Georgian Orthodox Church in 1943, Stalin confirmed its canonical jurisdiction at the churches in Abkhazia (Matsuzato, 2009: 246). Presently, the Russian Orthodox Church officially states that South Ossetia and Abkhazia (although both declared separation) are under the canonical jurisdiction of the Georgian Orthodox Church (Matsuzato, 2010a: 10).

After the annexation, the rights of Georgian nobility were taken from them, and the nature of aristocracy changed. Around 60 governors (*mouravi*) were replaced by Russian officials. The Russian language became the official language, and as a result, Georgian aristocrats had to have good command of it to find high ranking positions in the state (Mikaberidze, 2007: 31; Suny, 1994: 46-59). Many noble pupils were sent to Russian boarding schools where they were humiliated and bullied (Suny, 1994: 46-59). Thus, the new system engendered a divided generation. On the one hand, there was a group which objected to the Russian authority in the homeland and pioneered the nationalist discourse of the 19th century such as Alexander Chavchavadze, and on the other hand, a second group contented for the new system, in which low ranking nobles were freed from the yoke of princes or church duties and had equal chances. Some even joined the Russian military and fought in the oversea missions such as the Crimean War (Suny, 1994: 63-75; Mikaberidze, 2007: 552). Meanwhile, the South Ossetians of the time were predominantly landless peasants who were living on the lands of Georgian nobles. The economic oppression and heavy taxes lead to their uprising in 1804, 1810, 1830, 1840, and 1850 (Mikaberidze, 2007: 499). Because of the lower social strata of Ossetians, they supported the Bolshevik discourse in the following years. Although Abkhazians had an established aristocracy, they would also support the Bolshevik discourse in the upcoming years because they were not equalized to the Russian aristocracy unlike their Georgian counterparts. They were not allowed to the state services or military. Thus, losing their privileged status, many Abkhazian nobles participated in the uprisings together with the representatives of the lower social strata (Akaba, 2011a: 8-9).

4.1.1.3. The Emergence of the Abkhazian National Discourse: ‘Survival Against Psychological Extinction’

Abkhazians were somewhat the most suppressed nationality among the three. They strongly resisted to the Russification policy of the Tsardom. Thus, Abkhazians uprose against Russians in 1821–1824, in 1840–1842, and in 1866.

While the former two uprisings were against the Russian colonialism and led by the Abkhazian nobles, the latter was against the agrarian reform of the Russian Empire (Nodia, 1998: 20; Mikaberidze, 2007: 67, 85-86). These uprisings and their support to the Ottomans during the 1877-1878 Russo-Turkish War resulted in increased Russian oppression. Upon a royal Decree (May 31, 1880), which declared the entire Abkhazian population guilty, thousands of Muslim Abkhazians were forced into exile to Turkey. Many Abkhazians, along with other Circassians⁹², had already fled to the Ottoman Empire in several waves (in 1821, 1824, 1829, 1830, 1837, 1840-41, 1853-56, 1864, 1867, and 1877). It is estimated that from early to mid-1860s, 60% of the Abkhazian population underwent forced migration, which is also known as *Mokhajirstvo*. According to the Soviet records, 32 thousand more Abkhazians left their homeland solely in 1878, leaving 46 thousand in Abkhazia. It is estimated that around 340 thousand Abkhazians left their land between 1816 and 1910 (Chervonnaya, 1994; Markedonov, 2013: 21; Vardania, 2007: 113; Kaufman, 2001: 95). This also meant that, of the seven historical regions of Abkhazia, five were completely cleared of ethnic Abkhazians (Tabachnik, 2019: 244). The *Mohajirstvo* is printed to the collective memory of Abkhazians as a ‘deep tragedy’ and a ‘threat of physical extinction’ especially after becoming a minority in their own land through colonialist settlements of other ethnic groups, in particular the Georgians (Nodia, 1998: 20; Kaufman, 2001: 95; Achugba, 2004).

After the exile of the majority of the Abkhazians, the Russian authority passed another order to prevent the remaining Abkhazians from settling in the region between Kodori and Psyrtskha. These lands, according to Chervonnaya (1994), were for the settlement of the ethnic Russians. However, the Russian settlement did not occur as efficiently as was expected. Although the Russian authority encouraged other nationalities to migrate to the region such as Armenians, Greeks, and Estonians, the empty lands were vastly resettled by the Georgian

⁹² According to Chervonnaya (1994), between 1860s and 1870s, at least 300 thousand of Circassians left Russia and immigrated to Ottomans, leaving approximately 45 thousand behind.

subjects (Achugba, 2004; Markedonov, 2013: 22). In the early years of the 20th century, Abkhazians became a minority in their own land, and the demography of the region transformed from a mono-ethnic structure to a multi-ethnic one with a Georgian majority. The flow of the landless Georgians (especially the Megrelians) to the abandoned parts of Abkhazia incited the ongoing conflict between Georgians and Abkhazians, constituting a period of major historical debate between the historiographers of the counterparts. Akaba (2011a: 8-9) states that Georgian historians often voice their confusion for being blamed by Abkhazians while the Russians were the ones who forced them to migrate in the first place. The researcher adds that it was the ‘assimilationist’/‘Georgianization’ policies of the Georgian authorities that caused this perception among the Abkhazians. Georgian intellectuals and politicians of the time promoted resettlement in the abandoned lands in Abkhazia. For instance, while the Georgian writer Georgii Tsereteli argued that Abkhazia is part of the Georgian land, a public figure, Jacob Gogebashvili, encouraged Megrelians to migrate to Abkhazia since the neighboring region *Samegrelo* lacks arable lands for all (Achugba, 2004; Akaba, 2011a: 8-9). Thus, the emergence of the 19th century Abkhazian nationalism differed from the Georgian nationalism. Unlike Georgian nationalism, which was about gaining the political independence, the Abkhazian nationalism was “about survival as a distinct ethnic group” (Nodia, 1998: 20).

4.1.1.4. The Emergence of Georgian Nationalism under the Guidance of Its Founding Fathers and Georgia Through the Downfall of the Tsarist Russia

After the abolishment of serfdom, the demography started to change in the Georgian lands. Ossetians, who now had legal rights of a citizen, yet not the right to land ownership, were suffering hardships. Hence, in pursuit of arable and vacant lands, they migrated to the Inner Kartli and *Samachablo* (Otarashvili, 2015). For the same reason, landless Megrelians moved to Abkhazia. Many serfs also migrated to the big cities like Tbilisi in search of employment. However, serfs were not the only ones who did so. The Georgian aristocracy, who got into

debt, came to Tbilisi too to find position in state apparatus or military. Thus, they had the opportunity to exchange opinions. The worldview of most of them (especially the youth) was affected by the Russian order, which had the goal of transforming the regional characteristics and amalgamating them to its own structure. However, what Russian order really did was to spark a nationalist reaction that contained traditionalist sentiments (Suny, 1994:114). Those patriotic young nobles wanted a land free from the foreign authority and sought independence. While some thought that independence should be built under the reign of the Bagrationis, others wanted the parliamentary monarchy, and still others believed in a republic.

One can call the first generation of Georgian nationalist intellectuals as romanticists. Alexander Chavchavadze, Revaz Eristavi, Barbare Jorjadze, Grigol Orbeliani, Giorgi Baratashvili, Dimitri Kipiani, and Nikoloz Baratashvili, who were later named as the ‘fathers’ of Georgian nationalism, were the pioneers of the romantic movement (Ninidze, 2010). The main themes of their writings were “patriotism and nostalgia for a lost past” (Suny, 1994: 124). Then came the second generation, pioneered by Ilia Chavchavadze, Akaki Tsereteli, and Niko Nikoladze (Ninidze, 2010; Mikaberidze, 2007: 657).⁹³ Those young nobles, mostly educated in St. Petersburg, were referred to as ‘sons’ or *tergdaleulni* (who drank the water of Terek, a river that originates in Georgia and flow through Russia).⁹⁴ In their work, they avoided lexiphanicism and mostly criticized the former generation for caring about their interests more than their

⁹³ The ‘sons’, Ilia Chavchavadze and Niko Nikoladze, dissented from each other regarding their method. While Chavchavadze portrayed a more traditionalist approach and defended the idea for financing the cultural revival, Nikoladze, from a more liberal point of view, was aiming to open a bank and to support agriculture and production with the bank’s profit (Suny, 1994: 132).

⁹⁴ After the ‘sons’, a third generation rose in the 1880s. This generation was, however, diversified in their political thoughts and aspects. While writers such as Alexandre Qazbegi and Vasha Pshavela (neo-romantics) promoted Georgian language and education, another (populist) group, led by Shio Davitashvili and Ivan Jabadari, believed in the liberation of Georgia through a revolution in Russia. A third group composed of non-noble populists and led by Gola Chitadze, aimed to unite the worker class (Suny, 1994: 133-Mikaberidze, 2007: 34, Jones, 2005: 45).

country (Suny, 1994:124-129). For instance, in his famous poem “Lines to a Georgian Mother”, Ilia Chavchavadze signalled a search for a new path other than rhapsodizing the ‘past and gone victories’ of the nation:

O Georgian mother! Thou gavest sons
To home and land in days of yore.
The future braves were lulled to sleep
With lullabies and mountain lore.
Alas! those days are past, and now
By sorrow is thy country swayed.
Thy very breath of life is fled.
Thy warrior son is now a shade.
Where is the courage of our sires,
The dagger and the crushing blow,
The honour and the pride of old,
The fearless struggle with the foe?
But why should we shed idle tears
For glory that is past and gone;
Another star, O Georgians, must
We find to guide and lead us on...⁹⁵

Ilia Chavchavadze, who had many sobriquets including the “Uncrowned King of Georgia,” the “Father of the Nation”, “The Righteous,” and “Protagonist of Cultural Enlightenment”, had developed a new and civic national form that was quite inclusive (Gasimov: 2007:101; Gabisonia, 2012: 66). In medieval times, Georgia was equated to a land which was surrounded with churches that were servicing in the Georgian language. In other words, the Georgianness was based on faith and language (Nodia, 1998: 17). However, in the 19th century Georgia, the Georgian Orthodox Church was incorporated to the Russian Orthodox Church, which represented unity with the occupying country rather than uniqueness; that is why Chavchavadze put forward the idea of the ‘common history’ as the cement for all Georgians. He formulated a slogan for the Georgian nationhood: “Fatherland, Language, Faith” (*Mamuli, Ena, Sartsmunoeba*). It is commonly believed that he put the Georgian land and language before faith in his formulation to establish a modern and liberal national identity (Nodia, 1998:

⁹⁵ Chavchavadze, I. (1958). “Lines to a Georgian Mother”. In *Anthology of Georgian poetry* (Translated by V. Urushadze). Edited by M. Kvesselava, Tbilisi: State Publishing House Soviet Georgia, 57.

16; Nodia, 2009: 88-90; Chikovani 2012: 108). His approach was, therefore, inclusive and comprised not only the Adjarians but also the Megrelians “despite their linguistic or religious otherness” (Nodia, 2009: 91).⁹⁶ Nationalism was not the only political ideology that flourished among the Georgian intellectual elites. Some other political thoughts such as peasant socialism and Marxism also found their social base in the country (Suny, 1994:114).

In 1901, while pro-Empire state officials, Georgian nobles, clergy, bourgeois, and Russian workers were celebrating the anniversary of the Georgia’s annexation, Georgian workers and supporting political elite were increasing their collaboration as the opposition (Suny, 1994: 165). Between 1901 and 1904, strikes and demonstrations were held in big cities of Georgia, which was followed by the establishment of embryonic political parties. Meanwhile, the ‘1905 Revolution’ occurred in Tsarist Russia, which broke the absolute power of the Tsar, yet it did not lead to the collapse of the Russian Empire. In January 1905, under the leadership of the Georgian social democrats, a major strike was organized in Tbilisi too, which spread to the other industrial centers, including Kutaisi, Poti, Tkibuli, Chiatura, and Shorapani. The strike was brutally suppressed, and hundreds of Georgian activists were arrested and exiled.⁹⁷ In 1913 and 1914, the strikes spread through many industrial cities including Chiatura, Zestaponi, Batumi, Poti, and Tbilisi. Georgian political elite grouped around two camps. On one side, there were Mensheviks, led by Noe Zhordania, aiming at national self-determination, and on the other side, there were Bolsheviks, led by Joseph Stalin, aiming at a regional autonomy rather than a

⁹⁶ In 1877, Chavchavadze published several articles, in which he referred to Adjarians as “our brothers and sisters ... we share common past ... they were forcefully cut off from their fatherland ... they are equally lawful citizens of Georgia” (Gabisonia, 2012: 76). Unfortunately, before witnessing Georgia’s first independent republic, Chavchavadze was assassinated in 1907 (Gabisonia, 2012: 77). In 1987, he was canonized as Saint Ilia “the Righteous” by the Holy Synod of the Georgian Orthodox Church. See: “Martyr Ilia Chavchavadze of Georgia” (n.d.), <https://www.oca.org/saints/lives/2020/07/20/103867-martyr-ilia-chavchavadze-of-georgia> (Accessed: 25.02.2020).

⁹⁷ Due to the sustaining strikes, arrests and exiles continued between 1905 and 1909.

national one. In the meantime, following the 1917 Bolshevik revolution and the collapse of the Russian Empire, Georgians found themselves in a position to determine their own independent statehood (Suny, 1994: 144-164; 165-184; Mikaberidze, 2007: 34-35).

4.2. The Political Turmoil between 1917 and 1921: Georgia's Short Independence

In 1917, Transcaucasia was under the jurisdiction of the Imperial Russian Viceroy. After the February Revolution, the new provisional government in St. Petersburg transferred the Viceroy's authority to a civil administration. This administration which was established in Tbilisi in March 1917 was called the Special Transcaucasian Committee (*Osobyi Zakavkazskii Komitet-Ozakom*). However, before the establishment of the Ozakom, the proletariats of Baku and Tbilisi had selected the representatives of their own local soviets (councils). Social democrats, under the leadership of Noe Zhordania, were an increasing force in the Tbilisi Soviet (Suny, 1994: 187). Thus, a duality of authority occurred in the South Caucasus. On the one hand there was the Ozakom, the successor of the Russian Viceroy, and on the other, there were local soviets.

After the October Revolution in St. Petersburg, on November 14, 1917, the Transcaucasian elite replaced Ozakom with the Transcaucasian Commissariat (*Zakavkazskii Kommissariat- Zavkom*) to gain independence from the Russian rule. Zavkom, an anti-Bolshevik entity, was headed by Georgian Menshevik Nikolay Chkheidze (Hille, 2010: 67-68; Suny, 1972: 173-174). Soon, in February 1918, it shifted its power to the Transcaucasian Seim,⁹⁸ which consisted of representatives from the Georgian Mensheviks, Armenian Dashnaks, and Azerbaijani Musavatists. On April 22, the Transcaucasian Seim declared its independence from Russia and established the Democratic

⁹⁸ See: Transcaucasian Seim. (n.d.) *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia, 3rd Edition*. (1970-1979). <https://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Transcaucasian+Seim> (Accessed: 28.02.2020).

Federative Republic of Transcaucasia. However, due to increasing threats of the Germans and the Ottoman occupation, the Transcaucasian Federation was dissolved on May 28, 1918.

Two days' prior to the dissolution of the Federation, Georgia declared its independence (Suny, 1994: 192; Mikaberidze, 2007: 35-36). The Georgian provinces acted in unison and unified under the name of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. Noe Zhordania was selected as the first president of the country, and Tbilisi was designated as the capital. Under the authority of Mensheviks (the Social Democrats), the new government followed a "European-style democratic socialism in contrast to the Russian model of socialism" (Gachechiladze, 1997: 56). During this period, although it was refused to enter the League of Nations, the Georgian Democratic Republic was internationally recognized by many, including Turkey, Germany, Britain, France, Japan, and Italy. Moreover, on May 7, 1920, a treaty between Georgia and Soviet Russia was signed with Vladimir Lenin's consent.

During its short existence, the Republic of Georgia implemented remarkable reforms in political, cultural, and economic fields. That is why it was accepted as "the most important peak-experience in state-building" in the Georgian literature (Gachechiladze, 1997: 56).⁹⁹ Indeed, the Constitution of the Republic of Georgia was accepted in the parliament on February 20, 1921, yet it was in effect only for four days because the country was incorporated into the Soviet Union on February 25, 1921. Even so, it is noteworthy that the constitution was prepared based upon civic and liberal norms. The constitution also guaranteed the autonomy of Adjara, Abkhazia, and Zaqatala (now an administrative district in Azerbaijan), but not that of South Ossetia (Asker and Kahraman, 2016: 38-39; Souleimanov, 2013:114). Important attempts were also made regarding nation

⁹⁹ In this period Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi Opera and Conservatoire, and Shota Rustaveli Theater were established (Mikaberidze, 2007: 37).

building of the country. For instance, Iakob Nikoladze designed the flag of the new Georgian state, and Ioseb Scharkemahn the new state emblem. Furthermore, Kote Potskhverashvili composed the national anthem, *Dideba* (Glory) (Janelidze, 2018: 169-170).

Nevertheless, the new government faced many challenges. In the West, the Ottomans occupied Batumi in April 1918 and ceded it to British expeditionary force in December 1918. In April 1920, British administration left the region's control to Menshevik government; however, the government could hold it for only one year because of the Red Army's occupation in 1921 (Mikaberidze, 2007: 91; Hille, 2010: 106-107). Between December 1918 and January 1919, an Armeno-Georgian military confrontation occurred as a consequence of a border dispute regarding Akhaltsikhe, Akhalkalaki (Javakheti region), and Lori (Southern Borchali) districts (Hovannisian, 1971: 93-119). However, the main challenge of the new republic was Bolshevik uprisings, which spread through various regions and took a different dimension in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

4.2.1. Rise of Bolsheviks in Abkhazia (1917-1921)

Derlanguian (1998: 265) points out the irony at the events of 1917-1921 by arguing that it was the 'internationalist Bolsheviks' who promoted the national cause of the Abkhazians. On March 10, 1917, a temporary Committee of National Security was established at Sukhumi under the leadership of Abkhazian Prince Shervashidze. Although the Committee was in dialogue both with Russian and Georgian authorities, it was interested in the activities of the Union of the United Mountaineers of the Caucasus, which was founded in May, in Vladikavkaz, the capital of North Caucasus (Hille, 2010: 114; Chervonnaya, 1994; Gamakharia, 2009: 28). The Committee in Sukhumi became a member of the Mountaineers Union in September 1917 and was recognized by the Transcaucasian Seim in February 1918.

Meanwhile, the Abkhazian People's Soviet was established in Sukhumi on November 8, 1917. It was led by Nestor Lakoba, Mamia Orakhelashvili, and Efrem Eshba.¹⁰⁰ They put their uprising plan into action in March 1918. Under the leadership of Lakoba, demanding their autonomy and the Soviet control, the *Kiaraz*¹⁰¹ (Abkhazian peasant rebels) started their revolt in Gagra. After capturing several more regions, on March 26, 1918, they seized Sukhumi (Derlugian, 1998: 265; Mikaberidze, 2007: 87). The Georgian National Guard under the orders given by the Transcaucasian Democratic Federal Republic was led by General Giorgi Mazniashvili under the orders given by the Transcaucasian Democratic Federal Republic. Mazniashvili and his army sided with the Abkhazian Committee of National Security against the Bolsheviks. On May 17, 1918, they cleared Sukhumi from the Bolsheviks, and Lakoba fled to North Caucasus (Chervonnaya, 1994; Mikaberidze, 2007: 87). On May 26, 1918, Georgia declared its independence, and on the following summer Abkhazia incorporated (as Sukhumi region) into the Republic of Georgia (Beradze et. al., 2009: 10; Markedonov, 2013: 22).

Nonetheless, the Abkhazian Committee was already divided. One side was seeking amalgamation in Georgia, and the other side was supporting autonomy (Nodia, 1998: 20; Cornell, 2002: 142). A reason for this polarization was the Georgian authority in the region. As of June 1918, General Mazniashvili was appointed as the governor and the commander-in-chief in Abkhazia (Mikaberidze, 2007: 87). Under his rule, not only the Abkhazian national movement but also the regular Abkhazians were repressed (Markedonov, 2013:

¹⁰⁰ Nestor Lakoba and Efrem Eshba were going to meet Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his advisor Rauf Orbay, an ethnic Abkhaz, at the request of Lenin. This meeting was going to lead to the Treaty of Kars (October 13, 1921) via which Georgia kept Batumi in its administrative borders on the condition of securing the rights of the Muslim population in Adjara (Hille, 2010:123-24).

¹⁰¹ *Kiaraz* was a peasant squad that aimed to restore Soviet authority in Abkhazia. They are still a liberation symbol for Abkhazians that when they declared their independence in 1992. Their revolutionary song inspired the Abkhazian national anthem. See: World Abaza Congress (n.d.). "Open Palm to the World. State Symbols of Abkhaz ad Abaza". <https://abaza.org/en/open-palm-to-the-world-state-symbols-of-abkhaz-and-abaza> (Accessed: 29.02.2020).

22). According to Achugba (2004), to strengthen the Georgian presence in Abkhazia, a more systematic wave of Georgian settlement was organized during his period.

At the time, Abkhazia was not solely in the agenda of the Russian Bolsheviks or the Georgia state. The White Movement (anti-Bolshevik Volunteer Army), under the leadership of General Anton Denikin, was approaching Abkhazia as well. Denikin acknowledged the sovereignty of Georgia under the condition that the Gagra district would be subordinated to his authority. While Georgians did not want to negotiate by proclaiming that the Denikin's army had no legitimate authority, some Abkhazian groups requested the anti-Bolshevik Russian invasion, believing that it would provide further independence eventually (Mikaberidze, 2007: 66-67; Souleimanov, 2013:114). Consequently, Denikin entered Gagra in February 1919 and declared Abkhazia a neutral zone (Hille, 2010: 126; Cornell, 2012: 142). Reciprocally, on March 29, 1919, based on a special act, Georgia declared Abkhazia as an autonomous entity within Georgia (Hille, 2010:117-123; Beradze et al., 2009: 10).

In the following year, several uprisings were staged, even spreading to Samegrelo, but these uprisings were harshly repressed by the Georgian army (Souleimanov, 2013: 114; Cornell, 2002: 141). Nonetheless, the authority of an independent Georgia was coming to an end because the Bolshevik Red Army was marching to Transcaucasia. On February 22, 1921, the Red Army reached Gagra, and on March 4, 1921, they invaded Sukhumi. Two days later, Nestor Lakoba, Afrem Eshba, and Nikolai Akirtvala called back to Abkhazia to form the Abkhazian Revolutionary Committee (*Abkhazskiy revolyutsionnyy komitet*-Abkhaz Revkom) (Blauvelt, 2014: 25; Hoch and Souleimanov, 2019: 92). On the 10th of March, Abkhaz Revkom acknowledged the authority of Soviets by sending a letter to Vladimir Lenin. Thereby, on March 31, 1921, the Abkazian

SSR, which was independent from Georgia, was established (Hille, 2010: 123; Mikaberidze, 2007: 66-67).¹⁰²

4.2.2. The Peasant Uprisings in South Ossetia in 1918 and 1919

If the 19th century Georgian settlement and ‘Georgianization’ policies after the *Mokhajirstvo* in Abkhazia are regarded as the breaking point of the Abkhaz-Georgian struggle, the years between 1917 and 1921 can be taken as the starting point of the contemporary Georgian-Ossetian conflict since, during that period, there were three main South Ossetian uprisings in 1918, 1919, and 1920 (König, 2009: 240; Souleimanov, 2013: 112; Saparov, 2010:101).

After the collapse of the Tsarist regime, being encouraged by the Bolshevik slogan “land to the peasants”, the deserted soldiers of the Empire’s army collaborated with the revolutionary farmers in Georgia. According to Saparov, the early uprisings were not unique to South Ossetia and were taking place in many other *uezds* of the country, including Lechkhum, Senaki, Dusheti, and Shoropan (2010: 102). The peasant uprisings were sparked by the dissatisfaction of the peasants about the land reforms and the regulations of first Ozakom and then the Transcaucasian Seim (Suny, 1994: 186). Therefore, the early uprisings had more socio-economic than ethnic motives. However, the uprisings in South Ossetia soon turned into an ethnic confrontation as the landlords were of ethnic Georgians whereas the peasants were predominantly ethnic Ossetians (Souleimanov, 2013: 112; Saparov, 2010:101-102).

On February 2, 1918, the first rebellion occurred in an Ossetian village in Gori *uezd*. Backed by the deserted soldiers, the revolutionary peasants killed some Georgian landlords and confiscated their land. Then, the outraged Menshevik

¹⁰² The Abkhazian SSR was officially recognized by the Georgian SSR on May 21, 1921. See: AbkhazWorld. (n.d.). “Declaration of the Revolutionary Committee of the SSR of Georgia on Independence of the SSR of Abkhazia - 21 May 1921”, <https://abkhazworld.com/aw/reports-and-key-texts/600-1921-declaration> (Accessed: 29.02.2020).

government sent the Georgian National Guard to the region. At first, the rebels' resistance was so strong that they captured Tskhinvali and forced the National Guard to retreat; however, on March 18, the National Guard eventually suppressed the uprising and retook the administrative center (Saparov, 2010:102). The events in 1918 escalated the mutual dislike between Georgians and Ossetians. According to many, the suppression of the uprisings was quite harsh and the killings were directed not only the rebels but also to the Ossetian civilians (Suny, 1994: 186; Souleimanov, 2013: 112). These events brought Ossetians closer to Russian Soviets as they believed that survival in Soviets was more likely than under the Georgian authority.¹⁰³

In 1919, the distress of South Ossetians increased due to the policies of Tbilisi, which granted autonomy to Adjara and Abkhazia but not to South Ossetia. After their demand for self-determination was rejected by the Georgian state, on May 12, 1919, the Bolshevik Soviet was established in South Ossetia. This was followed by a second uprising in the region in October 1919 (Smele, 2015: 452; Hille, 2010: 112). Supported by the Bolsheviks, this was a planned move in comparison to the earlier one. In December, the Georgian army entered the region and once again suppressed the uprising. The leaders of the rebels escaped to the North, where (at Terek Oblast-Russia) they established the exile South Ossetian Revkom (*Yugo Osetinskii Okruzhkom*) (Saparov, 2010:104; Jasutis, 2016: 49).

4.2.3. The Final South Ossetian Uprising and Georgia's Incorporation to Soviet Union

Meanwhile, there were developments in Russia. The Bolshevik government seized the power after the 1919 Civil War, and then the focus of the new

¹⁰³ Although the 1918 uprising in South Ossetia is considered as spontaneous by some (Souleimanov, 2013; Saparov, 2010:101), others consider it an act of "looting" and "pre-planned" (Tskitishvili, 2013: 21).

government became the South Caucasus. To secure the control over the region, the new authority in St. Petersburg initiated the formation of the Caucasian Bureau of the Russian Communist Party (Kavbiuro) on April 8, 1920. Sergo (born Grigor) Konstantinovich Orjonikidze¹⁰⁴ was appointed as its chairman (Pipes, 1964: 264; Suny, 1989b: 487; Mikaberidze, 2007: 37). At the end of April 1920, Soviet troops entered Baku and stored the Soviet rule in Azerbaijan at the behest of Orjonikidze (due to the order of Lenin) (Kazemzadeh, 1951: 284). After Azerbaijan, stuck between Turkey and the Bolsheviks, the Dashnak government had no other choice but negotiate with the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic-RSFSR (*Rossiyskaya Sovetskaya Federativnaya Socialisticheskaya Respublika*). Thus, they signed an agreement on December 2, and Soviet rule was established in Armenia. From that point on, Georgia was all alone. Having brought the Red Army to the borders of Georgia, Orjonikidze was ready to occupy Georgia, which then was almost surrounded by the RSFSR (Suny, 1994: 205-206). Nevertheless, Lenin was in favor of negotiation with the non-Russian, rather than armed confrontation. Therefore, on May 7, 1920, a peace treaty was signed between RSFSR and Georgia, according to which Russia recognized the sovereignty of Georgia and Georgian government accepted the establishment of the Georgian Communist Party in Tbilisi (Janelidze, 2018: 186; Menteshashvili, 1992).

When Red Army entered Baku, the most subverting outbreak started at the Roki district. The rebellion was organized by the exile South Ossetian Revkom. It extended to Mamison Passes and ended in seizure of Tskhinvali on June 7 (Janelidze, 2018: 174; Toal and O'Loughlin, 2013: 140; Cornell, 2002: 141). A day later, the South Ossetian Revkom arrested the representatives of the Georgian Mensheviks in the region and declared Soviet authority within the district (Saparov, 2010: 104-105; Jasutis, 2016: 49; Hille, 2010: 112). Before long, the situation unexpectedly went against the South Ossetian Revkom's plan.

¹⁰⁴ In 1931, Vladikavkaz, the capital of North Ossetia, was going to be re-named as Orjonikidze with several other cities in the Soviet Union (Bursa, 1985: 171).

Due to the peace treaty signed between Soviet Russia and Georgia a month earlier, Soviet Russia distanced itself from a possible armed confrontation with Georgians. Without the Russian threat, the Georgian Army organized a major counteroffensive on June 12 (Souleimanov, 2013: 113; Saparov, 2010: 105; Jasutis, 2016: 49).

The counteroffensive had severe consequences. Around 40 Ossetian villages were annihilated (Toal and O'Loughlin, 2013: 140; Cornell, 2002: 141). The numbers of the deaths and refugees which vary in different sources are hardly mentioned in Georgian sources (Tskitishvili, 2013; Menteshashvili 1992; Janelidze, 2018: 186). According to the South Ossetian official statements, around 8% of the South Ossetian population (five thousand from mass murders and 13 thousand from hunger and epidemics) were killed in 1920. In addition, 75% of the South Ossetian population fled to North Ossetia, and most of them died on the road.¹⁰⁵ According to different sources, the number of the deaths varies from three thousand to 20 thousand, and the number of the refugees is estimated to be between 20 thousand to 35 thousand (Jasutis, 2016:49; Saparov, 2010: 105; Souleimanov, 2013: 113; Sammut and Cvetkovski, 1996: 8-9; Cvetkovski, 1999). Today, the 1920 uprising is still interpreted differently in the historiographies of Georgia and South Ossetia.

According to Georgians, when Russia signed the peace treaty with Georgia, they accepted the independence and territorial integrity of Georgia, which included South Ossetia. The 1920 uprising of South Ossetian rebels to unite with North Ossetia under the Russian Soviet was the first attempt for them to secede from the region. The Ossetian side argues that the revolutionary movement consisted of Bolsheviks, socialist revolutionaries, Mensheviks, and others in South Ossetia. These groups, together with North Ossetia as a united entity, aimed for self-

¹⁰⁵ See: Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of South Ossetia (2011). "Declaration of the Genocide of 1920 in South Ossetia", 22/06/2011, <http://www.mfa-rso.su/en/node/362> (Accessed: 01.03.2020).

determination within the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic. In addition, the treaty did not markedly affect North and South Ossetia; since South Ossetia willingly joined the Russian authority in as early as the 18th century, it was expected to stay in the Russian side (Sammut and Cvetkovski, 1996: 8-9; Cvetkovski, 1999; König, 2009: 240). Regarding the Georgian counteroffensive, Ossetian authorities asserted that the Georgian intervention to Ossetian uprising was “a manifestation of an imperial aggression aimed at the extermination of the Ossetian people” and was “genocide” because Georgian troops terminated the political leaders, as well as killing civilians and leaving the remaining to hunger and epidemics.¹⁰⁶

After Armenian Soviet was established in December 1920, Orjonikidze once more sought Moscow’s permission to occupy Georgia. According to Suny (1994: 207), although reluctant, Moscow consented to the occupation, and on February 15, 1921, the Red Army, which was deployed in Azerbaijan, moved to Georgia. Just like Abkhazian Revkom, a Georgian Revkom had already been formed. As the Menshevik government fled from the capital, the Soviet authority was established in Tbilisi on February 25, 1921.¹⁰⁷¹⁰⁸ One week later the Soviet authority was stored in Abkhazia and in South Ossetia (Mikaberidze, 2007: xxxvi; Suny, 1994: 207).

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ South Ossetian volunteers joined the Red Army as they were advancing to Georgia to retribute the atrocities of Georgian forces (Souleimanov, 2013: 113).

¹⁰⁸ In July 21, 2010, Georgia declared the day February, 25 as the “Soviet Occupation Day” to commemorate the Red Army’s invasion. KyivPost. (2010). “Georgia declares February 25 Soviet Occupation Day” July 21, 2010, <https://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/russia/georgia-declares-february-25-soviet-occupation-day-74749.html> (Accessed: 27.02.2020).

4.3. The Soviet Period: On the Path of the Hierarchical System of Nations

After the October Revolution, the provisional government in St. Petersburg faced the nationalities problem. According to Lenin, the unity with non-Russians was vital for the survival of the new emerging system. For Lenin, they were posing a threat to a potential disintegration at the periphery. Still, the ‘Great Russian chauvinism was a greater threat since it would trigger the ‘nationalist defenses’ of the non-Russians (Suny and Martin, 2001: 5-8; Tishkov, 1997: 29). Besides, Lenin also believed that nationalization was a necessary stage for societies evolving into socialism (George, 2009: 29-30).¹⁰⁹ For Martin, this perspective and the related policies aimed to establish an “affirmative action empire” which intended to create “a centralized, highly interventionist multiethnic socialist state” by supporting and (re)creating national territories, elites, national cultures, languages, and characteristics (Suny and Martin, 2001: 8). That is why at the 2nd All-Russia Congress of Soviets on October 25, 1917, the act for right to self-determination of the nations was adopted (Tishkov, 1997: 29). Adoption of this act brought the needed support from the nationalists in the periphery. However, it also raised the question of which communities would to be accepted as nations and thus be granted a nation-state status.

4.3.1. Hierarchy of Nations: The Union’s Perspective and Policies on Nationalities

Tishkov (1997: 29) points out that, while Lenin’s choice of wording for ‘nation’, ‘nationality’, and ‘*narodnost*’ wasn’t clear and he used them interchangeably, it was Stalin who proposed a more concrete definition for the term ‘nation’. According to Stalin, a nation was “an historically formed and stable community of people which has emerged on the basis of common language, territory,

¹⁰⁹ Lenin was following Marxist materialism, according to which human societies are transforming throughout the history first forming primitive communism and then evolving through “slave-ownership, feudalism, capitalism, and finally socialism leading to communism” (Banks, 1996:17-18).

economic life and psychological make-up, the latter being manifest in a common shared culture” (Stalin, 1973: 60 quoted in Bromley and Kozlov, 1989: 426). His definition became, and is still, a basis for the further policies and discussions in the Soviet Union.

To regulate the *narodnost*¹¹⁰ within the RSFSR, the People’s Commissariat for Nationalities (*Narodnyy komissariat po delam natsional'nostey- Narkomnats*) was established in 1917, with Stalin as its Commissar (Kulegin, (n.d.)). The main objectives of *Narkomnats* were “recruitment, mobilization, and socialization of nationality elites and through them, their masses” (Smith, 1999: 31). Rather than policy-making, this Commissariat was expected to play an intermediary role between the Soviet government and nationalities through the local elites (Smith, 1999: 41). Even though *Narkomnats* was perceived as a “lame duck” for covering soft-politics such as educational and cultural development of nationalities and was only covering a territorial area of 22% within the RSFSR,¹¹¹ it gave Stalin the opportunity to rub elbows with the non-Russian elites. Consequently, his Commissar position helped him have both theoretical

¹¹⁰ The term *narodnost* is driven from *narod* (a people/folk/ethnos), which is rooted in the 19th century Russian ethnography literature. *Narod* conceptualizes all subtypes of ethnic groups from tribal communities to nations that are extinct or still exist (Bromley and Kozlov, 1989: 425; Tishkov, 1997: 1). According to Bromley and Kozlov, in the hierarchy of ethnic communities, *narodnosts* are in between tribes and nations that they surpass tribal communities but not catch up with nations (the highest form of ethnos) (1989: 432). What distinguishes nations from other ethnic groups (tribes and *narodnosts*) and makes them the highest form of ethnos is their will for forming a sovereign state or an autonomy “within a multi-national state while operating as a single economic organism” (Bromley and Kozlov, 1989: 431; Tishkov, 1997: 3). A further remark must be made here regarding a related term, *natsional'nost'*, which is translated to English as “nationality” yet which it does not quite cover the same meaning in English. While, in English, nationality describes one’s relation to the belonged state, or an ethnic group that shares common features, in Russian language, the term used for nationality is *grazhdanstvo* (citizenship). Shanin argues that *natsional'nost'* does not indicate one’s citizenship status or ethnic features. It is something “inherited” from family or from the language spoken at home. To be more precise, he gives the example of “Alexander Pushkin, an ‘assimilated’ Tatar, who clearly displayed the genetic features of an Abyssinian ancestor and is indisputably Russian” (Shanin, 1986: 115).

¹¹¹ *Narkomnats* were not dealing with big non-Russian republics such as Belorussia, Ukraine, and Transcaucasia. Since they were Soviet republics, they stayed in touch with RSFSR through the Council of Peoples’ Commissars (*Soviet narodnykh kommissarov-Sovnarkom*) (Smith, 2005: 45).

and practical experiences to further work on nationalities' policies, namely the hierarchy of nationalities and *korenizatsiia* (indigenization)¹¹² (Smith, 1999: 34; Smith, 2005: 45, 55, 61-62).

After the establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), one of the first acts regarding the designation of nations was to conduct an all-Union census in 1926. Census results indicated that people claimed to belong to some 190 different *narodnosts*. This result was alarming because it was almost impossible to determine the national territories since, in some regions, the ethnic communities were living side-by-side and the boundaries of group identity were not solid. That is why, ethnographers, along with historians and politicians, started to work on all ethnicities within the Union, which meant that the *narods* were (re)defined and a hierarchical list was prepared. The process, indeed, was subject to political manipulations; some groups were merged into one, some were downgraded, and some upgraded (Tishkov, 1997: 30-31). In this hierarchical system, which Nodia defines as “Soviet matryoshka system of nationalities” (1998: 21), *narodnosts* were categorized from top to bottom as “nation”, “nationality”, “people”, and “national group”.¹¹³ However, a nation was granted a union republic with which it became the titular nation. Nationalities were given their own autonomous republics, *oblasts* or *okrugs*. (Chikovani, 2013: 77; Suny, 2001: 874; Rouvinski, 2007: 237). Chikovani accentuates that “there were no precise criteria for assigning a group to a particular category or any clear criteria for implementing territorial borders

¹¹² In 1923, Stalin's policy of *korenizatsiia* became a top priority in the USSR. The policy's aim was advancing the educational and cultural level of the local people within the socialist framework and recruit local cadres into high positions in the governance structure (George, 2009: 30-31). Hence, through *korenizatsiia*, Stalin aimed to equalize other nations to the RSFSR and transform national cultures, in his own words, “national in form, socialist in content” (quoted in Martin, 2001: 74). To do that, in early 1930s, he promoted the Russian culture and language (Suny, 2001: 873; Miller, 2008: 61).

¹¹³ Smith adds one more ethnos category to the list above, the most unfortunate groups that are branded as ‘dangerous’ such as: “Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Germans, Crimean Tatars, Karachai, Kalmyks, and Meshketian Turks,” who faced mass deportation during the Second World War (Smith, 2005: 55).

within the USSR” (2013: 77). In fact, personal communions and feelings of the Party figures in Kremlin (including Stalin) were affecting the faiths of nationalities in the Union (George, 2009: 30; Tishkov, 1997:31). This unequal system structure many times caused resentment among minority groups, who felt discriminated. Many ethnic groups had to strive either to upgrade their status or to protect it in case of downgrading (Rouvinski, 2007: 237).

To conclude, both nationalities’ policies (hierarchy of nationalities and *korenizatsiia*) eventually created a two dimensional ethnic hierarchy. On the one hand, the universal Russian culture was dominating all Soviet non-Russian *narods*, and on the other, minority groups existed within the jurisdiction of Soviet Republics, which were also dominated by the titular nations. With the emergence of *korenizatsiia* during the post-Stalinist era, national elites started questioning the system, and when Gorbachev initiated his reforms, national mobilizations would not be restrained anymore (Suny, 1999: 156; Martin, 2001: 82).

4.3.2. The Dilemma of Abkhazia’s Autonomy Between 1921 and 1936

On Abkhazia was given the status of a Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) on March 31, 1921. According to Hille, although Stalin opposed to the idea, Lenin supported the signing of the Treaty of Kars (2010:123-124) after the success of Lakoba and Eshba in Turkey. Mikaberidze also interprets the SSR status of Abkhazia as a “reward”, and he further argues that it was one of the pillars of the Moscow’s *divide et impera* policy since Moscow granted autonomies in different levels to Adjara and South Ossetia as well (2007: 67). In the 1922 Constitution of the Georgian SSR, while Abkhazia was accepted as an SSR (with emphasis on a “special union treaty”) besides Adjarian SSR¹¹⁴, South Ossetia was accepted as

¹¹⁴ On July 16, 1921, Adjara became an SSR. The autonomy of Adjara had a *sui generis* structure differing from all the autonomous units in the Soviet Union due to its religious character, very much in contradiction with the rationale of the Soviet regime. This exception was based on the Article 6 of the Treaty of Kars, signed between the Soviet Union and Turkey, which stipulated

an Autonomous Oblast (AO). Over the course of the following years, the status of Abkhazia would undergo confusing changes. On December 12, 1922, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia incorporated to the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic-TSFSR (*Zakavkazskaya Sotsialisticheskaya Federativnaya Sovetskaya Respublika-ZSFSR*), and on December 30, 1922, the TSFSR incorporated to the USSR. On January 13, 1924, the USSR adopted its first constitution at which Abkhazia and Adjara were referred to as Autonomous Republics (ASSR) within Georgia (Markedonov, 2013: 23).¹¹⁵ It was bizarre that Abkhazia turned into an entity which was treated as an ASSR but had some privileges only granted to the SRRs such as owning national symbols (flag, state emblem) and army units (Saparov, 2015: 50-56). To secure its SSR status, Abkhazia adopted a new constitution in 1925. According to this constitution, Abkhazia was part of a Federative Union with Georgia being its equal (Potier, 2001:11). It led to disputes in Georgia and was rejected by the Transcaucasian Territorial Committee of the Bolshevik Party (Fowkes, 2002: 80; Markedonov, 2013: 24).¹¹⁶

Meanwhile, in the second half of the 1920s, Stalin declared a war against the *kulaks* (peasants that were considered rich). Under the leadership of Lakoba,

that local administrative autonomy would guarantee each community's cultural and religious rights (Balci and Motika, 2007: 336; Hoch and Kopeček, 2011: 65). See: Armenian News Network / Groong. "Treaty of Kars (Treaty of Friendship between Turkey, the Socialist Soviet Republic of Armenia, the Azerbaijan Socialist Soviet Republic, and the Socialist Soviet Republic of Georgia)", <http://groong.usc.edu/treaties/kars.html> (Accessed: 27.04.2017).

¹¹⁵ See: "First Union Constitution-Second Congress of Soviets, Constitution of the Soviet Union. Treaty. January 13, 1924", *Seventeen Moments in Soviet History*. <http://soviethistory.msu.edu/project-team/> (Accessed: 15.03.2020).

¹¹⁶ However, this constitution had an important impact on the Abkhazian national claims. On July 23, 1992, Abkhazian Supreme Soviet would restore this constitution as a reaction to Gamsakhurdia's move regarding the restoration of 1921 Constitution of pre-Soviet Georgia. This act of Abkhazia would not be accepted by the Georgian National Council on the grounds that it was a draft constitution which had never been actualized (Toft, 2010: 101-102, 194). See: "Constitution of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia , 1 April 1925", 17 December 2009, *AbkhazWorld*, <https://abkhazworld.com/aw/reports-and-key-texts/589-constitution-ssr-abkhazia-1april1925> (Accessed: 08.03.2020).

Abkhazia had been able to avoid the collectivization policy of the Union¹¹⁷ till 1931, when Stalin offered two options to Lakoba: accepting the ASSR status or tolerating the collectivization of all private farms in Abkhazia. Making his choice on the “lesser evil”, Lakoba offered Abkhazia’s incorporation to Georgian SSR, as an ASSR at the Abkhazian Council (Hille, 2010: 126). The decision was interpreted differently by the counterparts of the Abkhaz-Georgian conflict. For Beradze and his colleagues (2009: 12), Abkhazia accepted the downgrading of its status on its “own request”; for Abkhazian intellectuals, it was a “forcible convergence of two neighboring states through the incorporation of one of them, Abkhazia, into the other, Georgia” (quoted in Souleimanov, 2013: 115).

In 1936, a new Soviet constitution was adopted, in which the new SSR’s were announced. With the dissolution of the TSFSR, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia were regarded as separate SSRs. In the 25th Article of the constitution, it was stated that the Georgian SSR was including Abkhaz and Adjarian ASSRs with South Ossetian AO.¹¹⁸ South Ossetian cadres strongly protested this article since they wanted to unite with North Ossetia, which at the time was accepted as an ASSR within the RSFSR (König, 2009: 240; Souleimanov, 2013: 113). Georgians similarly protested the autonomy of South Ossetia, according to whom the concept of South Ossetia was introduced “forcibly and artificially” (Cvetkovski, 1999). Moreover, when the South Ossetian AO was established, the city of Tskhinvali was chosen as its capital. This was also protested by the Georgians since it was a Georgian populated city (Cvetkovski, 1999). However, because Ossetians were residing in the mountainous regions, they did not have a proper place and Tskhinvali “was the only town close enough to the Ossetian territories suitable to be a capital” (Saparov, 2010: 111; Cvetkovski, 1999).

¹¹⁷ For instance, during this period, Abkhaz population dodged the ‘dekulakization’ policy of the regime, while ethnic Russians and Greeks were deported. Their properties were confiscated and then transferred to ethnic Georgians as *kolkhozes* (Eng. collective farms) (Derluguian, 1998: 266).

¹¹⁸ See: Bucknell University. “1936 Constitution of the USSR”, <http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/36cons01.html> (Accessed: 15.03.2020).

4.3.3. Hegemony within Hegemony: The Period of Stalin and Beria

Mensheviks were still supported by the Georgian society even three years after the Soviet occupation. One reason Bolsheviks could not gain the intended popularity among the society (which was vastly comprised of peasants) was the collectivization policy of the regime (Suny, 1994: 222-223). In August 1924, a major uprising was organized by the Mensheviks but was suppressed rigorously by the Red Army and Cheka (secret police). It is estimated that some three thousand people died during the uprising, 7-10 thousand people were executed, and 20 thousand people were exiled (Smele, 2015: 147; Lang, 1962: 243). This period broke the resistance of the opposition in Georgia to a great extent, and during the 1930s, the country was subject to extreme policies of Stalin regarding the implementation of not only the NEP (new economic policies) and collectivization but also the cultural revolution and *korenizatsiia* policies, with which he aimed to establish a new education system and replace old *intelligentsia*.¹¹⁹

As stated earlier, Abkhazia avoided the collectivization policy thanks to Lakoba, whom Stalin was fond of (Rayfield, 2012: 349, Blauvelt, 2007: 208). However, their close ties were meant to be broken as his arch-nemesis, Beria has entered the picture. Lavrenti Pavlovich Beria was born in Sukhumi to a Megrelian peasant father and a Georgian noble mother (Rayfield, 2012: 351; Sotiriou, 2017: 33-35). He advanced in his career quite fast and held many positions at the high cadre. He was a Cheka member in 1920 and 1921; then, he became the Chief of OGPU (Joint State Political Directorate) in 1926 and was appointed as the 1st Secretary of the Communist Party in Georgia (1934-38). Between 1938 and 1945, he was the Head of NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs). Finally, he acted as a full member in Politburo through 1946 and 1953.

¹¹⁹ In 1938, with a special decree, Russian language became a *lingua franca* “in all schools of the Soviet republics and ethnic regions starting with the primary school” (Pavlenko, 2006).

Even today, Abkhazian collective memory bears vivid marks of Beria as the main offender that committed the Georgianization of Abkhazia (Nodia, 1998: 21; Fowkes, 2002: 81; Mikaberidze, 2007: 68). As Zverev (1996) states, “Stalinist repression hit Abkhazia like the rest of the USSR, but here it had an additional ethnic colouring”.¹²⁰ In December 1936, Lakoba died after a dinner with Beria in Tbilisi, most probably poisoned by him. From then on, Lakoba’s family and kinsfolk were accused of being “Turkish spies” and were “exterminated”. Soon, the rest of the Abkhaz intelligentsia were subjected to the Great Purge and were replaced by Georgian officials (Rayfield, 2012: 352; Mikaberidze, 2007: 68; Fowkes, 2002: 81). The ethno-demography of Abkhazia once again changed dramatically through resettlement policies of Beria. The Georgian population (Svans, Laz people, and Georgians, but predominantly Megrelians) of 28.875 in 1897 increased to 67.494 in 1926. This number then rose to 158.221 in 1959 (Hille, 2010:114). Correspondingly, Abkhaz population reduced to 27.8% in 1926 and to 15.1% in 1959 (Fowkes, 2002: 81)¹²¹ As a result of this demographic change, the representation of ethnic Abkhazians in the Abkhaz Communist Party reduced from 28.3% to 18% (Sotiriou (2017:2). In addition, the Georgian language was accepted as the official language in the ASSR, and the Abkhaz script in the Cyrillic alphabet was replaced with the Georgian one (which was also experienced in the Ossetian AO). The Abkhaz radio station was closed; many Abkhazian toponyms were replaced with Georgian ones, and Abkhazian language was prohibited at schools (Goltz, 2008: 21; Rouvinski, 2007: 238, 250-251; Sotiriou, 2017: 2; Markedonov, 2013: 25). Thus, this period (1937– 1953) was, and still is, viewed by many Abkhazians as a Georgian

¹²⁰ According to Mikaberidze (2007: 68), not only Abkhazians but also all ethnic groups suffered under Stalin’s regime, including Georgians as in the example of “Megrelian Case”. The period known as the “Megrelian Case” started in 1951, when Stalin’s suspicions on Beria peaked. Many citizens were accused of being anti-government Megrelian nationalists. Many were sent to jail, and at least 20 thousand people were deported to Central Asia. Only after the deaths of Stalin and Beria did these people return to their country (Rayfield, 2012: 364-366).

¹²¹ In the last census of the USSR (1989), the Georgian population would be given as 239.872, which was corresponding to the 45,7% of the Abkhazia’s population proper. See: “Население Абхазии”, <http://www.ethnokavkaz.narod.ru/rnabkhazia.html> (Accessed: 05.02.2020).

attempt to eradicate the Abkhazian culture and identity, which significantly facilitated the spread of anti-Georgian sentiments and the rise of Abkhaz nationalism. That is why, the death of Stalin right after the execution of Beria in 1953 was welcomed by Abkhazians. From then on, the situation dramatically changed for Abkhaz-Georgian relations as Nikita Khrushchev came to power (Goltz, 2008: 21).

4.3.4. The Turning Tables: The Era of Khrushchev (1953-1964)

One of Khrushchev's first activities was to reverse the alphabet change in Abkhazia and Ossetia, so the Cyrillic alphabet returned in 1954. He also gave better positions to minorities in their local governances, as well as encouraging local cultures and education systems (Rayfield, 2012: 368). Thus, Abkhazians started to enjoy "positive discrimination" (Fowkes, 2002: 81) due to two reasons. First, they ceaselessly protested "Georgian suppression" and petitioned for separation from Georgia. As Akaba states (2011a: 6), "The Abkhaz, after all, were the only nation in the Soviet Union whose representatives would repeatedly participate in protest rallies (in 1957, 1964, 1967 and 1978)". Second, Abkhazian elite had close connection with central cadres since Abkhazia was their most favorite holiday resort (Derluguian, 1998: 269). On the other hand, Georgians were quite agitated by the ongoing situation. Their discontentment increased on February 25, 1956, at the 20th Party Congress, when Khrushchev's speech struck all the Union. At his speech, he did uncover Stalin's years of terror, murders, and misdeed. Khrushchev's demeanor was perceived quite negatively by Georgians, especially by the youth, as he was offloading all the blame onto Beria and thus Georgians. Moreover, on the third anniversary of Stalin's death, a student led demonstration spread to the country, which resulted in the intervention of Red Army and Committee for State Security-KGB (*Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti*) forces. At the end of the intervention, 150 demonstrators were killed, and hundreds were injured (Rayfield, 2012: 369-370).

4.3.5. The Era of Brezhnev and the Rise in Nationalisms (1964-1982)

In October 1964, Khrushchev was dismissed from his position after he “removed Stalin’s body from the Red Square Mausoleum and his face from renominated banknotes in 1961” (Rayfield, 2012: 371). To avoid the dramatic ending of Khrushchev, Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev created his own cadres. These cadres were composed of national elites that were Brezhnev’s “own protégés” (George, 2009: 32-33). During the Brezhnev era, as national demands of minorities were increasing, the national sentiments in Georgia were on rise, as well. Dissident voices were rising in Georgia, and a new intellectual generation was growing up. The most notable personages were Merab Kostava and Zviad Gamsakhurdia,¹²² who at the time were writing against human rights violations and discriminations. There was another political figure, Eduard Shevardnadze, who was a rising star and the 1st secretary of the Georgian Communist Party. He took several measures against ethnic favoritism, including purges and reforms. For instance, in 1977, Kostava and Gamsakhurdia were arrested. Gamsakhurdia was sentenced to three year of imprisonment and two years of exile (Suny, 1994: 319).¹²³ Gamsakhurdia appeared on television and accepted ‘his mistakes’ thus got a pardon. He was sent to Dagestan for three years of exile. However, Kostava refused to negotiate, so he was sent to Siberia and got freed only in 1987. Their reactions reframed their public view. Gamsakhurdia lost his popularity in the public eye, and some segments of the dissidents labeled him as a “coward” (Suny, 1994: 319; Cheterian, 2011: 160).

¹²² In 1975, Gamsakhurdia and Kostava joined Amnesty International, and in 1976, they formed the Georgian Helsinki group, which, unlike Moscow Helsinki Group that was monitoring the human rights violation in the USSR, was prioritizing the protection of the Georgian national identity against the Russification threats of the Union (Keskin, 2017: 35).

¹²³ This arrest was not their first experience. Gamsakhurdia and Kostava together with five school friends were arrested in 1956 for supporting demonstrations in Poznan and Hungary against the Soviet regime (Rayfield, 2012: 369-370).

As mentioned earlier, Abkhazians were periodically applying to Moscow for their ASSR status to be changed. Their application in 1977 triggered a series of nationalist confrontations which led to upcoming conflicts. In 1977, 130 Abkhazian intellectuals sent a letter (known as Letter of 130) to Moscow demanding the protection of Abkhazian language and history against the continuing Georgianization policies (Markedonov, 2013:26; Gitsba, 2013: 116-117). Meanwhile, in 1977, the constitution of the USSR changed. This called for a change in the constitutions of the republics. In the draft constitution of the Georgian SRR, the official status of the Georgian language was aimed to be replaced with the Russian language (Cornell, 2002: 62). This caused an instant unrest among the Georgian nation, and consequently, on April 14, 1978, the day the new constitution was planned to be ratified, a demonstration broke out. It is estimated that 20 thousand Georgians, mostly university students, backed up with intellectuals, marched to the government house. They were surrounded by the Soviet army when the situation was about to escalate, but then Shevardnadze assured that the status of Georgian language would not change (Suny, 1994: 319; Sakwa, 1998: 241; Rayfield, 2012: 373-374). As of May, the events escalated uncontrollably, upon which Moscow sent an investigation commission to Abkhazia, which decided to enforce several resolutions in countenance of Abkhazians such as higher quotas for governmental representation (even though they were then minority) and improved cultural rights such as, establishment of Abkhazian State University, national TV, radio, museums, and newspapers in Abkhazian language (Derluguian, 1998: 271; Mikaberidze, 2007: 68, 70-71; Markedonov, 2013: 26; Fowkes, 2002: 82). In 1980, now Georgians brought a letter of resentment to the 26th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union-CPSU. This time, they were objecting to Abkhazian local governance and its discriminatory policies, which according to Georgians were worse than Beria's policies for Abkhazians (Fowkes, 2002: 139).

The relations of ethnic groups in Georgia at the societal level are worth discussing before an analysis of the last years of the Union and the upcoming

ethnic conflicts. During the Soviet period, Georgians somehow managed to preserve their national self-identity and avoid Russification policies to some extent. Thus, Georgians were not as much affected by the Russian oppression as the other nationalities. Indeed, the last census of the Union in 1989 indicated that the vast majority of ethnic Georgians (more than 95%) stayed in their own SSR, which made them have the highest concentration among all Soviet republics. In addition, although Russian was the *lingua franca* of the education language in the Union, they managed to keep their native language in their higher educations (Gachechiladze, 1997: 56).

In the case of Abkhazia, the intermarriages of Abkhazians and Georgians (predominantly Megrelians) were not uncommon. A moderate level of integration existed in the Autonomous Republic (Jones, 2008; Souleimanov, 2013: 96). However, ongoing migrations and cultural oppression policies which were interpreted as assimilation attempts by Abkhazians eventually created a certain degree of mistrust and an image of “enemy” regarding Georgian migrants (Nodia quoted in Markedonov, 2013: 25). In comparison to the problematic Abkhazian-Georgian relations, the population in South Ossetia managed intermingling much better despite the bloody confrontations of the past. Indeed, some Ossetians complained about inequality, and in some levels discrimination, yet according to Souleimanov (2013: 96) nationalism stayed at rather “marginal” level, at least for a period of time.¹²⁴ What made the South Ossetia example special can be attributed to several reasons. First of all, unlike Abkhazia, which was considered one of the most prosperous regions of all Soviet Union, Ossetia had rocky lands and an undeveloped economy. Depending heavily on Tbilisi, the region was not an attraction and thus was not exposed to Georgian migration *en masse*. Secondly,

¹²⁴ During the Soviet period, Ossetian language was restricted to only elementary schools. Therefore, not having a command of the Georgian language, Ossetians could not find high positions in the administrative bodies of the Georgian SSR (Jones, 2008). Zverev reports the claims of Torez Kulumbegov, the leader of the South Ossetian AO (between 1991 and 1993-on and off): that Ossetians were not admitted to higher education or state posts was denied by Georgians (Zverev, 1996).

there was a high ratio of interethnic marriages in the region. As regards the 1989 census of Soviet Union, the total population of South Ossetia was around 100 thousand, of which Ossetians constituted 66.2%, whereas Georgians 29%. Zverev (1996) argues that around half of the region was composed of interethnic families.

4.3.6. Through the Dissolution of the Soviet Union

When Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev took over the power in 1985, he took over it with a burden of economic catastrophe and public unrest (Cohen, 2004: 79). To overcome the ongoing struggles, he decided to renew the Soviet system. As he put into effect his famous policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, he also replaced all high cadres. By the 1990, all political actors in the Politburo and Secretariat had been replaced, except himself and Eduard Shevardnadze (Gooding, 1992: 48). In return, Gorbachev expected to find a definite and enthusiastic popular support, but on the contrary, especially, his *glasnost* policy was severely criticized: “unleashed forces, such as minority and Russian nationalism, which cannot be resolved by appeals to party unity or social harmony” (Zwick, 1989: 216). Pioneered by the Baltic region, many titular nations established their own Popular Fronts secede from the Union and declare their independences. In 1988, the Georgian elite, having asked legal support and assistance from their fellow companions at the Baltics, formed their Popular Front under the leadership of charismatic and populist dissident Zviad Gamsakhurdia (Wheatley, 2005: 31-45; Muiznieks, 1995: 6). Soon, Abkhazian and South Osetian elites followed their Georgian counterparts. In the same year, South Ossetian Popular Front *Ademon Nykhas* (Eng. Popular Shrine) and Abkhazian Popular Forum, *Aidgylara* (Eng. Unification), were formed.

On March 18, 1989, under the leadership of Vladimir Ardzinba¹²⁵, *Aidgylara* organized a demonstration at Lykhny-Abkhazia and gathered at least 12 thousand Abkhazians. They demanded separation from Georgia and restoration of their former SSR status within the Soviet Federation. To intervene this, Shevardnadze had to go to Abkhazia, where he allegedly eluded an assassination attempt. Moreover, this demand would trigger several events that resulted in ethnic clashes and fatalities (Derluguian, 1998: 270; Sotiriou, 2017: 3; Shenfield, 2008; Mikaberidze, 2007: 71-72).

The counter protests, which started in Gali by Georgians, spread to Tbilisi. In those demonstrations, the Georgian nationalists had several demands such as abolishment of all sorts of autonomies in Georgia, recognition of the special status of Georgian Orthodox Church, and acceptance of Georgian language as the one and only official language in all parts of the Georgia (Goltz, 2008: 10-27; König, 2009: 241; Fowkes, 2002: 139; Matveeva, 2002: 7). The reaction of the regime was harsh. On April 9, 1989, Soviet troops attacked the protestors; more than 20 individuals (predominantly women) were killed, and hundreds got injured. From then on, the day 9th of April became an important date for Georgian national consciousness (Fowkes, 2002: 140; Gahrton, 2010:79).¹²⁶ The first blood was shed on July 15-16, 1989, when a department of Tbilisi State University was established in Sukhumi, which was perceived as a provocation by the Abkhazians. As a result, 14 deaths and 127 injuries were recorded in Sukhumi (Zverev, 1996; Coppitiers, 1998: 7).¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Ardzinba, a historian, became the leading figure of the Abkhazian national movement. (Fowkes, 2002: 139-140). Three years later, in 1992, he became the first (*de facto*) president of Abkhazia.

¹²⁶ Two years later, the day 9th of April was chosen for the declaration of independence, and in 2009 the growing opposition against Mikheil Saakashvili's presidency chose the same day for one of the major demonstrations of Georgian history that experienced after the Rose Revolution of 2003.

¹²⁷ Minorities at Risk Project, *Chronology for Abkhazians in Georgia*, 2004, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/469f388ca.html> [accessed 22 August 2019]

During these events and with the release of Kostava from prison in 1987, Gamsakhurdia started to restore his once lost popularity. According to Nodia (1996), Kostava was the one who insisted on Gamsakhurdia's inclusion to "the movement". By doing so, they would be the "two patriarchs" of the movement. After Kostava's death in a suspicious car accident in October 1989, Gamsakhurdia became the most prominent figure for Georgian nationalist in Georgia. From then on, the role of Popular Front shrank since it was rather a civil initiative. According to Gamsakhurdia, a political formation was needed. Hence, he founded the Round Table-coalition and gathered different opposition groups (Gürsoy, 2011: 43).

Meanwhile, in order to support Abkhazian comrades on their cause, Alan Chochiev, the leader of *Ademon Nykhas* published an open letter (Cvetkovski, 1999). As a reaction to the South Ossetian leader, Gamsakhurdia gathered some 20 thousand protestors and brought them to Tskhinvali for a "peaceful meeting of reconciliation", which naturally was perceived as a show of strength by Ossetians (Sammut and Cvetkovski, 1996: 11; Toal and O'Loughlin, 2013: 141). Consequently, due to ethnic disputes, violence broke out in South Ossetia for the second time since 1920. The clashes occurred between the paramilitary groups belonging to Georgians and Ossetians (Zverev, 1996). Ossetian Parliament, afraid of further oppression from the Georgian authorities, demanded their status to be upgraded to ASSR on November 10, 1989, which of course was rejected by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR (Saparov, 2010: 100; German and Bloch, 2006: 53). In June 1990, the Georgian SSR decided to return to its pre-Soviet Constitution in which, while Abkhazia was considered as an autonomous republic within Georgia, there was no mention of South Ossetia. In other words, inure of the pre-Soviet constitution meant that the Georgian SRR was totally abolishing the AO status of the South Ossetia (Karpenko and Beteeva, 2013: 95-96; Rukhadze and Duerr, 2016: 35). In addition, in August

1990, Georgian Supreme Soviet passed an election law to ban all sorts of party activities at the regional levels. The main reason of this law was to prevent the participation of local parties to the parliamentary elections that were going to be held on October. In response, on August 25, 1990, Abkhazians declared their sovereignty, and immediately afterwards on September 20, 1990, South Ossetia declared that it was now an independent SSR (Sammut and Cvetkovski, 1996: 11; Zverev, 1996; Karpenko and Beteeva, 2013: 95-96; Rukhadze and Duerr, 2016: 35). While Abkhazians and South Ossetians were boycotting the parliamentary elections on October 28, 1990, Gamsakhurdia's Round Table (53%) coalition won against the Communist Party (29%), and on November 14, Gamsakhurdia was elected as the Chief of the Georgian Supreme Soviet (Nodia, 1996; Suny, 1994: 375; Gürsoy 2011, 40-42). As soon as he was elected, the Supreme Soviet adopted a law. The law was on abolishing the autonomy of the South Ossetia region on December 11, 1990. The reason of Gamsakhurdia passing this law was a reaction to the elections held in South Ossetia two days earlier, at which Tomez Kulumbegov was elected as the first president of the self-claimed Supreme Soviet of South Ossetia SSR. A day after the adoption of the law, a state of emergency was introduced by the Georgian militias in several districts of South Ossetia, including the capital Tskhinvali (Kochieva and Margiev, 2011: 6). On March 31, 1991, Georgia held a referendum for separation from the Soviet Union. Georgians were in favor of the secession. Thus, on April 9, 1991, Gamsakhurdia declared the independence of Georgia and on May 26, 1991, he was elected as the first president of the independent Georgia (Gürsoy, 2011: 44).

CHAPTER 5

ARMED CONFLICTS, FLED PEOPLE

5.1. The Armed Conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia (1990-1992)

The new president Gamsakhurdia had quite an aggressive start regarding the minority issue. Many minority groups felt insecure, unrest and underrepresented during his presidency as his new parliament had only 9 non-ethnic Georgian PMs out of 245. His slogan “Georgia for Georgians” was indeed in act (Gahrton, 2010: 80-81; Rayfield, 2012: 381).¹²⁸ Besides the state of emergency in South Ossetia, Gamsakhurdia underhandedly supported the expulsion of Ossetians from Georgia proper (Nodia, 1995: 110). The major incident that lighted the fuse of Ossetian-Georgian conflict was the imprisonment of the Ossetian leader Kulumbegov in Tbilisi, where he was invited to discuss the ongoing process in January 1991. Fighting broke out in Tskhinvali on January 6-7, 1991 (Sammut, and Cvetkovski, 1996: 11-12; Toal and O'Loughlin, 2013: 141). On the Georgian side there was the National Guard of Georgia, led by a fine arts graduate Tengiz Kitovani together with the paramilitary groups of Georgia including ‘White Eagles’, ‘White George’, ‘White Falcons’, ‘Black Panthers’, the ‘Kutaisi National Guard’, the ‘Merab Kostava Society’ (Cvetkovski, 1999; Zverev, 1996).¹²⁹ The Ossetian side was composed of militias including veterans of the Soviet Army and the locals including sportsmen and smugglers (Toal and O'Loughlin, 2013: 141).

¹²⁸ Nodia states that he had never come across with this slogan, neither in Gamsakhurdia’s rallies, nor in his speeches. Yet Nodia also agrees the fact that this branded slogan of Gamsakhurdia was indeed reflecting his “true attitude” (Nodia, 1998: 27).

¹²⁹ According to Cvetkovski (1999) these paramilitary groups were ideologically diversified and some were mafia-like structures that had no ideological stance at all.

The situation in Tskhinvali was devastating. The city was blockaded. The power was off, the communication lines were cut off and the food supply was stopped. In the broadcast of the Soviet Central Television the war-zone was described as “worse than Leningrad in 1942. The entire city is without heating and electricity ... there is no food” (quoted in Toal and O’Loughlin, 2013: 141). The war has taken a heavy toll on both sides. According to confirmations, out of 365 villages, 117 were destroyed. Besides the destroyed infrastructure and the sacked/burnt down private properties, at least 3.500 people were wounded, more than 1000 have been killed and around 100 people have gone missing (Toal and O’Loughlin, 2013: 141).¹³⁰ In the Ossetian collective memory this phase was remembered as the 2nd genocide attempt of Georgians. Ludwig Chibirov, the president of South Ossetia between 1993 and 2001, recalled the conflict with following words: “...this was the second time in one generation that we have been the victims of genocide by the Georgians” (Chibirov quoted in Cvetkovski, 1999). Thousands of people were forced to migrate due to being in the conflict zone, or afraid of possible atrocity and discrimination. To be more precisely, 60 thousand people were displaced due to the conflict in South Ossetia, of whom 40 thousand were ethnic Ossetian refugees that fled to North Ossetia. This 40 thousand was not only displaced from South Ossetia but from Georgia proper. The remaining 20 thousand were IDPs. Half of the IDPs, who migrated to the other parts of Georgia were ethnic Georgians and the other half was ethnic Ossetians (5 thousand became IDP within South Ossetia and 5 thousand were IDPs who came to South Ossetia from Georgia proper). In the following years a part of the IDPs (5 thousand of them with the assistance of UNHCR) have been able to return their places of origin (Mooney, 2011: 179; Gürsoy, 2018: 102). Maybe one of the most devastating result of the conflict was the irrevocable ethnic fragmentation within the South Ossetia population who, as mentioned

¹³⁰ See: Human Rights Watch, *Up In Flames: Humanitarian Law Violations and Civilian Victims in the Conflict over South Ossetia*, 23 January 2009, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/497984202.html> (Accessed: 19.03.2020).

earlier, quite successfully intermingled in the Soviet period mostly through inter-ethnic marriages. The conflict turned the towns into mono-ethnic entities and forced people to choose their sides. Through the following years, there were examples of reciprocal militia attacks to the towns of the counter parties (Toal and O'Loughlin, 2013: 141-142; Jones, 2008).

5.2. The Coup d'état in the Center and Shevardnadze's Arrival

In Tbilisi, Gamsakhurdia was getting quite suspicious as discontented voices were raising against him. He outlawed the *Mkhedrioni* (Eng. Horsemen/Knights), a paramilitary organization famous for its criminal structure, and put its fine arts graduate (like Kitovani) leader Jaba Ioseliani to prison in February 1991.¹³¹ Furthermore, in August, Gamsakhurdia tried to discharge Kitovani from his chief commander position of the National Guard. Kitovani refused leaving his position and putting the majority of the army to his tail, he left Tbilisi. This brought the downfall of Gamsakhurdia.

In December 1991, Kitovani's National Guard started a rebellion against him. In the same month, Ioseliani escaped from the prison and joined to Kitovani's forces. By December 22, the street fights turned into a *coup d'état* as Kitovani and Ioseliani sieged the Parliament. On January 6, 1992, Gamsakhurdia fled to Armenia first. From there he passed to Chechnya, where he sheltered by Chechen leader Dudaev. (Mikaberidze, 2007: 47; Gahrton, P. (2010: 82). At the end of several weeks of fighting, around 200 people have died in Tbilisi streets. (Zürcher et al., 2005: 271). After Gamsakhurdia's flee, Ioseliani and Kitovani released Kulumbegov, the Ossetian leader, who was arrested by Gamsakhurdia earlier (Rayfield, 2012: 382). An interim government was formed by Kitovani and Ioseliani and former Prime Minister Tengiz Sigua, who then invited

¹³¹ *Mkhedrioni*, which was founded in 1989 and composed of 1000 active fighters and 10.000 members, was controlling the gasoline and tobacco black market in the country. The organization strongly criticized Gamsakhurdia for his pardon in television in 1977 (Gahrton, 2010: 81; Zürcher et al., 2005: 271).

Shevardnadze from Moscow to his homeland (Mikaberidze, 2007: 47). At that time, Shevardnadze was the minister of foreign affairs of Soviets'. He was the most suitable candidate for the position. For democrats, he was the 'Silver Fox', who had a liberal world view that contributed to the unification of Germany, for the communist *nomenklatura*, he was representing the golden age of Brezhnev era and for Georgia's ethnic minorities he was a breath of fresh air in terms of increasing radical nationalism (Gürsoy, 2011: 46). When he came to power in 1992 (and then elected as the 2nd president of Georgia in 1993), he had several political maneuvers to strengthen his position. Shevardnadze was trusting neither to Kitovani nor to Ioseliani, yet they were quite powerful. So rather confronting them, he gave them high state positions, which he thought they could not handle and thus could fail. Furthermore, he was baptized by Patriarch Ilia II, he refused entering the Commonwealth of Independent States and he started the negotiations for a cease-fire in South Ossetia (Hille, 2010: 243; Suny, 1994: 328).

5.3. The Georgian-Osset Cease-Fire

Shevardnadze was in a dire situation. As one of the most famous Georgian intellectuals Alexandr Rondelli states that during those years: "Georgia was in a disastrous situation, it was practically a failed state." (quoted in Akhmeteli, 2014).¹³² On the one hand, Kulumbegov, who was released in an aim to open dialogue yet was refusing to negotiate until Georgian troops' would retreat and their blockade would be lifted; and on the other hand, new battle fronts were opening in Western Georgia (Zverev, 1996). Starting from the early 1992, the Georgian forces, both National Guard and *Mkhedrioni* were shifted to Samegrelo and Eastern Abkhazia where they were confronting the Gamsakhurdia supporters, who are known as the Zviadists. As a result, Shevardnadze met with Boris Yeltsin in Dagomys and on June 24, 1992, with North and South Ossetian

¹³² See: Akhmeteli, N. (2014). "Eduard Shevardnadze: Controversial legacy to Georgia" *BBC News*, 8 July 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-28205380> (Accessed: 20.03.2020).

representatives, and signed the Sochi Agreement. The agreement was forcing Georgia to accept the deployment of joint Russian, Georgian and Ossetian peacekeeping forces in South Ossetia, in terms of binding a cease-fire (Zverev, 1996; König, 2009: 241; Toal and O'Loughlin, 2013: 141). Other than peacekeeping forces, Georgia compromised in other points as well. Besides the establishment of a 14 km long buffer zone, Georgia was forced to accept the Russian part as a negotiator, which ended up with a Treaty of Friendship between Russia and Georgia with which Georgia consented the functioning of Russian military bases in various regions of Georgia for 25 years (Rukhadze and Duerr, 2016: 35; Sotiriou, 2017: 6; Cvetkovski, 1999).

5.4. The Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict (1992-1994)

While Gamsakhurdia was in exile, his supporters were active in Samegrelo and in several regions of Abkhazia. These regions were predominantly inhabited by Megrelians (like Gamsakhurdia himself) and they were mostly averse to the new Shevardnadze government. It is necessary to mention that the opposition to Shevardnadze was not based on ethnic reasons thus it was not a conflict between Megrelian and Georgian identities. It was rather a political struggle for controlling the state apparatus. As a result, in March 1992, Zviadists kidnapped some high ranking officials and took control of railway routes in Abkhazia (Fowkes, 2002: 141; Nodia, 1998: 30-33). The struggle between the Zviadists and the central government created an advantageous environment for Abkhazians. By June, they took the control of the local government in Abkhazia where the Georgian representatives were hands tied for being in the minority (Nodia, 1998: 31; Rukhadze and Duerr, 2016). Consequently, on July 23, 1992, under the leadership of Ardzinba, Abkhazia declared its independence and restore its 1925 Constitution (Fowkes, 2002: 140; Coppieters, 2004: 5) Chirikba states that this was the way Abkhazians proposed to Georgians a federative entity of equal republics (1998: 50).

For central authority in Tbilisi, a federative entity of equal republics was unacceptable yet the overall situation was complicated. On the one hand there was the Zviadist uprising and on the other Abkhazian secessionists. As a politician, known for his skills on negotiation, Shevardnadze was reluctant for another armed conflict but his hands were tied as Kitovani and Ioseliani were determinate for a firm counteract against Zviadists. According to Shevardnadze's supporters, the future escalation of the armed conflicts in Abkhazia was "the result of unauthorized actions by Kitovani" (Nodia, 1998: 32-33). As a result, on August 14, 1992, National Guards and *Mkhedrioni* entered Abkhazia, on a mission to freeing hostages, gaining control of the railways and suppressing the Zviadists. Yet they did not stop there (Coppieters, 2004: 5; Fowkes, 2002: 141). As early as the beginning of the Georgian military operation, Shevardnadze lost control. Georgian armed forces aimed to take military control of the whole territory, first entered Sukhumi. Soon, besides Sukhumi, the Georgian armed forces took the control of the region between Psou River (northern west edge of Abkhazia) and Gagra. According to UN (1993: 4), during the process, allegedly grave human rights violations and atrocities were committed by the National Guards *Mkhedrioni* and White Eagles units. On August 18, 1992, Ardzinba and his secessionist government fled to Gudauta. Kitovani wanted to march to Gudauta after them, nevertheless, Shevardnadze did not want further humanitarian consequences at an Abkhaz majority region which would fueled up further aggressions and a possible Russian intervention; thus he stopped the march.

In the first days of the conflict, although the Georgian military units were far from an actual army since they were composed of volunteers, inexperienced soldiers and paramilitary groups; they still had the upper hand on their military capacity, in terms of their population size. But soon, the tables have turned. A flood of volunteers from the Northern Caucasus came to Abkhazia to fight besides Abkhazians. Yet, the volunteers were not solely limited to North Caucasians (Lynch, 1999: 131). As Matsaberidze (2012: 43) quotes from a TV

program broadcasted on February 9, 1993, “the Confederation of the Caucasian Peoples was forming military units from representatives of the North Caucasians, Cossacks, and Circassians of Turkey, Syria, and Jordan, who would cross the Russian-Georgian border with the aim of joining the Abkhazian irregulars.” There was also one more party, the Russian Federation, of which Abkhazian side claimed that they took no military assistance while Georgians argued vice versa (Chirikba, 1998: 51; Rukhadze and Duerr, 2016: 37). Russia definitely became a part, at least on the negotiation level. On July 27, 1993, Russia brokered a ceasefire between the conflicting parts through one of its many Sochi agreements.¹³³ However, the fighting was broken again in September 1993 (UN, 1993: 8; Fowkes, 2002: 141), when the Abkhazian side attacked Sukhumi. Shevardnadze blamed Yeltsin for planning the entire plot but he had to negotiate him because during that time, Gamsakhurdia returned to Samegrelo, there he organized a surprise attack causing the start of a civil war in Georgia. Consequently, on September 8-9, 1993, Shevardnadze capitulated to Russia’s term, accepted joining to the CIS and signed a military agreement¹³⁴ (Fowkes, 2002: 141). In return, Russia provided military support to Georgia against Zviadists. With the support of the Russian military forces, Georgian government organized an operation in Samegrelo in October (1993) and by December, the Georgian government took the full control of the region. Many Zviadist leaders were captured and Gamsakhurdia was found death.¹³⁵ One of the main reasons that Megrelians still feel resentment against Shevardnadze is the atrocities

¹³³ Nodia highlights that two agreements brokered by Russia (one in September 1992 and the other in July 1993) caused Georgia losing first the Northern part and then the rest of Abkhazia (1998:34).

¹³⁴ Due to the military agreement called “on the status of the Russian troops in Georgia,” four military bases (one in Vaziani, outside of Tbilisi; one in Akhalkalaki, Samtskhe-Javakheti; one in Batumi, Adjara; and one in Gudauta, Abkhazia) were hired to Russia (Gordadze, 2009: 35).

¹³⁵ Although the Georgian government announced that he committed a suicide, his death still raises suspicions.

committed by *Mkhedrioni* paramilitary units during the suppression of the Zviadist movement (Cornell, 2011: 73; Mikaberidze, 2007: 48).¹³⁶

Meanwhile, starting from September 1993, Abkhazians took control of the entire Abkhazia beginning from Sukhumi to Ochamchire and Gagra. Defeated Georgian troops were driven out from Abkhazia, leaving only a small part under Georgian control at the area called the Kodori Gorge which locates in the northeast of Abkhazia (Rukhadze and Duerr, 2016: 37; Fowkes, 2002: 141). According to Nodia (1998: 33) many Georgians believed that it was Shevardnadze's reluctance that caused them lost the war; on the other hand, what Shevardnadze was believing that the war was actually with Russia and Georgian military was not capable to win a war against 'the Bear'.

Yeltsin once more brokered a peace treaty on April 4, 1994. The treaty caused Georgia to capitulate further but it was a consequence of the harsh defeat. According to the agreement, Russian forces positioned in Abkhazia for peacekeeping purposes. In addition, Abkhazia, although not recognized as independent, was granted with "its own republic, constitution, flag, state emblem and national anthem" (Fowkes, 2002: 142). Gordadze (2009: 35) also mentions that the agreement was indicated the return of displaced population, yet this indication has not been materialized.

5.5. The Consequences of the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict

The war caused devastation for both sides. Serious human rights violations were followed by killings of thousands. It is estimated that during the war, 4 thousand Georgians and 4.040 Abkhazians were killed; 10 thousand Georgians and 8 thousand Abkhazians were wounded; 1 thousand Georgians and 122 Abkhazians

¹³⁶ Zviadist grudge against Shevardnadze continued during his presidency. In February 1998, an assassination attempt to Shevardnadze was claimed by Zviadists and in October, an armed rebellion was organized in Senaki, Samegrelo which was harshly suppressed by the government (Cornell, 2011: 73).

were detected missing (Geneva Academy, 2018: 4). Also the war resulted in another ethno-demographic change in the region, this time Georgians fled to Georgia proper. A UN report (1993: 8) indicates that before the invasion of Sukhumi by Abkhazians in September 1993, there have been 152 thousand Georgian IDPs have already left their houses. This number increased to 240 thousand at the end of the war. There was also unspecified number of Abkhaz IDPs, whose displacement was transient¹³⁷ that they returned to their place of origin soon after the conflict. Furthermore, an unspecified number of Russian and Greek population also left Abkhazia (Derluguian, 1998: 275). At the end of 1994, Abkhazian authorities gave permission to resettle of a several hundred Georgians in the Gali region and around 40 thousand Georgians return to Abkhazia on their own (Zverev, 1996; Lynch, 1999: 131).¹³⁸ According to Coppieters (2004: 6), the reason behind the permission for the return of a small ratio of Georgians was a political maneuver of Abkhazian authorities. By doing so, they rejected the “ethnic cleansing” accusations raised by Georgian state and the international community.

Hewitt (2008: 193) foresaw that a mass return of Georgians to Abkhazia was unlikely since the Abkhazians saw them as the fifth column of Georgia. An Abkhazian historian Temur Achugba’s (2004) writings are corroborative to this view. He states that the return of “revanchist” Georgians would lead further atrocities, therefore “instead of trying to force the return of the refugees to Abkhazia ... they [Georgian government] should deal with settling the repatriated people in Georgia, the historic motherland of the Georgian people”.

¹³⁷ See: UNCHR. “Protection of Internally Displaced Persons in Georgia: A Gap Analysis” (2009), Accessed April 23, 2018. <http://www.unhcr.org/4ad827f59.pdf>, p. 6.

¹³⁸ Georgian properties were either destroyed or confiscated by the Abkhazian authorities to be distributed to those who have come voluntarily from abroad and fought for the Abkhazian side (Derluguian, 1998: 275). Therefore, many returnees could not have dwelled at their own houses and resettled elsewhere. These people are referred to as IDP-like by UNHCR. UN General Assembly, *Status of internally displaced persons and refugees from Abkhazia, Georgia, and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia*, 20 May 2013, A/67/869, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/67/869 (Accessed at: March 1, 2017).

5.6. From Shevardnadze to Saakashvili

In fact, the Georgian state was in no condition fulfilling Achugba's suggestion, even if it would have intended to. Due to the earlier conflicts and the secession from the Soviet Union, put Georgia in a dire position in terms of economy. In addition, the central government was quite weak and was challenged by the paramilitary groups of Kitovani and Ioseliani that National Guard and *Mkhedrioni* had a criminal reputation for their confiscations of the private properties. Furthermore, the central government had little control in the regions. In Kvemo-Kartli, an alternative economy of cross-border smuggling was active, the Samtskhe-Javakheti region was controlled by an Armenian minority group called *Javakh*, in Adjara Abashidze had his own client-based regional authority, which doing very little with the central government. Only after 1995, when Kitovani and Iosaliani were arrested, Shevardnadze was able to consolidate some power (Keskin, 2019: 55-56; Wheatley, 2009: 123-124). Then on, he developed relations with the West, while he was balancing state relations with Moscow. The country took donor assistance from the West that, between 1992 and 2000, Shevrdnadze's government took over 860 million USD aid from the USA (Agenda.ge, 2019). Despite the economic boon provided by the Western actors, Shevardnadze faced criticisms against his presidency. He was accused for running the country through client networks, widespread corruption and poor management of the IDP situation (Cheterian, 2008: 693; Keskin, 2019: 56; Nodia and Scholtbach, 2006: 35). And in 1998, he faced another conflict in Abkhazia.

Due to the earlier counter attacks of Georgian paramilitary groups (the White Legion and the Forest Brothers) and the Abkhazian troops, the clashes started in Gali, in May 1998. The clash resulted in another IDP wave to Georgia proper. The estimated numbers are diversified from 40 thousand to 50 thousand people (Gahrton, 2010: 71; Matveeva, 2002: 12-13). On May 25, a ceasefire protocol was signed in Gagra (Geneva Academy: 2018: 5). On May 28, Yeltsin and on July 30, the UN (again in January 28, 1999) condemned Abkhazia for the fled of

local Georgians. Come in for Western and Russian criticisms, Abkhazians let the return of Georgian IDPs starting from March 1, 1999 (Fowkes, 2002: 143).¹³⁹ Although difficult to give exact figures, it is estimated that 17 thousand IDPs returned to Gali and some other started trespassing the border between Abkhazia and Georgia regularly for controlling their property and working in harvest seasons.¹⁴⁰

In 1999 and 2000, Georgia held parliamentary and presidential elections, at which Shevardnadze was heavily accused for election fraud. As a result, Shevardnadze lost his popularity, his political party, the Union of Citizens of Georgia-the UCG was fragmented (Gürsoy, 2011: 50). In 2001, Mikhail Saakashvili, a young politician, quitted the UCG with his team and formed a new political party called the United National Movement-UNM. In 2003 parliamentary elections, Saakashvili competed with Shevardnadze but lost. Accusing Shevardnadze for fraud, Saakashvili took the support of a Soros-financed youth group called *Kmara* (Eng. Enough) and started demonstrations. The protests spread and gathered thousands together in front of the parliament. Protestors holding roses in their hands called Shevardnadze for resigning. On November 22, 2003, as a result of the demonstrations later called as “Rose Revolution”, Shevardnadze resigned from his position. A new election was held on January 4, 2004 and with 96% of the votes, Saakashvili became the 3rd president of Georgia (Keskin 2017: 41).

¹³⁹ In 2001, when Chechen guerillas joined to Georgian paramilitaries; there were kidnappings and killings reported. During that period 90 Russian peacekeepers and 6 UN staff were killed. As a result, in the fall of 2001, another heavy fighting occurred, which finalized after Abkhazian forces swept those groups out of Abkhazia (2018: 5; Matveeva, 2002: 12-13),

¹⁴⁰ See: United States. Department of State (2000). *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Report Submitted to the Committee on Foreign Relations, US Senate and Committee on Foreign Affairs, US House of Representatives by the Department of State in Accordance with Sections 116 (d) and 502B (b) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as Amended* (Vol. 11). US Government Printing Office.

5.7. Saakashvili's Minority Reforms: Adjara Success, South Ossetia Fail

After Saakashvili came to power, he enthusiastically, hastily and somewhat successfully started his reforms to increase state capacity, diminish corruption and consolidate democracy. He proclaimed that these reforms would eventually lead on to “achieve economic prosperity, unify the state’s territory, and repair relations between the Georgian state and its ethnic minorities” (George, 2010: 48). His policies bore fruit in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti regions, in terms of rise in integration of Azerbaijani and Armenian minorities through infrastructure developments, cultural and educational reforms. But his major success was in Adjara when he removed Aslan Abashidze from his position and integrated Adjara further to central government (Mikaberidze, 2007: 51). He then directed his attention to South Ossetia and expected a similar success as he gained in Adjara. He was wrong.

In May, 2004, to close down the Ergneti Market, Georgia set up several checkpoints. The market was a free economic zone, in which people from South Ossetia, Russia and Georgia were trading their goods without any tariffs or taxes. Although the market was illegal; it was gathering people together from different ethnicities and was improving integration (The Messenger, 2013). Saakashvili came to television and he assured South Ossetians that he only wanted to restore law and order in peaceful terms. To show his peaceful attitude, he introduced his future plans on improving infrastructure, including restoration the railroads to Tskhinvali, improvement of healthcare system and pension distributions as well as starting an Ossetian news broadcast in the local television. Besides his promises, he did not abstain from adding a warning and stated that “the disintegration of Georgia will not take place. This is the end of a fragmented Georgia.” (German and Bloch, 2006: 55-57). In return, in order to be recognized as an independent state, Kokoity, the *de facto* leader of South Ossetia since 2001, appealed to the Russian Duma. Tense words exchanged between Georgian, Russian and South Ossetian authorities during the course of tension. Russian

peacekeeping troops gathered in South Ossetia with heavy weaponry, Saakashvili stated that he would broke the 1992 ceasefire agreement (German and Bloch, 2006: 55-57; König, 2009: 246-249). The mutual aggression upheaved between July and August 2004. On August 13, a ceasefire was agreed on. Till then, 17 Georgians and 5 Ossetians were reported as deceased (Gahrton, 2010: 62; König, 2009: 248). In July 2005, Saakashvili again attempted to integrate South Ossetia to Georgia by offering a plan for an autonomy with extensive conditions, which of course rejected by Kokoity (Nichol, 2010: 3). Saakashvili's political maneuvers attracted some criticisms. For instance, two years before the War in 2008, Gegeshidze foresaw the potential dispute and argued that Saakashvili "miscalculated" several factors such as the popular support to Kokoity in South Ossetia, South Ossetians' reluctance to join Georgia and most of all the "Russian factor". He further commented as follows "it was naively believed that Russia would not be resisting Georgia's attempts of changing the status quo" (Gegeshidze, 2006: 153).

5.7.1. The 2008 August War

A major conflict broke out and escalated into a five-day long war in August 2008. Georgia's war, according to many, was "aggravated by a direct Russian involvement", and thus was with Russia, rather than South Ossetia (Kemoklidze et al. 2012: 1617). The triggering event actually dated back on July 3, when an Ossetian police chief targeted by a bomb and killed. The same day, Dmitriy Sanakoyev, the leader of the South Ossetian government of Georgia, barely escaped but injured by a mine sorted to a roadside. These incidents triggered several armed attacks on other's checkpoints and villages which ended up some killings and injuries (Nichol, 2010: 4).

Small armed clashes occurred on August 1 and 2, a Georgian policeman was wounded and three Georgian soldiers were killed by Ossetian militias

(Gahrton, 2010: 177; Finn, 2008). As a retribution, the Georgian forces opened artillery fire on August 6. This set in motion the Russian move. As a well-known Russian tactic, in a claim for protecting Russian citizens, to whom it distributed citizenship *en masse*, Russian troops marched to Ruki Tunnel from where they could enter to South Ossetia. Georgian side could not block their entrance, as its reported that they could not block the entrance of Chechen fighters either (Rayfield, 2012: 397; Rukhadze and Duerr, 2016: 36). As a reaction, the Georgian military attacked with a heavy artillery assault on Tskhinvali that conducted in the night that bound August 7 to August 8. The attack came as a surprise (Gürsoy, 2011: 62). Consequently, the war has started. On August 9, Russian troops started to evict Georgians from Tskhinvali, and then from South Ossetia proper (Gahrton, 2010: 178). On August 10, the Russian troops have already repelled Georgian troops from South Ossetia and marched through Georgia proper and arrived to city Gori which was only 65 km away from the capital Tbilisi.

Meanwhile, the tension spread to Abkhazia. This time, Abkhazians evicted ethnic Georgians from the only region they had control on, the Kodori Gorge (Sotiriou, 2017; Rayfield, 2012: 397; Gahrton, 2010: 178). On August 9, Russia launched an air strike to several points (to the conflict zone in Zugdidi, to the targets in the Poti port and to the military base in Senaki) in Western Georgia. On August 12, Abkhaz forces started a military attack in Kodori Gorge and took the control of entire region (Geneva Academy, 2018: 6; Nichol, 2010:3). The same day, Medvedev ended the military operation. At the time, the presidency of the Council of the European Union was at France, thus French President Nicolas Sarkozy mediated a ceasefire agreement, which was signed by Saakashvili on August 15 and by Medvedev on August 16 (Gahrton, 2010: 179).¹⁴¹ However, the agreement did not end mutual accusations.

¹⁴¹ On August 26, Abkhazia and South Ossetia were recognized as independent states by Russia (Rayfield, 2012: 398; Jones, 2008).

Georgian side claimed that the war started with the entrance of Russian troops from Roki Tunnel, however as Gahrton points out this claim was not only negated by Russian and South Ossetian sides but also by independent observers. He adds that on the night of first attack conducted by Georgia, “Georgian spokespersons made no reference to any Russian attack, but explained the Georgian assault only by referring to the ‘restoration of the constitutional order’ in South Ossetia” (Gahrton, 2010: 177-178). On the other hand, Russia accused Georgian side for starting the war by attacking Russian forces and Tskhinvali. Russia also backed up, South Ossetian side’s claim that the Georgian attack was the 3rd genocide attempt committed by Georgia (Toal and O’Loughlin, 2013: 140). This of course was reported as an exaggeration by international observers, yet there were also atrocities committed by both parties that reported by international observers, including the rapporteurs of EU.¹⁴²

5.7.2. The Outcomes of the August War: Worsening of the IDP Situation

After a six-month inquiry in the conflict zone, Heidi Tagliavini, the EU rapporteur, published her report on the consequences of the war, according to which 412 Georgians (228 civilians, 170 soldiers and 14 policemen), 67 Russian soldiers and 365 South Ossetians (both combatants and civilians) have been killed and 1,747 Georgians (973 soldiers, 227 policemen and 547 civilians), 268 Russian soldiers have been wounded (Tagliavini, 2008: 320; Gahrton, 2010: 181; Rayfield, 2012: 397). It is also estimated that around 500 South Ossetian have been injured in various degrees. In addition, 60 persons (54 Georgians and 6 South Ossetians) remained missing (CoE, 2008).

¹⁴² See: Tagliavini, H. (2009). Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia, Report Vol. 2. *Council of the European Union*, https://www.mpil.de/files/pdf4/IIFMCG_Volume_II1.pdf (Accessed: 03.04.2020); Human Rights Watch (2009). *Up in Flames: Humanitarian Law Violations and Civilian Victims in the Conflict over South Ossetia*, 23 January 2009, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/497984202.html> (Accessed: 19.03.2020); Amnesty International (2008). “Civilians in the Line of Fire The Georgia-Russia Conflict”, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/52000/eur040052008eng.pdf> (Accessed: March 10, 2020).

The August War caused new waves of internal displacement from both sides. In total 158,703 persons have been displaced.¹⁴³ From the northern front of the war 141.625 (75.852 from South Ossetia, 65.800 from Gori and its surrounding) persons and from the western front of the war 17.051 (12,701 from Western Georgia and 4.350 from Abkhazia) have been displaced. Approximately 30 thousand Ossetians fled to North Ossetia. The remaining 128 thousand, were predominantly ethnic Georgians who fled to Georgia proper.¹⁴⁴ After the ceasefire, the vast majority of the displaced people have return their place of origins, yet around 22 thousand Georgian IDPs permanently settled in the inner parts of Georgia.¹⁴⁵ Based on the data, Mooney obtained from the MRA, 3.613 Georgian IDPs have experienced displacement during two conflict periods (2011: 180). The IDPs, who were registered in Georgia and are most commonly labelled as ‘old IDPs/Shevardnadze’s IDPs’, were around 212 thousand before the war in April 2008. As officially stated by the MRA, after the war, the number of the registered IDPs raised to 259.247 in 2014.

When the second major IDP wave hit Georgia in 2008, the post-Soviet Georgian Republic was not even 20 years old. Yet, through that limited time, Georgia survived from many catastrophic phases that include the dissolution from the Soviet Union, the ethnic conflicts, a civil war, a *coup d'état*, a color revolution, a war and an overall consequence: the economic woes. Concisely, the country was in desperate straits. And now, Georgia had come face to face with a massive IDP problem, for the second time. Thus, Georgia was in need of international

¹⁴³ UNCHR. “Protection of Internally Displaced Persons in Georgia: A Gap Analysis”, (2009). Accessed April 23, 2018, <http://www.unhcr.org/4ad827f59.pdf> pp. 5-6.

¹⁴⁴ IDMC (2008). “Georgia: Tentative return of some of the people who fled August 2008 conflict”, 28 August 2008, <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/48b8131d2.pdf> (Accessed: 05.04.2020).

¹⁴⁵ Amnesty International (2009). “Civilians in the Aftermath of the War: The Georgia- Russia Conflict One Year on”, https://amnesty.dk/media/2025/civilians_in_the_aftermath_of_war.pdf (Accessed March 10, 2018).

assistance. In this context, it is of importance to look at the international support and the initiatives that are taken by the Georgian government and the Georgian civil society regarding the IDP situation in the country. Elaboration of the initiatives taken by these actors is important because on the one hand it will frame the picture of IDP situation in Georgia in terms of what kind of assistances were provided to this community (i.e. humanitarian aid, advocacy, conflict resolution and durable solutions for integration); and on the other, it show that how these initiatives have affected the identity construction of IDPs. To be more precise, as mentioned in Chapter Two, the external definition that is provided by the other(s) has an immense impact on the internal identification of one's group identity. As this external agency would be the local community that IDPs have come into, it would also be an authoritative body such as state and local civil society. How IDPs are approached by these actors would clarify not only the social context they live in but also the perception directed to them in state and civil society levels. Thus, the next chapter elaborates the above-mentioned discussions.

CHAPTER 6

INTERNATIONAL ACTORS, STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY INITIATIVES: WHAT HAS BEEN DONE SO FAR FOR THE IDPs?

As mentioned in the beginning of Chapter Two, the IDPs are a vulnerable social group. The primary reason behind this is their status in the international law because there is no legally binding base for the IDPs, which differentiates them from other forced migrant groups, most notably the refugees. In fact, the severity of the IDP situation was first realized in the late 1980s Ethiopia, where people were forced to migrate due to civil war and famine. Those who were able to cross the borders to Sudan and Kenya were helped by the UN, whereas those who stayed within the borders of Ethiopia suffered greatly since there were no rules and regulations for these people back then (Cohen, 2006: 88). For this reason, the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement were developed.¹⁴⁶ Although the Guiding Principles have paved a universal path for the better management of the IDP situation in the world, these principles merely are not adequate to solve the problems since all the cases have a *sui generis* structure, and the IDPs are eventually confined under the responsibility of their respective states.

Over the course of years, Georgia showed strong enthusiasm to collaborate with international actors and accordingly established a legal framework for the protection and improvement of the rights of the IDPs. Since the first legal act that was adopted in 1992, Georgia has promulgated more than two hundred laws, acts and policies for the IDPs. The first law, “The Georgian Law on Internally Displaced Persons-Persecuted from the Occupied Territories of Georgia”, was

¹⁴⁶ UNHCR, *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, 22 July 1998, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3c3da07f7.html> (Accessed: 08.07.2020).

adopted in 1996 and it defined who the IDPs were and what responsibilities the state had.¹⁴⁷ Then, the law was amended several times in 2001, 2005, 2006, and finally in 2014 (World Bank, 2016: 14-15; Walicki, 2011: 66-67). Although Georgia's IDP-related legal framework is in line with international treaties and the UN Guiding Principles, the formation of such a legal structure took quite a long time and more importantly, the country struggled and fell short on the implementation of these acts for long. Hence, this again brings us back to the other reasons pushing the IDPs into a dire situation such as insufficient state capacity, unwillingness for dialogue with local civil societies and/or the affected population, the 'standardized' intervention methods of international actors which may ignore the regional and the case-based needs, the insufficiencies generated due to the responsibility priorities of the civil society at the field (whether focusing on the expectations of the donor organizations or on the real needs of the IDPs).

Furthermore, if the forced migration occurs due to an armed conflict, obstacles to solving the IDP problem increase. First and foremost, the secessionist conflict and the loss of control over a part of the country's territory become a matter of national sovereignty. In order to continue to claim the lands, where the control has been lost and to avoid the impression that the territory at risk was given up, states reflexively may hold on the policy of IDP return. Hence, they may abstain from implementing durable solutions for the IDPs and may avoid responding to their needs for a long period of time. In addition to state inefficiency, international actors may also fail to sustain the necessary conditions for the voluntary return of the IDPs. This failure is often due to the inability of the international actors to ensure dialogue between conflicting parties, as their involvement in negotiations does not exceed beyond statements and resolutions that are ignored by one or all conflicting parties (Gürsoy, 2018; 2020a).

¹⁴⁷ See: MRA. "Law of the Republic of Georgia Concerning Internally Displaced People" <https://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/txis/vtx/rwmain/opendocpdf.pdf?reldoc=y&docid=548ef5c04> (Accessed: 03.09.2020).

All these factors listed above are more or less what Georgia has experienced over the years; thus, this chapter focuses on the role played by international organizations, local civil society actors, and the Georgian state, which eventually would give the hints about how the IDPs were dragged into a fate of long-lasting isolation.

6.1. The Period of Total Negligence- ‘Somehow or Other the IDPs Will Return’

In the aftermath of the ethnic conflicts, Shevardnadze’s prior aim was to restore peace and to sustain the peaceful and voluntary return of the IDPs to their place of origins. Thus, Georgia sought solution at the international level. In the early 1990s, the UN and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) became the leading actors in conflict resolution and management between Georgia and the de-facto authorities, whereas the EU and the Council of Europe (CoE) avoided taking a serious part in the process (Popescu, 2010: 17; CoE, 1997).¹⁴⁸ The UN involvement in the dialogue between Georgia and Abkhazia was channeled mostly through the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG), which was established in 1993. The role of the UNOMIG was entrenched in a meeting held by the UN in Geneva in 1997. This meeting also designated the roles of the participants. As the UN assumed the chairmanship, the Russian Federation was designated as the ‘facilitator’; meanwhile, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States (namely the ‘Group of Friends of the Secretary General on Georgia’) and the OSCE had the observer status. The participants of the ‘Geneva Peace Process’ created three task groups which focused on some specific issues such as politics and security, refugee and IDP returns, and social and economic rehabilitation (Wohlgemuth, 2005: 136; Stewart, 2003: 4). On the other hand, starting from

¹⁴⁸ After the Rose Revolution, the government changeover and the momentum in the EU’s Eastern Partnership Programme; the EU focused more on Georgia. In 2006, the EU signed a cooperation Action Plan with Georgia regarding conflict resolution (Popescu, 2010: 17).

1992, the political negotiations between Georgia and South Ossetia were held in Borjomi (Georgia) by the Joint Control Commission of Georgia (JCC). The JCC consisted of Georgia, South Ossetia, North Ossetia, the Russian Federation, and the OSCE (CoE, 1997e). Similar to the Geneva Peace Process, the agenda of the JCC was the security issues, economic issues and issues regarding the IDPs and refugees (CoE, 1997e). However, both negotiation channels did not make a progress. At the international level, the only promising development regarding the IDP issue was the signing of the “Quadripartite Agreement on Voluntary Return of Refugees and Displaced Persons” between Abkhazia, Georgia, Russia and the UNHCR, on April 4, 1994.¹⁴⁹ Although the Quadripartite Agreement was a successful document and set the principles and the procedures for the IDPs’ return, in the course of time, this agreement was also resisted by the Abkhazian side and has not been materialized (Mooney, 2011: 215).

While the international negotiations continued without a considerable progress, the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees of Georgia (MRA) was established in 1996 at domestic level. In the same year, in parallel to the establishment of the MRA, the IDP Law was enacted.¹⁵⁰ While the MRA was responsible for every issue related to the IDPs of Georgia, the aim of this law was to determine who would apply for the IDP status and thus who would benefit from this status-based

¹⁴⁹ Refworld. “Quadripartite Agreement on Voluntary Return of Refugees and Displaced Persons (Abkhazia, Georgia, Russia and UNHCR)”, 4 April 1994, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b31a90.html> (Accessed: 14.09.2020). The Quadripartite Agreement was signed one month prior to the "Agreement on Cease-fire and Separation of Troops", between Georgian and Abkhazian. See: Reliefweb. “Agreement on a Cease-Fire and Separation of Forces, signed in Moscow on 14 May 1994” <https://reliefweb.int/report/georgia/agreement-cease-fire-and-separation-forces-signed-moscow-14-may-1994> (Accessed: 14.09.2020).

¹⁵⁰ In fact, a state institution called the State Committee for Refugees and Accommodation was established at the end of 1992. See: UN General Assembly. “Executive Committee of the High Commissioner’s Programme Forty-Fifth Session-UNHCR Activities Financed by Voluntary Funds: Report for 1993-1994 and Proposed Programmes and Budget for 1995 Part III. EUROPE Section 7 – Georgia” A/AC.96/825/Part III/7, 3 August 1994, <https://www.unhcr.org/4ddcbf119.pdf> (Accessed: 13.09.2020).

governmental assistance (i.e. monthly allowances and social services).¹⁵¹ Although the state showed signs of trying to solve the IDP issue by forming such a legislative structure, in practice its efforts remained less than modest and its approach to the IDPs remained within the terrain of emergency humanitarian aid rather than sustainable solutions (CoE, 2006a; DRC, 2018: 4). To be more precise, for the Georgian state, the fundamental aim was the return of the IDPs to their places of origins; thus, their social interaction was not an option. Accordingly, an interviewee from Tbilisi State University, who is also an expert in Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), explained the state attitude in this period as follows:

In Shevardnadze era, at first the idea was partial integration. It meant that they should be integrated because it was what the EU and other countries asked for. But in fact this policy was based on the idea that ‘They should not live in good conditions because they would not return.’ Of course it was not a pronounced policy but it was the real policy.¹⁵²

Therefore, Shevardnadze’s government on the one hand chose not to implement any kind of durable solutions for the IDPs and eventually “quarantined [them] in dilapidated Soviet-era hotels or abandoned buildings where they experienced overcrowding, malnutrition, and disease” (Koch, 2012: 6); and on the other, established an all separate system for the IDPs that included separate educational and medical facilities which operated under a separate government called the Legitimate Government of Abkhazia (also known as the Government of Abkhazia in exile) (Mitchneck, Mayorova and Regulska, 2009:1024; Sulava, 2010: 11). For instance, between 1995 and 2005, in order to receive their primary and secondary education, the majority of the IDP children from Abkhazia attended separate public schools, which were affiliated to the Ministry

¹⁵¹ The law defined and considered the IDPs as the ‘persecuted ones’ (Geo. *devnilebi*). The term is used synonymously to the IDPs in Georgian language, which is an interesting choice of wording and is perceived by the Georgian IDPs as a negative connotation; thus, it turns into a determinant identity marker for the group. This is a topic discussed in the upcoming chapter.

¹⁵² Interviewee 69, Tbilisi, 04.12.2014.

of Education and the Culture of the Legitimate Government of Abkhazia (NRC/IDMC, 2011b).¹⁵³ Furthermore, in 1993, the Sokhumi Branch of the Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University was established in Tbilisi, where university-level IDP students were able to receive their higher education.¹⁵⁴ In order to provide job opportunities, the Georgian government also employed the IDPs in all the above-mentioned separate facilities (Kharashvili, 2001). According to Sulava (2010: 11), “While separate educational structures unify the displaced community and reinforce the desire for return to Abkhazia they also sharpen the social isolation of the IDP population and hinder the process of integration”. Similarly, the political rights of the IDPs were also restricted to prevent their integration to society. They were only allowed to vote in general elections. As their place of origin was in the non-governmental control areas, they were not allowed to vote in municipality elections (CoE, 2001; Røkke, 2012: 41-43).

The above-mentioned state attitude was based on two practical reasons. First, the return of the IDPs was a matter of national sovereignty. Thus, heading them towards isolation and not improving their conditions was a message to the world that Georgia was not giving up its lands and the IDPs had to return their rightful homelands. By doing so, the Georgian state was trying both to put a political pressure on the Abkhazian authorities and to draw the attention of international actors to the severe conditions of the IDPs (Sulava, 2010: 11; CoE, 2001). Second, Georgia simply did not have the necessary economic and political conditions, as well as the institutional capacity to deal with the IDP situation. The country desperately needed international assistance on many spheres

¹⁵³ The IDPs from South Ossetia did not have a separate school system as they were smaller in size (NRC/IDMC, 2011b). Then again, in 2007, a provisional administration in South Ossetia – officially called the Temporary Administrative Unit of South Ossetia– was formed by the Saakashvili government (EurasiaNet, 2007). Since 2008, this structure continues to survive in exile.

¹⁵⁴ See: SOU. “About Us”, <https://www.sou.edu.ge/Cven-Sesaxeb/2/1/0/0/0> (Accessed: 12.09.2020).

including conflict resolution, humanitarian aid, capacity building, infrastructure development and durable solutions for the IDPs. Thus, in the mid-1990s, Shevardnadze welcomed international actors to Georgia and before 2000, the Georgian government had already consociated with important international organizations including the World Bank¹⁵⁵, the European Union (EU)¹⁵⁶ and the UN¹⁵⁷ with its mandates (Gürsoy, 2011: 4; NRC/IDMC, 2006).¹⁵⁸ From that time on, in order to sustain humanitarian assistance to the IDPs, Georgia was also associated with various organizations on partnership and donor bases. The biggest donor organizations were the EU, the World Bank, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID),¹⁵⁹ the UNHCR,¹⁶⁰ the Swiss

¹⁵⁵ In 1992, Georgia became a member of the organization. See: World Bank. (2017). “World Bank in Georgia: 25 Years of Partnership”, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2017/08/24/world-bank-georgia-25-years-of-partnership> (Accessed: 22.08.2020).

¹⁵⁶ The EU started its cooperation with Georgia in 1992 (Macharashvili et. al, 2016: 14).

¹⁵⁷ Georgia became a member of the UN in July 31, 1992. See: UN in Georgia. “The United Nations in Georgia” <https://georgia.un.org/en/about/about-the-un> (Accessed: 22.08.2020).

¹⁵⁸ Until 2004, to fight against the IDP problem, the UN provided humanitarian assistance to Georgia and to the conflict affected population through the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA); however, since the international assistance started to focus more on durable solutions and developmental activities, including state-capacity building, the OCHA closed its office in Georgia in December 31, 2004 (NRC/IDMC, 2006; NRC/IDMC, 2007: 152). From then on, the activities of the OCHA were handled by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the UNHCR and other UN mandates including the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the World Food Program (WFP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) (UNHCR in Georgia, 2009: 6-7; Åhlin, 2011:8). For more information on the OCHA see: OCHA. “History of OCHA”, <https://www.unocha.org/about-ocha/history-ocha> (Accessed: 22.08.2020).

¹⁵⁹ The USAID has been operating in Georgia since 1992. From 1992 to 2020, the USAID provided 1.8 billion USD to Georgia. See: USAID. “About Georgia”. <https://www.usaid.gov/georgia> (Accessed: 22.08.2020).

¹⁶⁰ In 1993, the Georgian government invited the UNHCR so that it provides protection for the IDPs (Kharashvili, 2012).

Development and Cooperation Agency (SDC)¹⁶¹, and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA).¹⁶² Georgia also became partners on various projects with international civil society organizations such as the Danish Refugee Council (DRC)¹⁶³, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)¹⁶⁴, Individual Counseling and Legal Advocacy (ICLA)¹⁶⁵, the World Vision International (WVI), the Great Britain's Charity organization-OXFAM¹⁶⁶, the International Relief and Development Fund (IRD)¹⁶⁷, the International Rescue Committee (IRC)¹⁶⁸, the Action against Hunger (ACF International)¹⁶⁹, the

¹⁶¹ The SDC opened a regional office in 1999 in Georgia which covers not only Georgia but also Armenia and Azerbaijan. "South Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan)" <https://www.eda.admin.ch/deza/en/home/countries/south-caucasus.html> (Accessed: 22.08.2020).

¹⁶² See: MRA. "Donors", <http://mra.gov.ge/eng/static/83> (Accessed: 22.08.2020).

¹⁶³ The DRC has been providing aid and assistance to the displaced people in Georgia since 1999. "Country facts", <https://drc.ngo/our-work/where-we-work/europe/georgia/> (Accessed: 22.08.2020).

¹⁶⁴ See the history of the NRC at "Brief History of NRC" <https://www.enonline.net/fex/46/agencyprofile> (Accessed: 22.08.2020).

¹⁶⁵ ICLA is one of the programmes of the NRC, which provides legal assistance to the displaced communities. It has been operating in Georgia since 2002. See: "What is the Consortium Legal Aid Georgia" <http://lag.ge/index.php?Cat=NeWs&Cid=162&Lang=2> (Accessed: 22.08.2020).

¹⁶⁶ OXFAM-Georgia started its mission in 1993 and as of 1999, the organization has shifted its focus from emergency aid to developmental programs. See: "OXFAM-Georgia" <https://www.preventionweb.net/organizations/11615> (Accessed: 22.08.2020).

¹⁶⁷ See information on the organizational structure of the IRD at "International Relief & Development (IRD)" <https://www.ngoaidmap.org/organizations/41> (Accessed: 22.08.2020).

¹⁶⁸ In 1994, the IRC was coordinating the rehabilitation/reconstruction programmes and distributing relief supplies in Georgia. See: UN General Assembly. "Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme Forty-Fifth Session-UNHCR Activities Financed by Voluntary Funds: Report for 1993-1994 and Proposed Programmes and Budget for 1995 Part III. EUROPE Section 7 – Georgia" A/AC.96/825/Part III/7, 3 August 1994, <https://www.unhcr.org/4ddcbf119.pdf> (Accessed: 13.09.2020).

European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI)¹⁷⁰, Care International¹⁷¹, and ‘Save the Children’.^{172,173}

It is estimated that Georgia was funded around 4 billion USD by international donors between 1992 and 2000. A significant amount of this fund was allocated to humanitarian needs (Sumbadze and Tarkhan-Mouravi, 2003; NRC/IDMC, 2006). For instance, thanks to international assistance, MRA’s total budget reached 27.6 million USD in 2001, which at the time was equivalent to the 6% of the state budget. Approximately 12 million USD of this budget was partitioned for the utilities in collective centers, whereas around 4 million USD was spent to free public transportation costs of the IDPs. The IDPs also received monthly allowance, which was referred to as “bread money” by them. This allowance ranged between 7 and 11 USD, depending on whether they were living in collective houses or private dwellings (Zimmerly, 2009: 69). Nonetheless, the foreign funding was a life line support not only for the Georgian state but also for the Georgian civil society. During the early 2000s, many international actors chose to cooperate with the state through local civil society. Since the donor support came with either direct funding or project base grants, this eventually led

¹⁶⁹ Concentrating on long-term food programs, the ACF has been operating in Georgia since 1994. See: ACF. “Georgia”. <https://www.actionagainsthunger.org/countries/asia/georgia> (Accessed: 22.08.2020).

¹⁷⁰ In 2003, the organization opened its regional office in Tbilisi. See: ECMI. “European Center for Minority Issues – Caucasus”, <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/organisations/european-center-minority-issues-caucasus> (Accessed: 22.08.2020).

¹⁷¹ Care International has operated in the region since 1993. See: Care International. “Georgia” <https://www.care-international.org/where-we-work/georgia> (Accessed: 22.08.2020).

¹⁷² Since 1993, the organization has operated in Georgia. See: Save the Children. “Save the Children in Georgia” <https://georgia.savethechildren.net/save-children-georgia> (Accessed: 22.08.2020).

¹⁷³ See: MRA. “Partners”, <http://mra.gov.ge/eng/static/835> (Accessed: 22.08.2020).

to the mushrooming of NGOs in Georgia (Gürsoy, 2011: 4).¹⁷⁴ In other words, the foreign aid flow changed the civil society structure of the country via “NGO-ization” and civil activism yielded to a sectoral entity. As the civil society was in a process of transformation, it did not have the necessary capacity for negotiation with the state on policymaking or for monitoring the state initiatives (Nodia, 2005: 31-32). For instance, in cooperation with the UNDP, the OCHA and the World Bank, the Georgian government launched its ‘New Approach Policy’ in 1999. This policy aimed to grant the social, economic and political rights which all Georgian citizens enjoyed to the IDPs (Koch, 2012: 6; Manning 2009; CoE, 2002). However, as the policy stuck in the Soviet inherited bureaucracy, the Georgian civil society could not be a part of the process. Unaware of the non-implemented policy, the IDPs mostly continued to be neglected by both the Georgian government and the civil society (Koch, 2012: 6; Sulava, 2010: 11).

6.2. From Rose Revolution (2003) to August War (2008): A Shift in the State Policy

The Georgian civil society, which was in transition until 1999, then reached the capacity to pose a “challenge” to the state, and the voices of the NGOs were heard more at national and international levels (Nodia, 2005). In 2003, the Shevardnadze government was overthrown by the opposition led by Saakashvili, who gained the support of the civil society and the public.¹⁷⁵ International actors acted as the kingmaker in this period since significant amount of financial aid flew to the civil society organizations concentrating on some specific issues such as Westernization, political transition and democratization. For instance, the youth organization *Kmara*, which became the symbol of the Rose Revolution, single-handedly received around 500.000 USD from the Soros Foundation as a

¹⁷⁴ Between 1992 and 1995, the number of the registered NGOs were up to several thousands, which reached 14 thousand in 2010 (Nodia, 2005: 15; Aliyev, 2015: 86-87).

¹⁷⁵ For further information on the Georgian Civil Society’s role in Rose Revolution in 2003, see: Gürsoy, 2011.

startup (Gürsoy, 2011: 54; Bolton, 2011: 241). In parallel, as the agenda of international actors shifted towards another direction, so did that of the local NGOs; hence, the civil society support for the IDPs gradually decreased.

Meanwhile, after coming to power, one of the first acts of Saakashvili was the privatization of the IDP collective centers located in central locations through the evacuation of the IDPs. One of the most iconic examples of this was the privatization of the former Soviet Hotel called Iveria, which was occupied by the IDPs right after the ethnic conflicts. The IDPs accommodated in this dilapidated and overcrowded hotel for many years. While for some, the hotel stood as an indicator of Shevardnadze's failure in governing (Koch, 2012: 8; Dunn, 2018: Elliot, 2018: 35), for others the hotel was used as a policy tool. For instance, during our interview, an expert from the Caucasus Research Resources Center (CRRC) said that:

Not only this hotel. There were a few other hotels occupied by the IDPs. The previous government deliberately allowed them to stay there because these buildings were sending messages. First, they showed how bad the situation was and second, it was pointed out that the situation was temporary. Now, there is no expectation like that; therefore, the present government tries to integrate the IDPs more in communities where they settled.¹⁷⁶

Today Hotel Iveria, which continues to stand at the very center of Tbilisi at Republic Square, is a chain member of the Radisson franchise. Hence, one cannot suggest that Saakashvili did those privatizations solely to provide better conditions to the IDPs, since the evicted IDPs were relocated in remote areas at the outskirts of the cities. Saakashvili rather aimed for a fast transition to the liberal market economy, and the restoration of such dilapidated buildings would provide a cosmetic touch on the texture of the country.

The state's approach towards the IDPs dramatically changed only after the heat of the Rose Revolution began to wane when the Special Representative of the

¹⁷⁶ Interviewee 68, Tbilisi, 20.11.2014.

UN Secretary-General on the Human Rights of IDPs, Dr. Walter Kälin, paid a visit to Georgia in 2005. In his report presented to the UN General Assembly, Kälin pointed to the horrific conditions in which the IDPs were living (Kharashvili, 2012; Mitchneck, Mayorova and Regulska, 2009: 1024). During our interview, an expert from the IPS explained the new state approach as follows:

By 2005, the attitude towards the IDPs changed. Thus, it was admitted that there was little chance for return anytime soon. As a result, the idea of late 90s, so-called partial integration, was somehow forgotten. It was finally decided that, if possible, full integration was the most important policy option.¹⁷⁷

Similarly, an expert from The Institute for the Study of Nationalism and Conflicts (ISNC) highlighted the new slogan of the Saakashvili's government as follows: "Before you return, better living conditions must be provided."¹⁷⁸ According to her, integration became visible as a state policy, and the state promoted the idea that "if you live in good conditions, your integration will be easier and you will have a chance to choose whether to return or to stay."¹⁷⁹ Hence, the state then started focusing on durable solutions for the IDPs.¹⁸⁰ One of the first examples of changes in the state approach were in the field of education.

¹⁷⁷ Interviewee 63, Tbilisi, 17.11.2014.

¹⁷⁸ Interviewee 71, Tbilisi, 06.10.2015.

¹⁷⁹ Interviewee 71, Tbilisi, 06.10.2015.

¹⁸⁰ The Inter-Agency Standing Committee-IASC (2010: 5) states that "a durable solution can be achieved when the IDPs no longer have assistance and protection needs that are linked to their displacement and when they can enjoy human rights without discrimination resulting from their displacement."

In 2005, the new government started a nation-wide education reform.¹⁸¹ Ending the segregation of the IDP schools was also a part of these reforms. To do so, both the IDP and non-IDP pupils were allowed to attend the schools designated for one another (NRC/IDMC, 2011b: 12). In 2007, in order to integrate the IDP pupils to the general education system, the government decided to close down the segregated IDP schools (NRC/IDMC, 2009: 34).¹⁸² Also, when the August War caused more displacement, the government rapidly integrated the new IDP pupils to the national education system by establishing new schools in new settlement areas. However, because of the fact that those settlements were located at the remote areas, the new schools were only attended by the IDP children. In other words, the government could not have averted the isolation of the new IDP pupils (NRC/IDMC, 2011b: 13).

Another state project that the Saakashvili government was working on was the “My House” program, which was initiated based on the Presidential Decree #124 of February 2006. The aim of the program was to create a state inventory on the real property of the IDPs in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Salukvadze et al., 2013: 29; NRC/IDMC, 2007: 12). Although the MRA received 67 thousand IDP declarations in 2008, the program could not reach success as the *de facto* authorities hindered the process. For instance, in 2006 the Abkhazian court decided that those who did not claim their property until 2003 would lose their rights to their real estates (Røkke, 2012: 41-43; Salukvadze et al., 2013: 29). As opposed to the opinions that the program could not be successful, during our interview, the representative of MRA¹⁸³ seemed quite optimistic about the policy. He stated that “We are working on a map. We document the estates of the IDPs in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. We have good results. We need

¹⁸¹ For further information on state reforms on education see: Gürsoy and Tulun, 2016)

¹⁸² By 2011, there were only 13 segregated IDP schools left (NRC/IDMC, 2011b: 12; Salukvadze et al., 2013: 31).

¹⁸³ Interviewee 76, Tbilisi, 15.10.2015.

international support, so when the IDPs return, they can settle in their own houses.”

In 2006, the Georgian government decided to prepare another state strategy with the involvement of around 30 NGOs, which were the members of the Caucasian Refugee and IDP NGO Network (CRINGO)¹⁸⁴, to work on legal regulations, social integration, economic improvement and most importantly the housing problem of the IDPs. This was indeed the first time the government showed enthusiasm to cooperate with the Georgian civil society, and the UNHCR had a contribution on that matter (Kharashvili, 2012; NRC/IDMC, 2006: 141; Transparency International Georgia, 2011). While preparing the state strategy, the MRA started to generate several procedures for the IDPs such as compulsory registration to the state and a scoring system to benefit from social benefits. Yet, both these procedures had implementation flaws and received complaints (The Public Defender of Georgia, 2007b: 175). Not only the IDPs had little knowledge on the procedures, but also the bureaucratic red-tape posed an immense challenge. For instance, regarding the scoring system, the IDPs would easily be excluded from social benefits during the assessment process due to possessing domestic appliances such as refrigerator or television, which were perceived as ‘luxury items’ (Koch, 2012: 15-16). In addition, the state continued its privatization policy in 2007, causing the eviction of many IDPs from the collective centers. In the course of evictions, the state authorities also used excessive power and many IDPs were evicted “without a court decision or agreement of the persons concerned, and without proper compensation and support by governmental agencies.” (NRC/IDMC: 2009; Salukvadze et al., 2013: 35; The Public Defender of Georgia, 2007a: 101).

In February 2007, the State Strategy for Internally Displaced Persons was finally adopted with two major goals: to ensure IDPs’ return to their homeland safely and to improve their living conditions. The strategy was followed by an Action

¹⁸⁴ CRINGO was formed as an umbrella network by the DRC in 2001 (UNHCR, 2009: 15).

Plan, setting the necessary measures for the integration of the IDPs on July 30, 2008. However, eight days after the adoption of the Action Plan, Georgia got into the war, and the whole Action Plan became “null and void” (UNHCR, 2009: 7).

6.3. The War Time Assistance

As the Russian Federation prevailed in the war, Saakashvili returned to international audience in a hope to receive their support on regaining country's territorial integrity, providing humanitarian aid to the IDPs, and eventually ensuring their return. Although international organizations answered the call and rushed to Georgia to provide humanitarian assistance, their efforts on mediation remained modest in the most optimistic terms. Indeed, *de facto* states' reluctance on breaking the status quo of the frozen conflicts was also a major factor on this matter (Ditrych, 2008: 8; Blakkisrud and Kolstø. 2012: 293). For instance, in the aftermath of the war, although international organization such as the UN, the CoE and the EU requested the continuation of the activities of the UNOMIG and the OSCE Mission to Georgia in the conflict regions, their efforts were not reciprocated by the *de facto* authorities and the Russian Federation. They not only requested the withdrawal of 'Georgia' from the titles of these, but also did not allow the OSCE Mission to Georgia and the UNOMIG to enter Abkhazia and South Ossetia for monitoring. As a result, due to lack of consensus on their missions' continuation, both mandates were expired (the UNOMIG on June 2009 and the OSCE Mission to Georgia on December, 2008) (CoE, 2009b; Human Rights Watch, 2011a).¹⁸⁵ Thus, the EU's Monitoring Mission (EUMM)¹⁸⁶ remained as the only international mandated organization in the field. Though

¹⁸⁵ See: “UNOMIG” <https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/unomig/index.html> (Accessed: 19.05.2020) and “OSCE Mission to Georgia (closed)” <https://www.osce.org/georgia-closed> (Accessed: 19.05.2020).

¹⁸⁶ To learn more about the EUMM, see: EUMM. “About Us”, https://eumm.eu/en/about_eumm (Accessed: 19.05.2020).

the EUMM was and still is not accepted to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the Mission continues its monitoring mission by patrolling through the areas adjacent to the South Ossetian and Abkhazian Administrative Boundary Lines.¹⁸⁷ Since most of the dialogue channels were blocked by the conflicting parties, the Geneva International Discussions (GID) remained as the only international platform that gathered Abkhazia, South Ossetia, the Russian Federation and Georgia together. As the GID is co-chaired and sponsored by the UN, the EU and the OSCE, the discussions were held on two working groups. While the security issues were discussed in the Working Group I, the focus of the Working Group II was the humanitarian needs of the conflict-affected population under the co-moderation of the UNHCR. However, due to the strong resistance of the *de facto* authorities, no consensus has been reached for the return of the Georgian IDPs to their homeland so far (UNHCR, 2010: 41).

Meanwhile, the UN became an arena where the Georgian representatives continued their lobbying activities quite successfully. In fact, in 2008, the UN adopted its first annual resolution on the “Situation of internally displaced persons and refugees from Abkhazia, Georgia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia”, in which the UN called for the return of the IDPs to their places of origins. Nevertheless, Georgia’s efforts were again objected by the Abkhazian authorities. For instance, in an interview held by the International Crisis Group (ICG), an Abkhazian representative stated that (2013: 12): “instead of concentrating on having meaningless UN resolutions to pass, the Georgians should discuss the IDP issue with us.” As a matter of fact, aside from the Abkhazian side’s reluctance for such a dialogue, the representative had a point on these annually adopted UN resolutions. As the above-mentioned resolutions

¹⁸⁷ Unlike the 1990s, the EU seemingly became an active actor in 2008. However, its efforts on conflict resolution attracted criticisms at certain levels. For instance, while Simão (2012: 193) finds the EU reluctant, Khintba (2000) claims that the EU failed at all three tasks of conflict prevention, conflict settlement and conflict transformation it assumed. On the other hand, for Jeppson (2015: 26), the EU has fallen short only on the conflict settlement and transformation tasks, but had considerable success in conflict prevention through the EUMM.

have been adopted every year since 2008¹⁸⁸, the CoE has also adopted similar resolutions such as the Resolutions 1059 (in 1995), 1497 (in 2006), 1633 (in 2008), 1647 (in 2009), 1648 (in 2009), 1664 (in 2009), 1683 (in 2009), and 1916 (in 2012).¹⁸⁹ Although all these resolutions kept coming steadily, they had almost no impact on the negotiations between the conflicting parties as they did not have a sanction power. Probably for this reason, Akaki Minashvili, Georgia's representative to the CoE, presented a written question to the Committee of Ministers of the CoE in 2010, for which he could not receive a satisfactory reply.¹⁹⁰ In this document Minashvili asked (2010a):

What concrete actions have the Committee of Ministers taken to address the consequences of the August 2008 war between the Russian Federation and Georgia and what further steps need to be taken in order to promote the values and standards of the Council of Europe in the Russian Federation and Georgia according to the Committee of Ministers?

Although almost no progress has been achieved in mediation efforts, international actors have been the most determining factor in humanitarian intervention in the post-war Georgia. However, the international humanitarian response to Georgia had both its pros and cons; hence, it received both praise and criticism.

In the aftermath the 2008 war, a 'cluster' mechanism was organized under the leadership of the OCHA, which had closed its Tbilisi office back in 2004 and re-opened it in 2008 (Hansen, 2009: 21; Dunn, 2018: 71). A cluster system is a

¹⁸⁸ See: UN General Assembly resolutions, A/RES/62/249 of 15 May 2008, A/RES/63/307 of 9 September 2009, A/RES/64/296 of 7 September 2010, A/RES/65/287 of 29 June 2011, A/RES/66/283 of 3 July 2012, A/RES/67/268 of 13 June 2013, A/RES/68/274 of 5 June 2014, A/RES/69/286 of 3 June 2015, A/RES/70/265 of 7 June 2016, A/RES/71/290 of 1 June 2017; A/RES/72/280 of 12 June 2018 and A/RES/73/298 of 4 June 2019.

¹⁸⁹ See: CoE (1996); CoE (2006b); CoE (2008); CoE (2009c); CoE (2009d); CoE (2009e); CoE (2009f); CoE (2012b).

¹⁹⁰ For the reply of the Committee of Ministers of the CoE, see: CoE (2010b).

coordination mechanism bringing the UN, its mandates, and international and local humanitarian aid organizations under one umbrella since 2005. The system is composed of several pools/clusters. It gathers each institution and organization around specific clusters that are in line with their expertise. The main global clusters are listed as camp coordination and camp management, early recovery, education, emergency telecommunications, food security, health, logistics, nutrition, protection (child protection and gender based violence), shelter, and water sanitation and hygiene. Under the guidance of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee – IASC, each and every cluster has led an agency or agencies that not only coordinate the organizations and institutions associated that cluster but also call for donations in the international arena via ‘Flash Appeals’. For instance, while the UNICEF is the global cluster lead agency of the Water Sanitation and Hygiene, the WHO assumed the leadership of the Global Health Cluster. Moreover, some other clusters are co-chaired by other UN mandates or international NGOs as in the case of Food Security cluster, which is co-led by the FAO and the WFP. The clusters are also in dialogue with the governments of the countries to be assisted through the individuals called cluster coordinators.¹⁹¹ In August 18, 2008, a ‘Flash Appeal’ led by the UN was gathered to assess the post-war needs of Georgia (UN and the World Bank, 2008). Following the appeal, over 4.5 billion USD was pledged by 38 donor countries and 14 donor international organizations in October (Transparency International Georgia, 2008: 2). For the period between 2009 and 2014, over \$450 million USD of the pledged aid was planned to be allocated for the needs of the displaced population, primarily to provide housing options for both the new and old IDPs (UN and the World Bank, 2009: 4; Hovey, 2013; Dunn, 2014: 289-290; CoE, 2009a). The mentioned 4.5 billion USD is quite some amount considering the

¹⁹¹ See: Humanitarian Response. “What is the Cluster Approach?” <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/about-clusters/what-is-the-cluster-approach> (Accessed: 23.09.2020); Humanitarian Response. “About Global Cluster Leads” <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/coordination/clusters/about-global-cluster-leads> (Accessed: 23.09.2020).

fact that the Georgian GDP was around 10.173 billion USD a year earlier in 2007.¹⁹²

Following the Flash Appeal, around 100 NGOs and international organizations came to Georgia. They immediately sprawled and dominated the assistance process by taking over many of the state responsibilities to provide “capacity building” assistance to government, by imposing their “policies and procedures” (Dunn, 2014: 290). However, more importantly, they dominated the process through a “simultaneous explosion” of “the standardized aid kits” (MacFarlane, 2000: 57; Dunn, 2012: 10-12). Many organizations rushed to compete with each other to provide short-term (food, medicine, clothing and temporary shelters) and medium-term (psychological support, microcredits, agricultural support, job and small-sized enterprise building trainings) aid within the framework of the expertise of the clusters, yet some of those projects had nothing to do with the real needs of the Georgian IDPs, but more related to the expectations/calls of the donor agencies (Dunn, 2014: 289; Dunn, 2018: 66). As a result, there were criticisms regarding the accountability of the NGOs and whether their accountability was to donor agencies or to the conflict-affected population. Questions were raised as to whether the donor funds effectively reached their intended destination, namely the IDPs (Bruckner, 2011; Gürsoy, 2020b).

In addition, during the intervention process, the blasts of donor aid and the humanitarian agencies, as well as the expectation of this aid to be spent rapidly by these humanitarian agencies in the field (Hansen, 2009: 21)¹⁹³ melded with the cyclical structure of the operation mechanism of the cluster system, which composed of steps such as needs assessment and analysis, strategic response planning, resource mobilization, implementation and monitoring, and operational

¹⁹² See: The World Bank. “Georgia” <https://data.worldbank.org/country/georgia> (Accessed: 24.09.2020).

¹⁹³ The Tbilisi Office of the OCHA was closed down rapidly only after a year of functioning in the field (Hansen, 2009: 21).

review and evaluation. This caused inevitable bureaucratic entanglement.¹⁹⁴ Between endless assessment, planning and monitoring meetings of clusters, an immense waste of energy and finance was experienced. According to Hansen, although Georgia received an aid that is “far out of proportion to assessed needs”, there were also examples of humanitarian agencies working in the field yet could not benefit from sufficient funding (Hansen, 2009: 31).

The pace of intervention manifested itself in housing solutions for the new IDPs. The planning of new dwellings, selecting the location for the new dwellings and their design, and deciding on which construction company to work with took only a month of the Georgian government, while the constructions took roughly three months. From October 2008 to February 2009, the government built 13 new compact settlements with a total of 3.963 cottages.¹⁹⁵ The government also refurbished 25 old apartment buildings which contained 1.542 flats, as fast as the construction of 13 settlements.¹⁹⁶ As a result, as of February 2009, a total of 18 thousand new IDPs were settled to their new dwellings. The newly constructed and refurbished dwellings were equipped with house appliances including kitchen gadgets and basic furniture. In addition, the government allocated a one-time monetary assistance of 200 GEL per person for the settlement process (CoE, 2009a; UNHCR, 2009: 45).¹⁹⁷ Another 3.135 new IDPs, on the other hand, did not want to settle in those dwellings and applied for another option the government offered them, which was a 10 thousand USD monetary support

¹⁹⁴OCHA. “Humanitarian Programme Cycle”
<https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/programme-cycle/space> (Accessed: 24.09.2020).

¹⁹⁵ The Tserovani settlement, which was visited for the fieldwork of this thesis, was the largest settlement unit with around 2 thousand cottages (World Bank, 2016: 26)

¹⁹⁶ Five hundred families also resettled in the cottages financed by the German and Turkish governments (Transparency International Georgia, 2010: 5).

¹⁹⁷ The government also proposed a 100 GEL one-time monetary assistance to the children of the new IDPs who enrolled in their new schools; however, according to the UNHCR, not all pupils received this assistance (UNHCR, 2009: 45)

(Transparency International Georgia, 2010: 5; UNHCR, 2009: 44-45; DRC, 2018: 4).

The hastiness in the construction of cottage settlements caused them to be referred to as “mushroom villages” by international organizations, and the inspection of several organizations including Transparency International Georgia, the UNHCR and the CoE in those settlements revealed that there were several defects in the construction, allocation and settlement processes. The problem that was pointed out most by the Transparency International Georgia was the lack of quality of the cottages as the vast majority of these dwellings had moisture problem, which occasionally was brought to agenda by the Georgian media and civil society (Transparency International Georgia, 2010: 5). A second criticism was about the remote location of these settlements since they were built kilometers away from cities, at sites with no or limited infrastructure, causing the IDPs to have limited access to public services as well as employment opportunities. A third criticism was about the lack of transparency at the allocation process of the dwellings (CoE, 2009a). There was no standard application process for the IDPs and they chose their dwellings (either cottages or flats) mostly without seeing them and their location but through consultation (UNHCR, 2009: 45). Another complaint raised by the IDPs was about the house appliances they received when they moved to their new dwellings. According to the UNHCR report of 2009, many IDPs stated that they were given a document signed by the government regarding the house appliances received even though some of which were missing. The same report also pointed out that some IDPs had grievances due to the lack of fundamental conditions for security in their settlement such as lightening systems in their apartments or door locks on the building entrances (UNHCR, 2009: 45).

Although the above listed criticisms were about the new settlements allocated to the new IDPs, the old IDPs could not receive such a state assistance for decades. In 2008, it was estimated that 42 percent of the old IDPs were living in

overcrowded collective centers in dire conditions (5 to 10 people per room in many cases) (Transparency International, 2010: 5; CoE, 1997d). The remaining old IDPs were living in private accommodation, meaning that they were hosted by (non)relatives or stayed in rentals, and only a small part of this group owned a house. Whether they lived in collective centers or in private accommodation, resentment occurred among the old IDPs as the new IDPs not only benefited from the rapid housing program of the government but also were immediately granted the IDP status and social benefits including healthcare and monthly allowances, for which the old IDPs had to be found eligible through a bureaucratic assessment process (World Bank, 2016: 26; Koch, 2012: 11). As a result, the government was accused of developing a preferential attitude between the two IDP groups. This was actually one of the issues I asked to an MRA representative in our interview. His explanation on unequal treatment to the new and old IDPs is as follows:

The distribution of housing to the IDPs from the 2008 War period was not a difficult task for the Ministry as they were already residing in temporary shelters. The state moved them out of the temporary shelters and provided them with durable housing solutions through either new flats or monetary compensation. However, for the IDPs from the 1990s, the situation was different and more complex.¹⁹⁸

He stated that the number of the IDP families waiting for housing solution was more than 50 thousand at the time and this number was compelling for the state budget. He also explained the other reasons behind this complexity as follows:

Some of the collective centers are severely dilapidated. If the buildings are old and damaged, we are trying to move the IDPs to new settlements or we ask them to change their places by offering them to pay the rent. However, most of the time they do not want to change their places. Another problem is about the ownership of these collective centers. Some collective centers belong to private owners. If so, we are trying to buy these buildings from the owners, but

¹⁹⁸ Interviewee 76, Tbilisi, 15.10.2015.

sometimes owners can sell their buildings to other private buyers. This makes it even more difficult to intervene in.¹⁹⁹

6.4. In the Path of Durable Solutions

As mentioned earlier, the state already had the 2007 State Strategy and the 2008 Action Plan; however, these were interrupted by the war. Thanks to the funding provided by the international actors, the government soon returned to its IDP program for the old IDPs with some revisions. A revised Action Plan for 2009-2012 was adopted on May 28, 2009 and was steadily updated with several amendments in the following years (most notably in 2013) and followed up by the Action Plans for the years 2012-2014,²⁰⁰ 2015-2016,²⁰¹ 2017-2018,²⁰² and 2019-2020.²⁰³ In order to improve the living conditions of the IDPs through durable solutions, the 2009 Action Plan aimed to solve the accommodation problem, to reduce their state dependency, and to support them with new social aid programs.²⁰⁴ Thus, the government came up with several durable housing solutions by giving priority to the privatization of the actual dwellings of the IDPs in collective centers, whether these collective centers belonged to the state

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ MRA. “Action Plan for the Implementation of the State Strategy on IDPs during 2012-2014” <http://mra.gov.ge/res/docs/2014100614552521290.pdf> (Accessed: 01.10.2020).

²⁰¹ MRA. “2017-2018 Action Plan for the Implementation of the IDP State Strategy” <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5b3e0697c.html> (Accessed 30.09.2020).

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Bolkvadze, T. (2020). “Coordination and participation in Georgia - what worked and what didn't Good Examples and Challenges from Georgia” *IDMC Global Report*, https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2020/downloads/background_papers/2020-IDMC-GRID-background-georgia.pdf (Accessed: 01.10.2020).

²⁰⁴ Government of Georgia. (2010). “Georgia: Action Plan for the Implementation of the State Strategy on IDPs during 2009-2012”. <https://reliefweb.int/report/georgia/georgia-action-plan-implementation-state-strategy-idps-during-2009-2012> (Accessed: 01.10.2020).

or private owners. The government also guaranteed the rehabilitation of collective centers if needed. In accordance with the Action Plan, if the collective centers belonged to private owners, the government ensured purchasing these buildings within a reasonable price range that would not exceed the expense of building a new settlement.²⁰⁵ If the collective centers were state-owned buildings, the representative of The Public Defender of Georgia explained the process of privatization in our interview as follows:

In the past years, the Ministry of Economy sold several old Soviet buildings through auctions. However, if the building had been sold, it would have been the state's obligation to find new settlements for the IDPs. The Ministry of Economy did not take the responsibility, so the MRA was saddled with this obligation. That is why, the MRA tried to purchase these building. If the Ministry had had the ability, it would have distributed the ownership of the flats in the building to the IDPs. If not, then the MRA would have made payment to the IDPs for rent in their new settlements.²⁰⁶

This privatization process started in 2009. The MRA transferred the home ownership in several collective centers to the IDPs for “a symbolic sum of one GEL”, yet according to the UNHCR (2009: 9), the process had some flaws as the state lacked a standardized procedure. The government also offered alternative housing solutions, such as monetary compensation or alternative living spaces for those who did not want to benefit from the privatization option and it also ensured protecting them from uninformed eviction. Regarding the alternative housing solution, the IDPs were also offered either a 10 thousand USD compensation or a new dwelling (a cottage or a dwelling at the newly constructed compact settlements). Since the government could not cover the promised compensation due to insufficient budget, only 1.684 families (from among the new IDPs) benefitted from the monetary compensation. Hence, the program was not sustainable (CoE, 2012a; The Public Defender of Georgia,

²⁰⁵ See also: MRA. “Privatization of Living Spaces for IDPs”. <http://mra.gov.ge/eng/static/2653> (Accessed: 01.10.2020).

²⁰⁶ Interviewee 78, Tbilisi, 22.10.2015.

2009: 177). In addition, the allocation of the alternative houses also caused a set of concerns. To begin with, the location of the new settlements was not determined. Not knowing where to resettle and which conditions they would face evoked the feeling of insecurity among the IDPs (Caucasus Edition, 2013). Then, it was seen that those new settlements were built at remote areas or at the outskirts of the cities, which was perceived by the IDPs as another act of displacement. Moreover, the relocation process caused a series of unpleasant scenes of eviction. In 2010, due to the privatization of several collective centers, more than a thousand IDPs were exposed to arbitrary evictions, which appeared in the news and attracted criticisms from different local and international organizations including the Public Defender of Georgia (2010: 243-244), the Norwegian Refugee Council (2011a), and the Human Rights Watch (2011b).²⁰⁷ During our interview, the representative of the Public Defender of Georgia also pointed out these evictions and described them as “horrible and inhumane”.²⁰⁸ Nevertheless, between 2009 and 2010, the privatizations of collective centers continued at a fast pace and at the end of 2010, around 6.800 IDP families had the official home ownership (NRC/IDMC: 2011a; Human Rights Watch, 2011b). Due to budget constraints, the process decelerated for almost two years and accelerated again in 2012 on the eve of the new parliamentary elections. In 2012, a further seven thousand families possessed the property rights of their dwellings, yet the allocation process was assessed as vague by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC/IDMC, 2013: 4).

6.5. A New Government, a New Approach

On October 1, 2012, a new coalition was formed under the leadership of the billionaire tycoon Bidzina Ivanishvili. The new coalition won the majority of the

²⁰⁷ As a result of the adoption of the amendment to the IDP Law in 2014, the IDPs went under the protection of the government against forced eviction (World Bank, 2016: 26).

²⁰⁸ Interviewee 78, Tbilisi, 22.10.2015.

seats in the parliament and overthrew Saakashvili and his party UNM from power. The new authority maintained the IDP Strategy and the Action Plan of the previous government, albeit with several amendments.²⁰⁹ The new government was aware of the fact that the international actors were continuously stressing the lack of transparency and a systematic approach for the durable housing program. The government had neither concrete numbers of the IDPs nor a standardized procedure for the assessment and allocation processes. Therefore, one of the first acts of the MRA was to adopt the Decree N320 on the “Procedures Governing the Process of Durable Housing Allocation”. The Decree not only set the rules and procedures for a scoring system but also allowed for the formation of a Commission, which would assess the applications of the IDPs for the housing program.²¹⁰ In our meeting, the MRA representative explained the scoring system as follows:

Since there were more than 50 thousand families to be resettled in their permanent dwellings, it was challenging for the Ministry. Yet, the more challenging task was to decide who needed these dwellings more. Thus, we created some criteria. All individuals of all households were scored. If they had the necessary score, they were given a new flat. If, for example, they were paying rent, disabled, old or poor, their score was higher than the average people and we provided them with new flats. However, for example, if they owned a flat and wanted another from the state, we did not give them the flat they asked for.²¹¹

In order to explain how this scoring system worked, the MRA representative also mentioned a housing program that they initiated as follows:

We had a project called ‘House in the village’. If a family had a high score and if they found a house in the rural area, we helped them. If the house was less

²⁰⁹ MRA. “2017-2018 Action Plan for the Implementation of the IDP State Strategy” <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5b3e0697c.html> (Accessed 30.09.2020).

²¹⁰ Those who had higher scores in the scoring system would be eligible to benefit from the program (The Public Defender of Georgia, 2013: 320).

²¹¹ Interviewee 76, Tbilisi, 15.10.2015.

than 18.000 GEL, we purchased the house for them. If its cost exceeded this amount, based on the number of the family members and their overall score, we could close the gap; otherwise, they had to pay the rest.²¹²

Another important contribution of the Decree was its approach to the IDPs living in private accommodation. In other words, the Decree did not distinguish between the IDPs living in collective centers or private accommodation. For instance, for the first time in 2013, the IDPs living in private accommodation resettled in a new settlement in Batumi along with the other IDPs living in collective centers (The Public Defender of Georgia, 2013: 318-320). This was indeed a shift in the MRA's approach. The previous government's Action Plan of 2009-2012 had already targeted the IDPs living in private accommodation and proposed them housing solutions depending on their conditions.²¹³ Yet again, although they were touched on in the plan, the priority was given to the privatization of collective centers and the IDPs living in those buildings. In a way, the IDPs in private accommodation were neglected up until 2013. Nevertheless, it was not only the government that neglected the needs of the IDPs living in private accommodation for a long period of time but also the international agencies and the local NGOs, which concentrated on the compact settlements and collective centers (The Public Defender of Georgia, 2010: 251; CoE, 2012a).

After standardizing the rules and procedures for the needs of the IDPs, the second necessity was to designate how many IDPs were actually residing in Georgia, where they were residing and how many of them were in need of state support. To this end, the MRA developed an IDP database in 2013. Between

²¹² Interviewee 76, Tbilisi, 15.10.2015.

²¹³ For instance, according to this plan, the IDPs, who were living in their own dwellings, were offered a rehabilitation if needed; the IDPs, who were hosted by others (relatives or non-relatives), on the other hand, were offered cottages in the lands which were already owned by the IDPs. Those who did not possess neither a plot of land nor a dwelling were provided with alternative housing options (cottages or rehabilitated flats) in the regions which the state determined as feasible.

August and December 2013, it conducted the re-registration of the IDPs.²¹⁴ During the registrations, a special group composed of the representatives of the UNHCR, the Public Defender of Georgia, DRC, NRC and Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) also monitored the process (The Public Defender of Georgia, 2013: 316; UNHCR, 2014: 3). According to the interviews I conducted with an official from the MRA and a representative of the Public Defender of Georgia, during this period the government showed willingness to cooperate with the above-mentioned prominent non-state actors also in the fields of needs assessment and monitoring.²¹⁵ For instance, in our interview, the representative of the Public Defender of Georgia explained their participation in the IDP issue as follows:

As the Ombudsman's Office, we monitored the state policies; we participated in the IDP commission, observed the IDP settlements and detected their problems. For example, in the previous year, we had 14 collective centers, which were evaluated as collapsing after expert examination. The MRA invited us to monitor and asked for our suggestions.²¹⁶

In parallel to the above-mentioned policies, in 2014, the last amendment was adopted in the IDP Law. One of the novelties of the amended law was the increase in the monthly allowances of the IDPs, which was increased to 45 GEL per person. In our interview, the representative of MRA explained the change in the amount of monthly allowances as follows:

A part of our budget is spent on the monthly allowances of the IDPs, which is 45 GEL per person for the moment. If the family's total income is above 1.250 GEL, we cut this support. But in case the person loses his or her income, we continue to pay this allowance in the following month. Also, if the family is poor, they are also financially supported by other state projects, but we do not

²¹⁴ MRA. "Mandatory registration of IDPs in Georgia-2013" <http://mra.gov.ge/eng/static/3181> (Accessed: 02.10.2020).

²¹⁵ Interviewee 76, Tbilisi, 15.10.2015 and Interviewee 77, Tbilisi, 22.10.2015.

²¹⁶ Interviewee 78, Tbilisi, 22.10.2015.

pay it. It is a project covered by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Affairs of Georgia.²¹⁷

Another prominent novelty was the change in the definition of IDP, which also started to recognize the children of the displaced as IDPs and hence entitled them to all the granted rights (NRC/IDMC: 2018; World Bank, 2016: 14-15). After the re-registration process, which ended in December 2013, the MRA announced the number of the registered IDPs as 259,247, in 2014. Since the addition of the ‘new IDPs/Saakashvili’s IDPs’, there have been no changes in the numbers in terms of new conflicts.²¹⁸ Yet, according to the data provided by the Georgia’s Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs, there are 301,000 IDPs living in Georgia as of December 2019 (IDMC, 2020: 1), meaning that the number of IDPs increased by 20,761 people between 2014 and 2019, primarily as a result of births in IDP families.²¹⁹

On February 13, 2014, the MRA also adopted a livelihood strategy for the IDPs. The strategy aimed to implement programs that would help the IDPs sustain their financial independence, which eventually would improve the socio-economic conditions and the psychological well-being of the IDPs. Since the MRA was abolished and its duties were transferred and distributed to other ministries in 2018, the strategy and its program were assumed by the Legal Entity of Public Law Agency for the IDPs, Ecomigrants and Livelihoods, an agency working

²¹⁷ Interviewee 76, Tbilisi, 15.10.2015.

²¹⁸ MRA. (2014). “IDP Figures”, <http://mra.gov.ge/eng/static/55> (Accessed: March 30, 2018).

²¹⁹ UN General Assembly, Status of internally displaced persons and refugees from Abkhazia, Georgia, and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia : report, 21 May 2019, A/73/880, <https://undocs.org/en/A/73/880> (Accessed: 01.10.2020).

under the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs (Bolkvadze, 2020: 2).²²⁰

Together with the new state policies for the IDPs, either through the acquisitions of houses and flats in rural areas and privately owned dwellings in the urban areas or through the rehabilitation of old settlements and the construction of new ones in all regions of Georgia, 973 IDP families benefitted from the program in 2013.²²¹ Since a standardized system was developed by the Ministry, the challenging housing program continued steadily in the following years as there was a significant decrease in the foreign aid for the IDPs.²²² The Georgian state provided accommodation to 1.855 IDP families in 2015, to 1.552 families in 2016, and to 1.865 families in 2017 (The Public Defender of Georgia 2015: 646; 2016: 453; 2017: 207). In 2018, 1.531 IDP families acquired the home ownership and 1.406 families resettled elsewhere (The Public Defender of Georgia, 2018: 270). In 2019, 59 percent of the IDP population in Georgia was still waiting their turn to be accommodated under the housing program of the state (CoE, 2018; IDMC, 2019: 1). According to the latest information provided by the Georgian government, 90.831 IDP families are registered in Georgia as of January 31, 2020. Either by moving to their new dwellings or acquiring the home

²²⁰ See also: OC-Media. “Georgia to disband ministries of culture, IDPs, and corrections”, 26 June 2018, <https://oc-media.org/georgia-to-disband-ministries-of-culture-idps-and-corrections/> (Accessed: 02.10.2020).

²²¹ See MRA. “Privatization of Living Spaces for IDPs”. <http://mra.gov.ge/eng/static/2653> (Accessed: 01.10.2020); MRA. “Acquisition of Individual Houses and Apartments for IDP Families” <http://mra.gov.ge/eng/static/3425> (Accessed: 01.10.2020); MRA. “Resettlement of IDPs to Rehabilitated and Newly Constructed Buildings” <http://mra.gov.ge/eng/static/2657> (Accessed: 01.10.2020); MRA. “Acquisition and Transmission of Privately Owned Accommodations to IDPs”. <http://mra.gov.ge/eng/static/2661> (Accessed: 01.10.2020).

²²² According to the data provided by the OCHA Financial Tracking Service, from 2014 to 2020, there was direct financial support for the IDP issue in Georgia only in the years of 2014 and 2016. In 2014, 124.719 USD was donated by the United States of America for the war-affected children and community in Shida-Kartli; and in 2016, 200.000 USD was donated again by the United States of America for the protection of the IDPs in Georgia. See: OCHA Financial Tracking Service. “Country snapshot for 2020” <https://fts.unocha.org/countries/82/summary/2020> (Accessed: 13.05.2020).

ownership of their existing dwellings, 41.263 IDPs benefited from the overall options in the housing program of the Georgian state. Remaining 41.738 thousand families are still in the waiting list (The Public Defender of Georgia, 2019: 317).

CHAPTER 7

IDP PERCEPTIONS AND NARRATIVES ON INTERGROUP INTERACTION, GROUP IDENTITY AND BEHAVIORAL PATTERNS OF GROUP MEMBERS

Based This chapter focuses on four identity formation aspects of IDPs based on the data obtained from fieldwork²²³. The first aspect is related with the effects of spatial environment (predominantly the compact settlements) and socio-economic conditions of IDPs on their identity construction. This portrays not only the living conditions the IDPs, but also their economic struggle on daily-bases. The spatial environment of IDPs and their socio-economic conditions determine whether IDPs tend to be isolated from or integrated with the host community.

Secondly, this chapter examines the effects of the external definition of IDP identity. It focuses on the inter-group relations of IDPs with the out-group. That is, it aims to elaborate the interaction of IDPs with the rest of the society, state and civil society organizations. As clarified in Chapter Two, the external definition has an immense effect on the identity formation of a social group regardless of whether that particular group is willing to assume such an identity or not. The elaboration in this part, however, is not solely related with how out-group approaches to IDPs (as a matter of fact, the approaches of state and civil society towards the IDPs are already discussed in Chapter Six). The way out-groups' approach is perceived by the members of the IDP community is explained in this part.

²²³ Out of 85 interviewees, 51 interviewees' direct quotations are utilized in this thesis. The responses of the remaining interviewees helped out to observe the general perceptions of both in-group and out-group agencies.

Accordingly, the third aspect discussed in this chapter is about the self-identification process of IDPs. Here, two facets of self-identification are highlighted. The first one is how external definition reflects on the self-identification process of IDPs and how it is in a way internalized. The second facet is how in-group favoritism and shared notions of IDPs, such as shared traumas, the attributed meaning to the homeland or the discourse of strong wish to return the homeland, strengthen their self-identification. The final aspect covered in this chapter is the behavioral patterns of IDP group members. This part elaborates the individual (social mobility) and group based (social change and social competition) strategies used for coping, improving, or transforming the IDP identity.

Overall, these four aspects are studied to create a correlation with the case of Georgian IDPs and the Social Identity Theory. It is frequently demonstrated in the previous chapters that during the early days of the independence and the following years, Georgia faced various challenges in economic and political spheres. That's why, when the IDP communities came to Georgia proper, absorbing such a huge number of people was difficult. According to the SIT, disintegration between competing social groups was unavoidable as the sources get scarce and the new-comers would pose an economic challenge to the host community. However, since both IDPs and the host community share the most salient group identity in the country, which is their Georgianness, can we really talk about such a fragmentation? And furthermore, can we really accept all Georgian IDPs, who were displaced from different regions in different periods, as one social group against the hosting community? Especially, one can presume that construction of an IDP identity would be unlikely since it is associated with vulnerability. Also noteworthy is that people tend to identify themselves with the social groups which sustain them a sense of distinctiveness and high self-esteem. However Social Identity Theory also suggests that, despite seeking high self-esteem and belongingness to the superior group, social groups may lag behind the group they are in comparison with. Put differently, in a social context which

engenders a ground for competition among social groups, the groups may position themselves in an “us and them” confrontation rendering one group superior and the other inferior. In this scenario, while the superior social group aims to maintain its superior position, the inferior group develops different strategies to gain a positive and definitely not-inferior social identity. As the strategies of the inferior group can be based on an individual attempt which is for social mobility, it can very well be based on group strategies such as social competition and social creativity (social comparison in different dimensions, exchanging the values attributed their group for better ones, or simply changing the group that they compete with).

7.1. The Effects of Post-Migration Spatial Environment and the Socio-Economic Conditions of IDPs on Identity Construction

I would not say much has changed for IDPs since the beginning. They were and still are the most vulnerable part of our society. Their social integration is going slowly, slower than we need. Still much needs to be done for improvement.²²⁴

The quotation above is neither a rare nor a unique comment on who IDPs are and what their position in the society is. On the contrary, it is one of the many responses of the out-group agencies. During the interviews, the term “vulnerability” was frequently expressed by experts, academicians, and politicians. There is ample research on the Georgian IDPs that focuses on this concept. According to Gegeshidze and Chomakhidze, for instance, this term not only refers to the absence of adequate physical conditions (i.e. adequate housing, employment, education, and healthcare) of IDPs but it also indicates the psychological difficulties they face, such as “discrimination, the stigma of being a social outcast and the uncertainty about the future” (2008: 33-34). Regarding the absence of adequate physical conditions, the spatial environments IDPs are living in and the unemployment problems are the leading handicaps IDPs are facing, which eventually causes social isolation and depression.

²²⁴ An expert from Eurasia Partnership Foundation. Interviewee 60, Tbilisi, 13.11.2014.

During the fieldwork in Georgia, the physical environment the IDPs are living in particular and the general environment that the Georgian society was living in as a whole were observed. Although Georgia had a modest economy with a GDP of 17.74 billion US dollars in 2019,²²⁵ the rapid changes caused by the transition to market economy were vividly observed in the country. Especially following the Rose Revolution in 2003, many Western companies opened branches in Tbilisi; many buildings were privatized, and the distinction between poor and rich increased perceptibly. In other words, poverty and unemployment became a nationwide problem, not necessarily particular to the IDPs. In brief, the living conditions of the IDPs observed in the fieldworks were not as expected.

7.1.1. The Spatial Environment of IDPs and Its Effect on IDP Identity Construction

The fieldwork studies involved visits to 12 different IDP settlements between 2014 and 2017, with two of them being visited twice (See Appendix 2 for the visited old and newly constructed settlements). The eleven settlements of the early-comers were mainly located at the city center and some at the outskirts of Tbilisi. Of the 11, only two were newly built and one was renovated. The remaining eight settlements, where the early-comers were living, were old and dilapidating settlements. The only settlement of the late-comers visited in South Ossetia was built right after the 2008 War and was 40 km away from Tbilisi and close to the South Ossetia border.

- 1) Hotel Sakartvelo was visited both in 2014 and 2015. It was a privately owned hotel. It partially functioned as a hotel as one part was occupied by the IDPs who came from Abkhazia. The building was at the heart of the Tbilisi city center. Due to its location, it was a very valuable facility,

²²⁵ Trading Economics, Georgia GDP, <https://tradingeconomics.com/georgia/gdp#:~:text=GDP%20in%20Georgia%20is%20expected,according%20to%20our%20econometric%20models>. (Accessed: 24.02.2021).

yet inside of the building, where IDPs were accommodated, the conditions were extremely poor. The rooms, which were not larger than 20 meter square, were not adequate for an entire family. Each room had a small toilet, and mostly the IDPs were keeping their kitchen utensils at the hall, out of their rooms. The IDPs did not have the ownership of the flats/rooms. Visiting this settlement twice in a row, the researchers observed the concern of the IDPs about having inadequate living conditions.

- 2) Hotel Kolheti was visited twice, in 2014 and 2017. It was a privately owned hotel, which was occupied by the IDPs from South Ossetia, who came to Tbilisi in early 1990s. It was in the center of the Tbilisi. Like Hotel Sakertvelo, the rooms in Hotel Kolheti were as small as 20 meter square and not adequate for the living of an entire family. The rooms had a small toilet and a small balcony, where the IDPs were keeping their kitchen utensils. At the first visit in 2014, the building was in extremely poor condition, and IDPs were accommodated in the entire building, except the first floor. During the second visit in 2017, the first floor was renovated and allocated to non-IDPs. Due to the ruinous and dangerous structure of the other floors, the government was evacuated and IDPs were resettled elsewhere. As stated by an IDP that continued to live in the building, six IDP households remained in the building as they did not score high enough to be resettled in the newly constructed settlement complex at Tsothe Dadiani Street. Those who were left in the hotel and interviewed at 2017 again were furious for the negligence of the state, and they gave some of the most negative responses to the interview questions. They were also some of the most vivid examples of alienation from the rest of the society, state, and civil society.
- 3) & 4) Alekseevka settlement, which was newly constructed by the government for the IDPs from Abkhazia, and the old IDP settlement

nearby were visited in 2014. Alekseevka settlement was the first newly established settlement that was visited. It was in the uptown of the Tbilisi, close to Tbilisi Airport and 20-30 minutes away from city center. The IDPs had the ownership of the flats, and compared to those old settlements, the living conditions seemed to be adequate, yet there were some problems regarding the living conditions. Three base stations were placed onto the roof of the building against the will of the settlers. Several ruinous buildings which almost collapsed were in the surrounding, where again the IDPs from Abkhazia were living. As stated by the IDPs who were settled at those buildings, the buildings had been once military lodgings. They did not have their ownership but were accommodated in them by residence permit.

- 5) Nadzaledevi Settlement was visited in 2014. It is a very old building, which was given by the government to the IDPs from Abkhazia. It was close to city center. The flats were more spacious than settlements visited earlier; still, the living conditions were extremely poor.
- 6) Tserovani Settlement was visited in 2014. It was located between South Ossetia and Tbilisi. It was a settlement of approximately 2000 cottages, which had been established by the Saakashvili government right after the 2008 War for IDPs from South Ossetia. IDPs have the ownership of the cottages. However, the settlement was quite isolated located in an extremely remote place. It was as if IDPs from South Ossetia were placed there to be out of sight. Although they were newly constructed, the interviewees complained a lot both about the poor quality of the construction material and the location of the settlement.
- 7) The settlement in Bagebi was visited in 2014. It was located near Tskneti, which was 8 km. to Tbilisi. Before it was occupied by the IDPs from Abkhazia, it had been a dormitory complex of the Tbilisi State

University. It was a gigantic building complex, yet it was ruinous. As they were once dormitory rooms, the living spaces were too small for a family to live in.

- 8) Settlements of Tbilisi Sea were visited in 2014. These settlements were located near the lake 'Tbilisi Sea,' which was away from the city center. The government settled the IDPs in those buildings which were very old and in extremely poor conditions. In fact, among the settlements visited, they had the worst conditions. As IDPs told, there were sewer flows and collapsing balconies, yet the municipality did not attend to the situation despite constant complaints. The IDPs did not have the ownership of the flats.
- 9) Settlement at the Temka District was visited in 2015. It was an old school renovated by the government for IDPs from Abkhazia. It was again close to Tbilisi Sea with some distance to the city center. Although not spacious, the interior of the building was in better condition than that of the other old settlements. Although their conditions were better than the other settlements, which were visited a year earlier, the responses of IDPs residing in this settlement were parallel to the responses of previously interviewed IDPs.
- 10) The settlement at Ninoshvili Street was visited in 2015. It was an old hospital building accommodated by the IDPs from Abkhazia. The conditions of this old building were extremely poor. The flats, which were once utilized as hospital rooms, were small and not suitable for the accommodation of an entire family. Some rooms did not even have toilets, so the residents would share common bathrooms. The responses of IDPs residing in this settlement were parallel to the responses of the previously interviewed IDPs, too.

11) The settlement in Guramishvili Street was visited in 2016. It is located on a hill at Tskneti which was 8 km. to the Tbilisi city center. According to the interviewees, all the buildings in that street were accommodated by approximately two thousand IDPs from Abkhazia. The flats were more spacious than other settlements, yet they needed renovation. The results of interviews with the residing IDPs demonstrated the existence of strong in-group favoritism and group solidarity. The interviewees were one of the best examples to the social group formation among the IDP community. In addition, the general attitude of these IDPs was similar to that of the participants interviewed within the past two years.

12) Settlements in Tsothe Dadiani Street were visited in 2017. These settlements were newly built for IDPs by the government. The interviewed IDPs who were early-comers from South Ossetia were once the residents of Hotel Kolheti. As reported by the interviewees, they were evacuated from the hotel due the dangers it posed and were resettled in these buildings, which were more central and closer to Station Square. Although the new flats were not spacious, the interviewed IDPs seemed to be content about their new dwellings. Not surprisingly, their old rooms at Hotel Kolheti, in which they had resided for more than two decades, were in extremely poor conditions. Therefore, unlike the IDPs, who were visited at Hotel Kolheti in the same year, 2017, the responses of these IDPs were more moderate. They showed higher signs of social integration mostly because they were content with their new dwellings. Still, it was observed that their IDP identity was intact since all the residents of the new settlement were composed of IDPs. The interviewees frequently brought this up, stating that living with fellow IDPs was ideal for them to continue their neighborly relations.

Apart from the newly constructed or renovated IDP settlements, which were the settlements in Tserovani, Alekseevka, Tsothe Dadiani Streets, and the Temka

district, the buildings were quite damaged, unsuitable for living, and extremely small. The research of NRC/IDMC, which also affirmed the problem of limited living space, demonstrated that, in collective centers, the living space is approximately nine square meters per person whereas it is 30 square meters for the rest of the population (2005: 7). Last but not least, many interviewed IDPs did not have the ownership of the flats, nor did they have anything such as a resident permit or a piece of document to prove that they were living there. Thus, they were anxious for their future. The only IDPs, who had ownership of their dwellings, were those living in the new or renovated settlements.

Some of the above-mentioned newly constructed or renovated settlements had also visible deficits, and their residents may also complain about several aspects of their new dwellings. Only the ones, who were evicted from Hotel Kolheti and resettled in the Tsothne Dadiani Street, were truly pleased by their new situation. As regards the negative conditions, Dunn describes the Tserovani settlement, which contains two thousand cottages for the 2008 War IDPs from South Ossetia, with the following words: “Clearly the object was to get bodies under roofs, bodies that were considered as little more than individualized shelter-needing biological units” (2018: 72). This description fits the complaints of the IDPs living in those cottages. Similarly, an IDP woman in her 40s stated the following: “These cottages are built for maximum of three or four people. Now we are living eight people here,”²²⁶ and, an IDP man in his 70s said:

We have no connection with the locals. These cottages were built solely for IDPs. They built them here to get rid of us. Look at the walls [he knocks the wall and a hollow voice comes], they are not concrete it is plasterwork, and we have no gas-line.²²⁷

²²⁶ Interviewee 20, Tserovani, 30.11.2014.

²²⁷ Interviewee 23, Tserovani, 30.11.2014.

Alekseevka Settlement was the first newly constructed settlement visited as part of the fieldwork in 2014. The conditions at this building appeared quite sufficient though the residents complained on several issues. For instance, three base stations of the second largest telecommunication company Beeline were placed onto the roof of the building despite objection petitions signed by the residents. Furthermore, an IDP man in his 70s describes the difficulties he and his wife went through when they came to this settlement:

When we [he and his wife] fled, we first went to some relatives, then to another, and again another. Then, the government gave us a flat, but the conditions were terrible. We lived there for some time, and suddenly, the government sent us here. It was against our wish, and it happened suddenly when it was the New Year's Day.²²⁸

It was observed that the settlements by the Tbilisi Sea, at Bagebi, around the Alekseevka settlement, and Hotel Kolheti had the worst conditions. The buildings by the Tbilisi Sea were like what NGOs and Public Defender's Office call as CCC" (collapsing collective centers). They looked like patch worked, makeshift buildings. An IDP woman living in one of those buildings complained:

The municipality, they do not help us. Last year the sewers overflowed but they did not help. They said 'it is inside the building so the problem is residents' not municipality's'. Our balcony also collapsed before. The conditions are harsh.²²⁹

An old IDP lady from Abkhazia, who resettled in a dilapidated building near the newly constructed Alekseevka settlement, explained how she ended up in this flat as follows:

The first time I went to Kareli [a municipality in Shida Kartli], the government gave me a flat. I cleaned it and started to live there, but then someone showed up and said that it was his house. Then, I went to relatives, lived there a little, and

²²⁸ Interviewee 17, Tbilisi, 26.11.2014.

²²⁹ Interviewee 31, Tbilisi, 03.12.2014.

then for four years I worked as an elderly caregiver. Finally, I came to Tbilisi. This building was once a lodging building for soldiers. I went to the government and asked for a petition to live here. I have the documents. There were no windows, no doors, I built them all and I now live here with my granddaughter and her family.²³⁰

In 2014 and 2017, interviews were also made at Hotel Kolheti, which was settled by IDPs from South Ossetia in early 1990s. Then, it accommodated only six remaining IDP households that were denied the new dwellings due to low scoring in 2017. The other residents were transferred to the new settlements at Tshotne Dadiani Street. The evacuation was no surprise as the building was extremely dilapidated.

In addition to the poor living conditions and spatial isolation in the settlements, IDPs continued to encounter several problems. Physical and mental isolation in the settlements, which lead to ineffective integration, unemployment, and even depression, are some alarming and most common themes in the related research (Gogishvili and Harris-Brandts, 2019; Koch, 2012; Salukvadze et al., 2013). According to the Gogishvili's and Harris-Brandts' research, the vast majority of the IDPs, especially the older generations, prefer to spend their time within the periphery of their collective centers (2019: 141).

The field research also revealed the extent of the effect of the spatial isolation, not only in the settlements that are located in remote areas such as Tserovani and Bagebi but also in those located in the city such as Hotel Sakartvelo. Several interviewees indicated their continuing psychological distress during the interviews. For instance, a middle-aged IDP woman from Abkhazia who resided in a room in Hotel Sakartvelo for more than 25 years stated:

I lost myself. I feel like I am nobody. I cannot afford to go to a concert or theatre. In Abkhazia, I was social, I liked ice skating and many more things to

²³⁰ Interviewee 18, Tbilisi, 26.11.2014.

do. Now my only purpose in life is to live for my daughter. I am waiting to die. This life is only stressful.²³¹

A remarkable response manifesting the genuineness of this problem was made by a male interviewee. During the interview, which took place in his room in the settlement in Bagebi (a former university dormitory), he kept looking at a photo on the wall, the photo of a hotel in Abkhazia he used to work. He said:

I don't leave my room, sometimes I even do not want to get off the bed. I wake up and look at this photo and think about my past, and at night, while looking at it, I hope to see Abkhazia in my dreams.²³²

The fieldwork data demonstrated that the spatial features of the compact settlements have an immense impact on IDP identity development. First and foremost, living in compact settlements inhibits IDPs from establishing a high self-esteem, causing them a challenge to develop a positive social identity. Physical and mental isolation in settlements, as well as living in poor conditions for more than decades, resulted in depression and failure to integrate with the host community. Constantly feeling neglected by the state is another obstacle to successful integration. As elaborated in the following sections, long-term isolation affects IDPs (especially the older generations) such that they prefer interacting with neighboring IDPs to interacting with the host community. Overall, their spatial environment inhibits IDPs to articulate the rest of the society and get them too stuck with gaining a negative social identity.

7.1.2. The Effects of Socio-Economic Conditions on the Identity Construction of IDPs

According to Salukvadze and his colleagues (2013: 34), Gegeshidze and Chomakhidze (2008: 34) and Åhlin (2011:18), spatial isolation which

²³¹ Interviewee 9, Tbilisi, 24.11.2014.

²³² Interviewee 26, Tbilisi, 02.12.2014.

concentrated on poverty causes a kind of social behavior that can be described as “social passiveness” or “passive IDP mentality”, which is also a major reason for the increase in the unemployment rates among IDPs. This argument cannot be validated by the field research of this study as it did not concentrate on this dimension. However, the feelings of IDPs can rather be associated with pessimism rather than passiveness. The field research pointed out several other important indicators regarding the higher unemployment rates among IDPs.

As regards the socio-economic conditions of the IDPs, most interviewees in the category of *out-group* such as academicians, experts, and politicians stated that the high unemployment rate is a nationwide problem and is not particular to IDPs. As expert interviews were conducted relatively earlier than the actual IDP interviews and as the overall unemployment ratio in the country was 16% back then, it was not expected that higher ratio of unemployment would be attributed to IDPs than to the rest of society.²³³ However, after the IDP interviews started, it was observed that the estimates of the experts were not accurate. In fact, the economic conditions of most IDPs interviewed were devastating. A vast majority of them were unemployed. A a-12-year longitudinal study conducted by Torosyan and his colleagues (2018: 1-3) demonstrates that IDPs find position in the labor force less than the general society with a ratio of 3.9% to 11.2% and they receive lesser wages by approximately 16%. Also, according to the report of the World Bank (2016: 37), IDPs cannot generally receive loan, start small businesses, since they do not have official home ownership. Consequently, they are in a disadvantaged position in the society, which directly affects their income ratios negatively. In fact, state assistance and allowances mostly constitute their income. That is, they are mostly provided with state assistance rather than employment opportunities. This situation was criticized by the interviewees. For instance, a male interviewee from South Ossetia said “there are factories from Soviet times, which are not working anymore. We collected petitions and applied

²³³ Caucasus Edition. “IDPs in Georgia: Still Waiting for Better Life”, 1 Nov 2013, <https://caucasusedition.net/idps-in-georgia-still-waiting-for-better-life/> (Accessed: 01.03.2014).

to the government and asked to work in these factories. They smiled to our faces but nothing more. I am still unemployed.”²³⁴

The preliminary research of this thesis pointed to another reason for IDP unemployment: lack of qualifications and job skills.²³⁵ However, the fieldwork demonstrated just the opposite. Most of the IDP interviewees were mostly very well educated and had good jobs in their homeland. The proficiencies of the IDPs varied from teachers, medical staff, engineers, architects, to factory workers, market workers, and land owners. Below is what an academician from Tbilisi State University pointed out:

While they were living in Abkhazia, their social status was high. And suddenly they were lowered to nothing. Especially the male members of the society... Women are very active. They were and still are. But it is not the same for men. When you go to their concentration places even in Tbilisi, you see them sitting in the yards, talking to each other. They don't try to find a job because they cannot find the same job they had in Abkhazia. Women are socially more active, and they can afford themselves by any kind of job. For instance, as a professor, I cannot be a garbage man, but women do not have these kinds of mental restrictions.²³⁶

A male IDP interviewee from Abkhazia similarly told the following:

I am an architect. I built big buildings in Gagra, Abkhazia. When I came to Tbilisi, I tried to find a job in my profession, but I had no network. Then, I found a job as a driver. I drove a minibus, which belonged to someone else. I was so ashamed to collect money from the passengers.²³⁷

²³⁴ Interviewee 15, Tbilisi, 25.11.2014.

²³⁵ See: Caucasus Edition. “IDPs in Georgia: Still Waiting for Better Life”, 1 Nov 2013, <https://caucasusedition.net/idps-in-georgia-still-waiting-for-better-life/> (Accessed: 01.03.2014).

²³⁶ Interviewee 61, Tbilisi, 17.11.2014.

²³⁷ Interviewee 10, Tbilisi, 24.11.2014.

According to many interviewees, mostly the IDPs but also some experts, the main cause of IDPs' failure to find jobs was the lack of social network. Many interviewees highlighted the necessity of social network in Georgia to find a job. An expert from CRRC explained the situation as follows:

In general, it is not surprising that they have high unemployment ratio because they have to find job in a completely different context. They lost their earlier connections, status, and familiar ways of doing things. And they had to start in a totally different environment. Tbilisi is a huge city, at least for Georgia. When most of these guys came to Tbilisi from different contexts, it was hard to get a job which matches their skills and status. Because no one recognizes these skills and status here.²³⁸

The same expert also pointed out the difficulties of the IDPs who had farming background:

Another problem is IDPs mainly are from rural areas. For instance, from Abkhazia... they left wonderful lands with sub-tropic climate. In Abkhazia, they had rich soil. It was easy to make money from agriculture thanks to the Russian market. Here and in the rest of Georgia, the climate is not the same, but they could grow anything there. The subsidy of the government and technology are not enough. We still cultivate the lands as our ancestors do. So the way they traded with Russia, they cannot do that here.²³⁹

Regarding the 1st generation of IDPs, who once had occupations and higher living standards in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, a respondent from one of the opposition parties added that "Besides networking problems, most of the IDPs have reached their middle ages here, where job opportunities are in scarce and where younger people are preferred."²⁴⁰ This view was also brought forward by many IDP interviewees. A female interviewee from Abkhazia complained about the situation as follows:

²³⁸ Interviewee 68, Tbilisi, 20.11.2014.

²³⁹ Interviewee 68, Tbilisi, 20.11.2014.

²⁴⁰ Interviewee 65, Tbilisi, 19.11.2014.

Throughout Georgia, people cannot find jobs in general, and unemployment is very high. Government pays a pension of 120 GEL to the elderly people who are above 65, but I am 40 years old. I cannot find a job because of my age. What do they expect me to do till I get 65? My husband had a hotel, and I was working in a medical center. Now I have nothing.²⁴¹

Although unemployment was observed more commonly in the first generation than in the 1.5th and 2nd generation of IDPs, the situation was not promising for the younger generations, either. The words of a young female IDP from Abkhazia clearly explain this: “I won the university exam, but could not pay the tuition, so I went to a cheaper university. Now I am working in a store. I am not working in my profession.”²⁴² Another female IDP from Abkhazia said “I am living with my granddaughter and her husband. They both graduated from university, but they both are unemployed.”²⁴³

The fieldwork data and related studies in the literature demonstrate that, although unemployment is a nationwide problem, IDPs’ unemployment ratio is higher than the average population’s. Having high social status at their places of origins, they used to work in their field of expertise. However, forced migration caused them to lose their social network and business network that would help them find employment in their new environment. In addition to all these, lacking state support for employment and business opportunities and being in need of state aid made it difficult for them (especially men) to develop higher self-esteem. As a result, the vast majority of IDPs were placed at the lower echelon in the society, which caused them to be associated with vulnerability and inferiority in their interaction with the host community.

²⁴¹ Interviewee 18, Tbilisi, 26.11.2014.

²⁴² Interviewee 5, Tbilisi, 24.11.2014.

²⁴³ Interviewee 18, Tbilisi, 26.11.2014.

After shedding light onto the socioeconomic conditions of the IDPs, it is of importance to elaborate on the interaction of IDPs with the Georgian state and civil society. This would help to analyze the impact of external definition of the authoritative bodies on the identity construction of IDPs.

7.2. IDP-State and IDP-Civil Society Relations: A Sphere of Disappointment and Mistrust

As stated earlier in this chapter, many out-group agencies emphasized that IDPs' integration process is slower than expected. Even though more than 30 years have passed from the first migration wave, integration of IDPs continues to be a controversial issue. Other research also marks this problem. For instance, according to a research of the UNHCR (2015a), only 57.3% of the IDP population believe that they are fully integrated. The remaining 33.3% think that they are partially integrated, whereas the 8.3% think they are not integrated at all. When asked whether they feel integrated in their new places of residences, participants got polarized between the 1st generation of IDPs and the remaining 1.5th and 2nd generations. The young generations vastly pointed out that they feel they are part of the society and integrated. However, for the older generation, integration was still a problematic issue. The report of UNHCR (2015a) indicates that only the 47.9% of IDPs over the age of 60 think that they are fully integrated.²⁴⁴ However, the responses of the more elderly participants were more problematic since the vast majority of them stated that they did not feel integrated to the society.

According to the above-mentioned UNHCR report (2015a) on Georgian IDPs, the state assistance is a necessity to feel integrated into society and to feel they belong to the country. The report indicates that 46.3% of the IDPs think that they would feel more integrated if the state supports their livelihoods, 20.4% think

²⁴⁴ The same research indicates that the 70.6% of the IDPs between the ages of 16 and 24 think that they are fully integrated to the society.

that the state should support them with new dwellings, and 10.7% think that the support should be canalized to better medical services. This data brings us back to the IDP-state relations. Although the state and civil society organizations' initiatives were already covered in the previous chapter, it is important to discuss how those initiatives are perceived by the IDPs and how they affect their identity construction and group behaviors.

As regards their relations with the Georgian state and civil society, IDPs' thoughts about the initiatives taken by the previous and current governments and the non-governmental civil society organizations (NGOs) and how they perceive the state's and NGOs' attitude towards them were probed. Their responses indicate that IDPs have a problem of trust with the government and have bitter thoughts about NGOs. Regarding IDPs' interaction with the state, most of the time IDPs supported the winning side in the elections. This is understandable as they are vulnerable and in need of the governmental support. However, years of negligence caused damage in IDP-state relations. Thus, respondents were disappointed with insufficient state attention, and they had no expectation from the state whatsoever. For example, an IDP woman from Abkhazia, who lives in an ex-dormitory which is currently an IDP collective center in Bagebi, explained her feelings as follows:

I do not expect anything from the government because 22 years have passed, three presidents have changed. No one did anything. They put us in this dormitory and that was it. We don't even have the documents for the ownership of this room.²⁴⁵

Similarly, an ex-combatant in the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, who said that he had no expectation from the government, further explained how he perceived the state attitude towards IDPs like him as follows: "I fought for Georgia from the first day of the conflict. I even have a medal for it. I am a fighter, but it is not

²⁴⁵ Interviewee 28, Tbilisi, 02.12.2014.

valuable for the government, otherwise they would treat me differently.”²⁴⁶ Although, those who do not expect any state support due to mistrust were mostly the old-comers from Abkhazia and South Ossetia who migrated in the early 1990s, new-comers of the 2008 War also shared similar feelings. For instance, a new-comer IDP from South Ossetia who was residing in Tserovani Settlement said, “I don’t expect anything from the government because they do nothing. I know if I expect something, it will not be fulfilled. Look at the heater, there is no gas.”²⁴⁷

Nevertheless, the frustration among the old-comer IDPs was more vivid due to the imbalance in state assistance. As stated in Chapter 7, the IDPs of the 2008 War were aided immediately not only by the state but also by the international actors. Even though the efficiency of the aid was questionable, obviously it was more than what was provided to old-comers. In addition to the initiatives taken by the government, another source of frustration among IDPs was the public statements of the state officials. The most dramatic example to these statements is Saakashvili’s referring to 2008 IDPs as ‘my IDPs’ and the old ones as ‘Shevardnadze’s’. Although this does not exist in the literature, almost all old-comers referred to the same incident during the interviews. For instance, an IDP woman from Abkhazia who was residing in a settlement near the Tbilisi Sea expressed her feelings about it below:

I do not expect anything from the government. They do not do anything anyway. Saakashvili described the IDPs from South Ossetia as ‘my IDPs’ and us as ‘Shevardnadze’s’. This is unfair. Why are people from Tskhinvali approached differently from the people of Sukhumi for instance? The government gave them many things. But we did everything by ourselves.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ Interviewee 16, Tbilisi, 26.11.2014.

²⁴⁷ Interviewee 21, Tserovani, 30.11.2014.

²⁴⁸ Interviewee 31, Tbilisi, 03.12.2014.

To better understand the out-group perception of the state-IDP relations and the attitude of the state towards IDPs, the same questions were asked to think-tank and NGO experts. An expert from ECMI (European Center for Minority Issues) pointed out the criticism of IDP organizations towards the initiatives taken by the government:

If you talk to IDP organizations, they are very frustrated, they always criticize the government. They have many claims, and they think that IDP interests are neglected. They are not receiving enough in Georgia, and that is why they are marginalized.²⁴⁹

The views of ECMI experts were validated in the other interviews with civil society organization experts, who specifically work on IDPs. For example, according to an expert from Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD), the underlying reason for the problematic relations of the state with the IDPs is the real nature of the governments' intentions. According to her, "IDPs were somehow cared by the government, but it is more politics than real care."²⁵⁰ Similarly, another expert from the Institute for the Study of Nationalism and Conflicts (ISNC) pointed out the following:

IDPS are a good tool for politics not only internally but also internationally. In internal politics, they are a very effective portion of the electoral group of the country, who would determine the new government. On the other hand, in international politics, IDPs are portrait of vulnerability. The governments seek international support by means of them.²⁵¹

Other research exists pointing to another perspective on the problematic IDP-state relations, which was also observed in this fieldwork. According to a research conducted by ISNC and the Synergy network (2015: 24), years of exposure to scorn and stigmatization by the state caused IDPs to feel

²⁴⁹ Interviewee 54, Tbilisi, 11.11.2014

²⁵⁰ Interviewee 70, Tbilisi, 02.10.2015.

²⁵¹ Interviewee 71, Tbilisi, 06.10.2015.

disappointed and become further marginalized. Many interviewed IDPs who showed signs of alienation from the state expressed their frustration which was caused by the unmet expectations such as medical and social care, employment and business opportunities, and most importantly housing support. An IDP woman in her 70s expressed her disappointment regarding the lack of medical assistance as follows:

I have no one. My son and my husband died. I am a woman of integrity. I have never ever asked someone for help. But I have an illness, and the government said 'no'. My social security does not cover my illness. I am so angry. I do not want to live in this country anymore.²⁵²

Another IDP woman, who complained about not receiving the pension that is given to the family members of the martyrs, said:

During the war, my husband lost his leg. We came to Kutaisi, and he had several operations, but he died anyway. The families of those who died during the war take pension, but they said that my husband did not die in the war zone but he died here. So they didn't give us any pension. I have a daughter who will enter the university exam, but I do not have money to send her to the university. I don't know what to do.²⁵³

Another IDP woman from Abkhazia, who thought IDPs were neglected and their demands were not heard, spoke similarly:

We have no help from the government. We collected petitions to demand building of a factory so that we could work there. They said 'no'. We asked them to build new dwellings where we could live. They said 'no'. We asked for credits to start our business, and they again said 'no'. Whatever we asked for, the answer was *no*. We cannot live a normal life. We feel insecure and unprotected. We feel like we are a small group of people that is not heard.²⁵⁴

²⁵² Interviewee 6, Tbilisi, 24.11.2014.

²⁵³ Interviewee 8, Tbilisi, 24.11.2014.

²⁵⁴ Interviewee 5, Tbilisi, 24.11.2014.

Also the IDPs, who had not been provided with new dwellings, complained about the state's scoring system. The distrust in the system, which was also pointed out by the Public Defender of Georgia (2013: 313), was uttered by many IDP interviewees. For instance, during the second visit to Hotel Kolheti, which at the time was evacuated, only six IDP households remained in the building. An IDP woman from South Ossetia, who came to the building in the early 1990s and belonged to one of the remaining six families, expressed her mistrust in the system as follows:

My brother died, and three children were left behind. In his funeral, people collected money to support us. We bought a flat, but then my mother had cancer, so we had to sell it. Even though we sold it later, our purchase was still documented in the state records. So the government told us we have money. According to the government, we are not eligible for their scoring system. They say 'you should collect your documents and wait,' but the building is decaying. Look at the conditions I am living in. Only six families have been left in the whole building, whose scoring was not enough. I applied everywhere... I tried my voice to be heard. I was on the news; you can see it on YouTube. But nothing happened. I feel so alone. No one is by our side. I don't trust them. I am so angry. I hate everyone. I hate the government. The thing is, there were IDPs who scammed the scoring system. They said they are divorced and took two flats, but actually they were only divorced on paper. I know these people, but the government says I have money.²⁵⁵

Another important issue about the state-IDP relations is the effect of IDP status on their identity construction. As asserted in the previous chapter, IDP status comes with several benefits including an allowance which was given to all IDPs until 2014. In 2014, the state policy on IDP assistance was changed. Those who have more than 1.250 GEL family incomes were excluded from the 45 GEL/person allowance system. During an interview, this change in the state attitude is explained by a CRRC expert:

The government is trying to move from status based assistance to needs based assistance. They say that, if the household is poor, it doesn't matter if they are IDPs or not, they are eligible for state assistance. This means that they are not eligible for assistance just because they are IDPs. This was not the case before. Before, these were two different things. The household would get assistance if

²⁵⁵ Interviewee 49, Tbilisi, 29.11.2017.

the family members were IDPs, whether they were poor or not. Now it is different. If the IDP family has an above-average income, their IDP aid is cut. When we are talking about this aid, it is ridiculous. It is not something that people can really survive on. It is rather a symbolic contribution from the government. But unfortunately people are so poor. They still want very much this assistance and apply to get it. When they lose it, they complain a lot.²⁵⁶

The change in this state policy is important in terms of how it is perceived by IDPs. Even though the IDPs with family incomes higher than 1.250 GEL were cut from the allowance, this does not mean that their IDP status is retrieved. However, for many IDPs, it was equal to loss of status. Therefore, even though the allowance is not significant enough to affect the family income, the allowance itself and hence the IDP status had a symbolic value for IDPs. This symbolic value indicates that they are remembered by the government (Worldbank, 2016: 32-33; Rekhviashvili, 2012: 130). An expert from a think-tank who is also an IDP herself explained her view about the cut of the IDP allowance:

I myself received this IDP allowance up to 2014. It was a very low amount, only 28 GEL back then. But for those who are living in compact settlements, that amount is still something ... Now this new government changed its policy. It was increased from 28 GEL to 45 GEL per person. But they stated that people who are employed and have more than 1.250 GEL family incomes are not eligible to take this allowance. I have salary higher than this, so I am not taking 45 GEL ... Just to be honest, this 45 GEL is nothing for me, but at least it was something that showed that you were remembered by your government.²⁵⁷

Besides the state and the ruling governments, an important actor IDPs are interacting with is the Georgian civil society. This interaction is quite important. It affects the identity construction of IDPs in terms of their representation by the Georgian civil society. In addition, the nature of this interaction determines the perception of IDPs and how they are provided assistance by the NGO sector (i.e. humanitarian aid, advocacy, conflict resolution, and durable solutions for

²⁵⁶ Interviewee 68, Tbilisi, 20.11.2014.

²⁵⁷ Interviewee 64, Tbilisi, 18.11.2014.

integration). As stated in the previous chapter, Georgian civil society is vastly composed of staff-based and donor-dependent NGOs, rather than membership-based associations, so they are highly dependent on donor funds, and hence donor agenda. That is why, during the 2008 War, when the international financial aid to the IDP assistance projects peaked the interest of Georgian NGOs was high on IDPs. However, as the time passed, the agenda of international actors shifted towards other directions, so did the agenda of the local NGOs. The Georgian civil society was also criticised for being donor dependent because they were inefficient on IDP assistance even when they were receiving high funds during the post-war period. In other words, since NGOs received predetermined project-based funds, their attendance to the real needs of Georgian IDPs was questionable. The most vivid example to the inefficiency of the NGO assistance was depicted by Dunn (2014: 298). Dunn pointed out that in the early days of the post-war period in 2008, certain programs funded by international actors encouraged breastfeeding among the displaced mothers. Dunn admits that encouraging displaced women for breastfeeding is indeed an important issue but she adds that it is only in third world countries where accessing to baby formula and clean water is unlikely. In Georgia, a developing country, it should not be difficult to find baby formula and access water resources (2014: 298).

The mistrust towards NGOs, in fact, is a nation-wide phenomenon. The NGOs are among the least trusted institutions in the country, which are also infamously referred to as “grand-eaters.” Therefore, they are not highly regarded by the general society (Gürsoy, 2011: 114-115). Like the rest of the society, IDPs have trust issues regarding NGOs, including the international ones, as they mostly fail to fulfill their promises of assistance. As one of the interviewees from Abkhazia said, “NGOs visit us, they promise that they would do something but they do nothing.”²⁵⁸ As a matter of fact, the distaste for NGOs was perceptible to the researcher and the translator during the fieldwork. When asked for consent for an

²⁵⁸ Interviewee 4, Tbilisi, 24.11.2014.

interview, the initial response of most IDPs was that they had no such intention since they thought the NGO staff was conducting an IDP project on IDPs. Upon learning that the interviewer was a PhD student from abroad, they welcomed the interview. When the reason for this distaste and unwillingness was inquired, an NGO staff, an IDP man from Abkhazia said, “They come here if they need to write some reports that they need to send to their international donors. They collect some statistics and leave. They do nothing else.”²⁵⁹ According to Dunn, this standardized NGO approach to IDPs turns them “into an anonymous, standardized example of humanity” (2018: 71), a statistic which is presented in the annual reports of these organizations, and something unlikely to be advocated in the governmental decision-making processes. When asked whether NGOs help them in any spheres; such as humanitarian, durable, or advocacy assistances, only a handful of IDP respondents stated that they were helped by the civil society organizations. The IDPs, who stated that they were helped by the civil society organizations were mostly residing in the Tserovani settlement, namely the new-IDPs. They stated that they were helped by FAO, which provided them with 50% of their expenses to establish their small gardens near their cottages.²⁶⁰ Apart from few participants, who told that they received assistance from NGOs, the IDPs always gave me the shortest answer in their entire interviews: “*Ara.*” It means “No, they do not help”.

In sum, the external definition is not limited with the host society. The state apparatus and the civil society organizations also have an effect on IDP identity construction. The fieldwork data revealed that Georgian IDPs trust neither the state nor the civil society. They thought that state was disregarding their needs on the most fundamental issues such as accommodation, employment, and healthcare. That is why mostly they were not keeping their hopes high on state support. Hence, the general feeling among the IDPs was gross negligence by the

²⁵⁹ Interviewee 16, Tbilisi, 26.11.2014.

²⁶⁰ Interviewee 22, Tserovani, 30.11.2014.

state; they thought that they were not heard by the officials. Similarly, the IDPs thought that civil society organizations did not really care about their needs including humanitarian and advocacy assistance. They thought that the NGOs were visiting them only for their own interest and that they were accountable to donors rather than the IDP community. The above-mentioned facts caused IDPs' further alienation. Also, the restriction of social assistance (i.e., monthly allowance) strengthened the status-based IDP identity.

7.3. The Inter-Group Relations of IDPs and the Host Community: A Fluctuation between Indifference, Unawareness, Alienation, Labeling, and Discrimination

As regards the inter-group relations of IDPs with the host community, a vast majority of the out-group agencies agree that most of the society tried to help and empathized with the IDPs. However, the Georgian IDPs still had difficulties with integration in the early years of independence, which as interviewees claimed was due to the economic and political hardships of the country. An expert from GRASS, who is also an IDP from Abkhazia herself, described the situation in those days as follows: “Our integration was very problematic. Georgia was politically troubled, and the economy was very weak. At first, people tried to help us, but then the relations became tense because everybody was poor.”²⁶¹ About the early days of their arrival and the attitude of the society, most IDPs stated that they were helped by the host community. Sometimes those people from the host community were relatives and friends, but sometimes they were total strangers. For instance, a 22 years old IDP woman shared her experience:

When my family migrated, I was a baby and my mother was pregnant to my sister. They had nothing, not even bread. My family was sitting on the street and

²⁶¹ Interviewee 9, Tbilisi, 18.11.2014.

didn't know what to do. A local Georgian woman took my family to her house, and we lived with her for two years.²⁶²

Although most of the interviewees shared their stories of how they were helped by the host community in the early days of the migration waves, some stated that soon the attitudes of the host community changed towards indifference. An IDP from Abkhazia viewed this as follows:

At first people helped, but then they quickly forgot us. They were tossing their glasses in the restaurants and having fun. I had difficulty in understanding those people who were having fun while the rest of the country was in such a pain.²⁶³

Similarly, an IDP man from Abkhazia pointed out the developed indifference of society as follows:

Regarding this conflict and its consequences, I lived it, so I realized what had happened from the first day of the conflicts. But for a big part of the nation, they do not understand what we have been through. More correctly, they are not interested, we are not a priority.²⁶⁴

Some of the IDPs also pointed out that they faced antagonism by some segments of the society. Those who showed a negative attitude towards IDPs blamed IDPs for leaving their homeland to the enemy (Abkhazians/Ossetians). They, in a way, became the scapegoat for losing the territory that 'historically, culturally, and politically' belonged to Georgians. For instance, a young woman from Abkhazia told a dramatic memory:

I was seven years old when we came to Tbilisi. Before we came, there had been a civil war in Tbilisi, and the conditions were not good. The people had a

²⁶² Interviewee 42, Tbilisi, 18.10.2015.

²⁶³ Interviewee 40, Tbilisi, 13.10.2015.

²⁶⁴ Interviewee 17, Tbilisi, 26.11.2014.

strangely bad reaction towards us. They asked ‘why are you still alive? Why didn’t you die there?’²⁶⁵

This negativity, however, was not shown by the entire host population. According to the IDP interviewees, the approach of the host society varies depending on which generation they belong to. For instance, most of the 1st and 1.5th generation IDP participants claimed negative attitudes were directed to them. On the other hand, 2nd generation IDPs mostly stated that they do not feel any negative attitude towards them. A 22-year-old Abkhazian IDP woman describes the situation best as follows:

I was three years old when we came here. If you ask my mom, she would tell that the reaction of the society was not good towards us. But I do not feel so. When people hear that I am an IDP, they never say something bad to my face.²⁶⁶

According to the interviewed out-group agencies, the negative attitude actually developed because of economic reasons. An expert from CRRC shared his views on this matter:

People were very supportive at first, in the first two years probably. But then, you know, IDPs began selling things in the streets. They provided their goods from the relatives in Abkhazia and sold them in streets at lower prices and sold them without taxes. Even though it was not relevant, people thought that everything got higher prices because of them. Even now, in the streets, there are mostly IDPs who are selling.²⁶⁷

Similarly, an academician from Tbilisi State University commented on this issue:

Of course there is some tension because, when the work is very scarce, sometimes there could be this kind of attitude. People may complain saying things like ‘why do they have jobs while we can’t?’ For example, these small

²⁶⁵ Interviewee 5, Tbilisi, 24.11.2014.

²⁶⁶ Interviewee 28, Tbilisi, 02.12.2014.

²⁶⁷ Interviewee 69, Tbilisi, 04.12.2014.

traders in the markets, they are IDPs. Yet, I do not know any major or minor conflict against IDPs.²⁶⁸

Most of the interviewed IDPs' responses are in agreement in that the economic conditions of the country and the scarce job opportunities are the main cause of the tension for the entire society. For instance, a young IDP woman from Abkhazia says "They say they have worse conditions than us but the government pays us not them. How could they say that? Our family members died, we lost our houses, and we were forced to migrate,"²⁶⁹ and another IDP woman who lived in a private dwelling says she had a similar encounter just before our interview. She told that, before coming to the interview, she had a repairman in her house, who was constantly grumbling about how *itolvlebi* had taken their jobs and how incompetent they were in their work.²⁷⁰ My interviewee was fuming about the repairman's attitude and his wording.

In Georgian society, IDPs are referred to as either *itolvili* (pl. *itolvlebi*) or *devnili* (pl. *devnilebi*). The literal translation of *itolvili* is 'a person who is forced to flee; driven out; refugee, displaced', whereas *devnili* is translated as the 'a person who is pursued; hounded, persecuted; refugee, displaced'. As the first interviewees were out-group agencies, they explained these two terms. They stated that *devnili* is the term that the governmental, civil societies, and media agencies use and that it is the politically correct one. Even though the word has no negative inclination, *itolvili*, is the politically incorrect term. During the interview, an expert from GRASS, who is an IDP herself, explained why *itolvili* is not a correct term for IDPs: "*itolvili* means refugee. Refugees are not IDPs. Refugees are those who are citizens of different countries. For example, we have Chechen refugees during this Russian-Chechen War, but IDPs are forced to migrate within their

²⁶⁸ Interviewee 68, Tbilisi, 20.11.2014.

²⁶⁹ Interviewee 5, Tbilisi, 24.11.2014.

²⁷⁰ Interviewee 42, Tbilisi, 18.10.2015.

own territories.”²⁷¹ When asked whether the society uses these two terms interchangeably and whether they use them with or without any negative connotation, the out-group agencies mostly stated that the society does not attribute any different meaning to these terms and therefore, not distinguishing between the terms, they use them interchangeably.

However, as regards how they feel about these two terms, most IDP interviewees showed their dislike not only for the term *ltolvili* but also for *devnili*. These two terms, in fact, have a major effect on the formation of IDP identity. Although the IDPs come from the same ethnic and religious background with the rest of the society, the use of these two terms separates IDPs from the society. The IDPs think that *ltolvlebi* is a reflection of ignorance, which puts the IDPs in a degrading position, or in an ‘outsider’ position. The term *devnilebi* is also perceived as degrading because it creates a notion of neediness and a notion of willingness in their departure. A male interviewee from Abkhazia said, “They call me with both terms, but I was forced to come here, so I am not *devnili*, and I am in my country so I am not *ltolvli*.”²⁷² Another IDP woman from Abkhazia similarly said that the following:

For us, *devnili* means, people who left their houses and now live in another place within the territory of the country. But *devnili* has an implication of *willingness* in it. But migration was not the choice of the IDPs. *Ltolvili* means someone who leaves her/his country. IDPs don’t like the word *ltolvili* because we are in our own country and also it bears extra negative connotations. For example, I have never said in my life that I am a *ltolvli*. I say I am from Abkhazia.²⁷³

The same interviewee further explains how the term gained a negative connotation by giving an example to its usage: “Nowadays I do not hear bad

²⁷¹ Interviewee 64, Tbilisi, 18.11.2014.

²⁷² Interviewee 10, Tbilisi, 24.11.2014.

²⁷³ Interviewee 53, Tbilisi, 01.12.2017.

examples of discrimination or hostile behavior except those who still say that ‘look at them, they are rich, and they still get governmental care. What kind of *ltolvilebi* are they? They are millionaires.’”²⁷⁴ Another NGO expert, who works on specific issues related to IDPs explained how these two terms were stigmatized over time:

The words are important here. In Georgian language, *devnili* is better than the other. Because, in my childhood I don’t remember *devnili*, I remember *ltolvili*, which is closer to a negative meaning, it was something related to the poverty. Its actual translation is *refugee*. But in Georgian, the word implies ‘the persons who strive for something’. The thing is, it doesn’t matter what it literally means. The important thing is what meaning this word has gained over the years and that it has gained a negative meaning. It suggests the meaning of a person who is poor and who has problems.²⁷⁵

The response to the question of how the IDPs were treated by the society varies depending on which side the respondents were in. Most of the out-group agencies think that IDPs were not a major concern of the society; thus, they were neither discriminated nor alienated. The society was simply indifferent to IDPs. As an expert from ECMI pointed out, “Georgian society does not care much about IDPs. It is not a priority for ordinary Georgians.”²⁷⁶ An academician from Tbilisi State University made quite a contrary claim: “Maybe a part of the IDPs think they are alienated, but they always try to exaggerate. For the new generation, there is no problem.”²⁷⁷ However, for many participants, the negative attitude of the society is a common experience. However, when asked whether they have ever faced discrimination or a negative attitude themselves, some shared what they experienced occasionally, but they were mostly reluctant to

²⁷⁴ Interviewee 53, Tbilisi, 01.12.2017.

²⁷⁵ Interviewee 75, Tbilisi, 14.10.2015.

²⁷⁶ Interviewee 54, Tbilisi, 11.11.2014.

²⁷⁷ Interviewee 61, Tbilisi, 17.11.2014.

answer the question and tell their experiences. An IDP woman from South Ossetia who came in 1990s as a teenager said:

My children were born here. I have a daughter and a son. Next week my daughter will have a birthday, but she is ashamed to invite her friends. She hides she is an IDP. My son goes to elementary school. He had very good relations with his friends, but then he told them he is an IDP. Now he is reserved because his friends insulted him. They told him he is a son of beggars.²⁷⁸

Another interviewee, an IDP woman from Abkhazia, also talked about what she recently experienced at a bank queue. She told that another customer pointed her finger at her in the queue and referred to her as a “crying *ltovli* beggar”. She cried while she was telling her story.²⁷⁹ Even though out-group agencies think that much is fabricated by the IDPs themselves, such stories indicate that they feel there are boundaries between them and the rest of the society and these boundaries cause further alienation. The following two quotations may shed light onto the different perceptions of out-group and in-group members. An academician from Ilia State University explains the interaction of IDPs and host society as follows:

IDPs are just citizens. They are not different from the rest of the society. At least the difference is not that conspicuous. It may be conspicuous somewhere where they still live together in some remote areas, some IDP buildings. That way they are separate of course, they have some sense of separateness, but it is much less. It is still there if they are concentrated. To some extent, they feel alienated but it is not as vivid as they feel.²⁸⁰

An IDP woman on the other hand expressed her feelings:

You know I am very angry to Georgian people because, when I say I am from Abkhazia, I do not mean I am Abkhazian. I am Georgian. I am Mengrelian also.

²⁷⁸ Interviewee 13, Tbilisi, 25.11.2014.

²⁷⁹ Interviewee 18, Tbilisi, 26.11.2014.

²⁸⁰ Interviewee 62, Tbilisi, 17.11.2014.

For me, Abkhazian or Georgian or Kakhertian people are all Georgian, but when we came here, we were named as IDPs. It was hard to understand people's reaction. It was uncomfortable because it was a stigma for us.²⁸¹

Although most of the interviewed out-group agencies think that the alienation of IDPs is minimal, they also think that, if alienation occurs, it occurs due to several reasons such as living in remote areas or compact settlements and having competition in economic sphere, which was already discussed in the previous parts of this chapter. An expert from CRRC stated the following:

Alienation cases are particular events, and they vary across communities. Sometimes IDPs are settled in remote areas, so they are alienated. Sometimes they are in areas where they compete with the local community, and this also causes alienation. So these factors can create some distance with the host community. But it is private sector; they went and bought apartment in separate buildings. There is no tension in there. The tension occurs when you segregate them. Their identity becomes underlined and emphasized. And when they compete with locals, it also creates alienation.²⁸²

The out-group agency pointed out another reason for alienation: the sub-ethnic Megrelian identity of those who came from Abkhazia. An academician from Tbilisi State University explained how Megrelian identity affects the intergroup relations and the alienation of IDPs from Abkhazia in the capital Tbilisi:

I think they are definitely alienated in Tbilisi, but not in Zugdidi. In Zugdidi their origin is the same, and they have many relatives there. They are much better integrated in Zugdidi. Here you also cannot say that they are not integrated. Many IDPs have high positions, earn quite well, and live here forever. And that is also one reason for the tension. Because these people from Abkhazia, Megrelians are very active. By contrast, the people from Tbilisi and also those from South Ossetia are slower and more passive. These active IDP people have an effective system of solidarity. If you go, you can see that all the drivers of the minibuses are IDPs. When one goes into a business, they bring in their own people.²⁸³

²⁸¹ Interviewee 54, Tbilisi, 01.12.2017.

²⁸² Interviewee 68, Tbilisi, 20.11.2014.

²⁸³ Interviewee 69, Tbilisi, 04.12.2014.

Being a Megrelian was brought out as a cause of alienation and integration problems by several respondents. Thus, an expert from ECMI was questioned on the relation between being a Megrelian and the complexity of the Abkhazian IDP's integration process. His response was as follows:

I do not think having the sub-ethnic identity is the main reason for alienation as I am, for instance, Megrelian myself. The main reason was the language. IDPs from Abkhazia, especially from Sukhumi and the northern part, did not speak Georgian. They spoke Megrelian. So, for some, integration was not a smooth process. But the Russian language was more of a problem than the Megrelian language. Because of using Russian language in their places of origin, their Georgian language was not proper. But they have already overcome this problem long time ago.²⁸⁴

He also continued with an interesting anecdote which shed light onto the host community's perception of the Megrelians and onto stereotypical approach to both identities as one:

For many people in the Georgian society, for instance here in Tbilisi, being Megrelian automatically means being IDP. Because most of the IDPs are Megrelians, so they think that all Megrelians should be from Abkhazia. Just recently, we had a population census. Officers came to our houses and asked questions such as how many people are living here. My surname is a Megrelian surname so the officer automatically decided that I am an IDP, and without asking me, she ticked off the IDP section in my form. But I am not an IDP, I'm just a Megrelian.²⁸⁵

The Social Identity Theory asserts that a conflict of interest may concretize the group boundaries of the interacting groups, and sometimes to keep the upper hand, the members of the superior group may promote the differences with the inferior group to maintain their group status, which holds power, prestige, or wealth. If the conflict diminishes, these boundaries may become faint (Tajfel and Turner, 2004: 280-281). The fieldwork data confirm the fluctuation at the group boundaries as well as group strategies of the host community on IDPs. The group

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Interviewee 54, Tbilisi, 11.11.2014.

attitude of the host community swings at multiple directions among cooperation, support, indifference, alienation, discrimination, and unawareness, depending on the different periods in the post-Soviet period. For instance, many interviewees (mostly the in-group members) claimed that in the early days of the independence and in the period of migration waves of IDPs, the general attitude of the host community was positive since that was a time of armed conflict with the obvious others (Abkhazians and South Ossetians). However, as the migration did not occur backwards and it was understood that the IDPs would not return to their places of origins, the reality hit the Georgian society: IDPs were an economic burden added to the already existing economic hardship of the newly independent Georgia. That was when IDPs started to face hostility, alienation, and in some cases discrimination. Different terms were used to address the IDPs such as *devnili* and *ltovli*, which in no time, turned into stigmatized labels. Although Georgian economy started to flourish in the late 2000s, many interviewed IDPs stated that they were exposed to alienation off and on (particularly regarding the state support they received i.e. monthly IDP allowances, housing and other social benefits). Finally, it was observed that, as most of the IDPs from Abkhazia have Megrelian sub-ethnic identity, the host community may consider IDP and Megrelian identities as one.

7.4. The Effects of External Definition and Inter-Group Relations on the Self-Identification of Georgian IDPs

The IDPs of Georgia are not a homogeneous group; it is comprised of people who migrated from different regions in different periods. An interview item asked out-group members whether they think these groups of people resemble each other; the answer was “no”. So the differences were probed. An academician from the Tbilisi State University, Department of Psychology emphasized the psychological differences she observed in Georgian IDPs. She stated that IDPs from Abkhazia were more talkative and expressive, thus they recovered their traumas and move on in their lives more easily. On the other

hand, IDPs from South Ossetia were more self-restrained and under the effect of trauma, so they were not good at expressing their feelings.²⁸⁶ As this is not a psychological study, it is not possible to deduce if they have overcome their traumas or not, but their inability to express their feelings was also observed in this study. Indeed, the interviews with IDPs from Ossetia took less time as they expressed their feelings less, told less, and remained reserved. On the other hand, IDPs from Abkhazia were expressive and outspoken. This issue was discussed with an expert from ISNC, who believed cultural/regional behavioral patterns played an important role in this tendency. She added:

First of all, they are of different groups, well it is not ethnicity but it is sub-groups so to say. These people from Abkhazia, they are mostly Megrelians. They are more sentimental. South Ossetia IDPs are more realistic people. On the one hand, most of the South Ossetia IDPs had lived in their places of origin up until the 2008 War. So, they lived with Ossetians after the earlier conflicts. Abkhazia IDPs on the other hand have been living in poor conditions for more than two decades. Their vision for their place of origin is more theatrical, more mythical because what they remember is pre-war conditions. Also, Abkhazia IDPs are more intellectual than the South Ossetia IDPs. Abkhazia was a more developed region than South Ossetia. The tourism sector and industry in Abkhazia were developed, whereas in South Ossetia, people were mostly working on agriculture.²⁸⁷

It was also observed that the IDPs, who are coming from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, have no connection with each other. Actually, IDPs from South Ossetia, who came to Georgia proper in different periods, also have no connection with each other. First, they have loose networks in general. Secondly, the new-comers are immediately moved to the regions bordering South Ossetia by the state, so they have no physical connection. In addition, IDPs from Abkhazia think that the IDPs from South Ossetia receive greater support from the government, yet the South Ossetia IDPs think that Abkhazia IDPs have more group solidarity. At this point it is sensible to raise two questions: Can we consider them as a single social group? Can we consider IDP identity as a salient group identity for the

²⁸⁶ Interviewee 79, Tbilisi, 05.12.2016.

²⁸⁷ Interviewee 71, Tbilisi, 06.10.2015.

entirety of IDP community? The responses of both out-group and in-group members demonstrate that the answer to these two questions is ‘yes’.

First of all, these communities did not bear negative feelings towards each other. On the contrary, they had strong empathy for each other. For instance, about the 2008 war, the IDPs from Abkhazia and South Ossetia who came in 1990s all said how sorry they were for the new IDPs. They all stated that their trauma came to surface again. For instance, an IDP from Abkhazia shared her emotions for the 2008 War and the new migrant group as follows:

2008 means depression to me. It was very stressful. We were instantly back in those hurtful and anxious emotions again. We knew what they were going through. So we learnt where they resettled, collected some clothes and home supplies for them, and brought these things to them.²⁸⁸

More importantly than their good sentiments for each other, the reason why IDPs must be considered as a single social group and IDP identity as a significant identity in Georgia is the immense effect of external-definition and intergroup relations with the host community. In other words, how IDPs are despised by terms as *devnillebi* or *ltolvlebi* and how they are approached by the rest of the society affects their self-identification. About whether IDP identity is salient, most out-group agencies thought that being an IDP is still a major identity, yet for some, its effect is decreasing with the rise of the new generations. For instance, an academician from Illia State University expressed his views as follows:

It is one of the signifiers in their identity, but in my impression, “I am IDP” is not the main. That is not my feeling at least, but again I am not IDP myself. Being a Georgian, being a member of the Georgian Orthodox Church, or voting for a particular political party may be more of a signifier, but again, being an IDP is an important signifier. It also depends on the generation. For the older generation, it means a lot more because they feel displaced and don’t feel

²⁸⁸ Interviewee 35, Tbilisi, 05.10.2015.

integrated. For the younger generation, they have no childhood memory in Abkhazia or South Ossetia, so for them it is less important.²⁸⁹

An interviewee who is an expert from ECMI pointed out that the IDP identity is still significant for the IDP community:

I don't agree that this identity is fading because, for instance, I teach courses in the university and, in each class, I have IDP students. When I ask them to introduce themselves, they always underline that they are IDPs. Although they were born here, since they have this IDP ID card, this is some kind of a stamp, and they cannot run away from this identity. For their families, it is also very important.²⁹⁰

Regarding how intergroup relations affect the IDP identity in Georgia, an expert from Synergy Network shared an anecdote of his IDP friend:

An IDP friend of mine once told me that he left Abkhazia as a kid and resettled in Poti, one of the seaside cities of Georgia. When he went to his new school, his classmates prepared a bag for him. There were clothes in it. He said he didn't want to take the bag because it was hurtful, his pride was broken. Even after the years, he still recalls the day. He did not ask for help, but at the same time he admitted that he needed those clothes. And he had to wear them. In fact, he was very rich and used to own several houses at fancy districts in Abkhazia. And he said that being an IDP not only financially pushes one to the limits but also mentally leaves scars in one's life.²⁹¹

When asked if the IDP identity can be considered as a social identity and if IDPs describe themselves with this identity, the same expert responded said this: "Not only IDPs themselves, but also members of the society describe them with this identity."²⁹²

²⁸⁹ Interviewee 62, Tbilisi, 17.11.2014.

²⁹⁰ Interviewee 55, Tbilisi, 11.11.2014

²⁹¹ Interviewee 75, Tbilisi, 14.10.2015.

²⁹² Interviewee 75, Tbilisi, 14.10.2015.

And then the same question was cited to IDPs. Their responses confirmed that IDP identity is a significant identity for this forced migrant community whichever place they came Georgia proper from. For instance, an IDP woman from Abkhazia in her 20s stated the following:

When you become an IDP, your identity also changes. Probably it is a psychological effect. When you constantly hear from everybody that you are an IDP, you become one. And when you are asked where you are from, you do not say 'I am Georgian' or 'I am Tbilisian'. You answer them 'I am an IDP from Abkhazia or from South Ossetia.'²⁹³

Another IDP woman from Abkhazia similarly said "Being an IDP is a very bad feeling. When you are an IDP, it means that you left what you love. It is embedded to the inner parts of your heart, but what can you do?"²⁹⁴ Similarly, an IDP woman in her 60s, who came with the 2008 War from South Ossetia, told that "It is a reality that I am an IDP, but it is not a problem for me. I feel I am an IDP."²⁹⁵ Or another IDP woman, whose family came from South Ossetia in the early 1990s and who was a 2nd generation IDP stated, "Being an IDP is a normal thing for me. Most of my friends are from South Ossetia, so being an IDP does not bother me".²⁹⁶

According to the Social Identity Theory, to develop a group identity, the cognitive stage of social identification is needed. In other words, categorizing one's social environment or external definition of one's identity is not enough to form the group identity. An identity only occurs if the holders of that identity accept and internalize it. Hence, it is a self-evaluative process. The above-

²⁹³ Interviewee 42, Tbilisi, 18.10.2015.

²⁹⁴ Interviewee 46, Tbilisi, 06.12.2016.

²⁹⁵ Interviewee 24, Tserovani, 30.11.2014.

²⁹⁶ Interviewee 51, Tbilisi, 30.11.2017.

mentioned responses given by both in-group and out-group agencies indicate that the effects of external definition and the inter-group relations cause a forced self-social identification for IDPs. This categorizes them as a single unit that shares the same group identity, whether they are fine with it or not. The field research demonstrated that the self-evaluation process of IDPs is strongly influenced by external definition. The field research in this sense coincides with what Goffman argues about the construction of stigmatized group identity. In Goffman's approach, the members of an inferior social group avoid social comparison with the in-group members. This helps them restore their self-esteem and enhances in-group cooperation (Padilla and Peres, 2003: 48; Carneva, 2007: 10-11). Hence, internalizing the IDP identity and forming a social group grant IDPs a sense of distinctiveness and belonging. To this end, the following section evaluates the notions, which distinguish IDPs from the host community and which strengthen their IDP identity.

7.5. Shared Notions That Strengthen Group Identity of Georgian IDPs

During the interviews with the IDPs and occasionally with out-group agencies, it was discovered that several notions strengthen the group identity of IDPs, such as the shared trauma of loss, forced migration, the perception of homeland, the strong wish of return to their places of origins, and their in-group favoritism. These four notions were shared by almost all the interviewed IDPs.

7.5.1. Shared Trauma of Loss, and Forced Migration

“One day we had everything, and the next day nothing”²⁹⁷

The migration to Georgia was catastrophic for the IDPs, regardless of whether they fled from Abkhazia or South Ossetia, in early 1990s or 2008. IDPs came to the inner parts of Georgia in various ways. The IDPs from Abkhazia came by

²⁹⁷ Interviewee 4, Tbilisi, 24.11.2014.

their own means, e.g. by ships, by governmental planes, or on foot. Those from Ossetia came on foot or by private- and state-owned buses. In some cases, some IDPs from South Ossetia had to migrate twice, once in early 1990s and once again in 2008. The item that probed IDPs' migration stories was the most sentimental interview question. Despite the many years that have passed, most of the IDPs could not recover from the trauma. When they were forced to migrate, many families were separated since the older generations stayed back in their houses to protect them; many family members died due to wars or post-traumatic health problems; many never had the chance to return to their homes, and they all lost all their belongings. That is why all of the interviewees told the same thing, "We lost everything".

This section presents several migration stories belonging to IDPs from Abkhazia and South Ossetia who came in early 1990s and in the 2008 War. They were chosen purposefully to represent interviewees from different generations and with different trauma and distress levels. An IDP woman from Abkhazia, who was 21 years old at the time of the interview and thus was born in Tbilisi, told the story of her family:

When my mother and her parents fled from Abkhazia, she was pregnant to me. My father stayed back and joined the war, but his leg got injured. He recovered and returned to war, but this time he died there [she had breathing problem and used her inhaler] ... My mother couldn't overcome the loss of my father.²⁹⁸

Although many stories about loss of family members were told during the interviews, this particular interview was unforgettable as this IDP woman delicately opened a photo album and showed a photo of her parents. It was actually two photos, a photo of her father and one of her mother. The photos were attached to one another as if her parents were hugging each other because it was the only photo left from her father.

²⁹⁸ Interviewee 28, Tbilisi, 02.12.2014.

An IDP from South Ossetia who came in Tbilisi in the early 1990s also shared her story:

When the conflict broke out, I took my daughters to my brother, who was living in Kaspi [a city close to South Ossetia border]. Then, we returned our home, but after a year the conflict grew violent. When the bombings started, we hid in the basement of our building. Then, we came here. I had nothing but my hammer. I clasped that hammer till the end. It was to protect my daughters.²⁹⁹

Below is the story of an IDP woman from Sukhumi:

I was living with my three daughters and my husband in Sukhumi. I was working at a laboratory, and my husband was a technician at the bus terminal. My house was close to my workplace. While I was at work, I heard strange voices and saw military tanks in the streets. I ran to my house. At that time, we had house guests, my relative's sons... My husband brought the car and took my daughters and my relative's sons. There was no room for me, so I stayed back. He took them to Tbilisi, and then returned for me. We stayed in Tbilisi for a while. Then, Shevardnadze told that we could return, so we did. We changed our broken windows and continued our life. But the bombings started again on September 16. It was horrible [she starts crying]. It was impossible to stay. I took my daughters and went to the airport. It was a mass. The crowd was crushing each other to get to the plane. There were injured people, deceased bodies, women, and children. I passed my daughters to the plane. I even did not know where it was going to go. I just wanted them to be safe. At first, they did not let me get in with my daughters, but I brought medicines with me. When I told them I had medicines, they let me in. The plane landed in Tbilisi. A family friend took us her home. For a year, we lived in her underground cellar. It was horrible. Then, my husband heard that a hospital took IDPs in, so we came here. For the last 21 years, we have been living in this room. We still wait for the government to give us a flat.³⁰⁰

Another 80-year-old male interviewee, who became an IDP after the 2008 war, from South Ossetia told his story:

One morning, I woke up and went out to check on our animals. Then, I saw bombings. I ran back to house and told my family to escape. I sent them away and stayed there till the 15th of August. I hid in my house. I thought it would be over, and I didn't want to leave my house. But it became difficult, and I decided

²⁹⁹ Interviewee 12, Tbilisi, 25.11.2014.

³⁰⁰ Interviewee 40, Tbilisi, 13.10.2015.

to leave, but it was very difficult to pass the border. There were Russian Army and Chechen bandits on the roads. The bandits were taking everything from people. Before I decided to escape, they (Ossetians) came to our town. They caught my neighbor and gave him a torch. After stealing everything from his house, they told him to burn his own house, otherwise they were going to kill him. My neighbor torched his own house. He was crying. After a month he died because of sorrow. On the road, I saw all the houses were burning. I learnt later that they burnt my two houses as well.³⁰¹

His wife added, “Look, these are my medicines [shows her injections and cries]. I have to take them, I have neurosis. They killed my son. They bombed him, while he was working on the border security.”³⁰²

An IDP man in his early 20s, who migrated from South Ossetia to Tbilisi during the 2008 War, shared his migration story:

When the conflicts started, many people in the conflict zone came to our city because they thought that the city would be safe. There were also people from Georgia in my city because it was summertime, and people were chilling in their summer houses. So the city was crowded. My father said that the situation seemed to get harder and it would be safe to go to Tbilisi just temporarily, so he sent us here. Two weeks later, they occupied the region including my city ... After Ossetians occupied the whole region, Russians closed the borders. We then heard that, when the Ossetian military came to my city, not only Georgians but also Ossetians were afraid of them. We know that 60 to 70 percent of my city’s people hid in the forest maybe for one month. When the killings started, we lost contact with my dad for two days. The last time we spoke to him, he told us he was coming to Tbilisi with a friend, but then we heard nothing from him. We managed to find his friend and asked about my father, but he was confused, he didn’t know my father’s plan to come with him. Then some people told us they saw my father at the station, but he couldn’t get a vehicle because he loaded other people, women and children, onto the vehicles instead. Then he tried to pass the border on foot because there were no cars left. But it was impossible. The border was blocked by the Russian soldiers. He returned to city and somehow managed to come here. When we came to Tbilisi, we first stayed at a father’s friend’s house, then resettled at the National Center for Geography Institute. Then this building was sold by the state, and people were kicked out. Some were given cottages elsewhere, and some got compensation money. So my family now lives in Tserovani settlement, the biggest compact settlement in Georgia. I am living in Tbilisi and working here. My mother was a hairdresser

³⁰¹ Interviewee 22, Tserovani, 30.11.2014.

³⁰² Interviewee 21, Tserovani, 30.11.2014

and my father was a former chief of police. So it is extremely difficult for them to return as now there is a new Ossetian authority there and my father was a police officer of the old Georgian authority. When they came, they couldn't find jobs. My mother took temporary jobs, but my father just found a job two days ago after all these years.³⁰³

An IDP woman from Abkhazia explained how trauma and depression were a constant condition in her household and told about her great-grandmother and her grandmother's story:

When we fled from Abkhazia, my grandmother's mother refused to flee and stayed at her home. She was old. So her son, the brother of my grandmother, stayed with her. But then the Abkhazians killed him. My grandmother asked for help from the Red Cross, and they helped to bring my great-grandmother to us. We lived all together for six years in room at a collective center. But my great-grandmother had dementia because of the trauma. She didn't know who she was or who her daughter was. It was very difficult for my grandmother. She always searched for her brother's grave. Even after 22 years, she continued mourning, wearing all black. She was telling that she would not carry any color other than black until she would find her brother.³⁰⁴

As discussed in Chapter 2, a social group is a "cognitive entity" that is recognized and found meaningful by its members (Tajfel, 2010a: 80). Hence, it provides a sense of belonging and distinctiveness. What bring group members together are the commonalities among them. In the previous section of this chapter, it was explained that IDPs from different regions have a strong empathy for one another even though they have no connection with each other and have different cultural/regional characteristics. They believe that only IDPs like themselves would understand what another IDP has been through. An IDP woman from Abkhazia expressed her feelings for other IDPs as follows: "War is war. Regardless of whether it continued for only five days or five years. People

³⁰³ Interviewee 41, Tbilisi, 14.10.2015.

³⁰⁴ Interviewee 42, Tbilisi, 18.10.2015.

died. People lost their loved ones and everything they had. And most importantly, they had to begin life again the same way.”³⁰⁵

7.5.2. In-Group Favoritism

Reasons such as living in cramped settlements and mostly similar socio-economic conditions, sharing the same kind of trauma, having similar perceptions of homeland and return, and feeling the same way when looked down by the society strengthened their group boundaries. In fact, in an early research by NRC, it is reported that between 1994 and 1996, IDPs wanted to move to collective centers to “have better access to humanitarian aid, and not to burden host families”, yet there was one another major reason for doing this: “the desire to stick together.” (NRC/IDMC, 2005: 59). The same report also indicates that the increase in the collective centers caused IDP-host community relations to be “less friendly” (NRC/IDMC, 2005: 78).

The choice of sticking together, of course, cannot be solely related to a matter of choice. The societal reaction was also a motive. During our interview with an ECMI expert, the interviewee explained how he viewed intermarriage of IDP and host community members:

If a boy decides to marry an IDP girl, his family won't be happy. I know many examples... Especially if the girl is from an IDP settlement. It indicates that she is poor... Even within the Megrelian community, in Zugdidi, you know IDPs are mostly Megrelians. Even if a non-IDP Megrelian decides to marry an IDP, it creates problems because IDPs still are not proper citizens.³⁰⁶

Similarly, an expert from the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD) held the same view on IDP marriages. She said, “Even young people, who left Abkhazia as children, want to marry IDPs. They think

³⁰⁵ Interviewee 54, Tbilisi, 01.12.2017.

³⁰⁶ Interviewee 54, Tbilisi, 11.11.2014.

that they can understand each other because they suffered the same problems.”³⁰⁷ Another IDP interviewee from Abkhazia, who was talking about family members, said, “My son recently married a girl. She is also an IDP. It turned out that her father was a friend of mine from Abkhazia”. His mention of her daughter-in-law being an IDP was remarkable, so he was asked if it is important for them to marry their son to an IDP rather than a local girl. He said, “It does not matter, but it is better.”³⁰⁸

During the interviews, IDPs attributed their in-group favoritism to various reasons, including similar socio-economic backgrounds, living compactly in collective centers, sharing the same trauma, coming from the same region, and experiencing the same negative attitude of the host community. For instance, an IDP man from South Ossetia, who came to Tbilisi in early 1990s, made a remark about the significance of economic conditions: “The reality of the world is, rich belongs to rich and poor belongs to poor. Unfortunately, my side is the latter one.”³⁰⁹ Another 2nd generation young IDP woman from South Ossetia, who lives in the newly constructed IDP settlement in Tsotne Dadiani Street, pointed out the importance of living in the same compact settlement and coming from the same background by saying “We have good relations in this apartment because we live altogether with other IDPs”. And she added that all her friends are from Tskhinvali who are IDPs like herself.³¹⁰

Concerning the reaction of society towards them, an IDP woman from Abkhazia responded angrily, saying “very bad.” She said that she did not want her daughter to marry a local. She was living in Tskneti, a district at the outskirts of

³⁰⁷ Interviewee 70, Tbilisi, 02.10.2015.

³⁰⁸ Interviewee 10, Tbilisi, 24.11.2014.

³⁰⁹ Interviewee 15, Tbilisi, 25.11.2014.

³¹⁰ Interviewee 51, Tbilisi, 30.11.2017.

Tbilisi, where IDPs were living compactly. Her response regarding her relations with other IDPs was as follows: “We live like a big family. We are glad for our success as IDPs. We are proud. We are living altogether here, maybe more than two thousand IDPs.”³¹¹

Another IDP woman from Abkhazia shared her views on the importance of regionalism and shared trauma:

For my father, if someone is an IDP, he feels more responsible for this person. Maybe it is a group character. A few days ago, we went to a wedding. We met a woman who was from Sukhumi. Instantly they clung and had a connection. They promised to meet again. It is because they are coming from the same region and experiencing the same trauma. They understand and have empathy for each other.³¹²

The interview also probed into whether IDPs have group solidarity or not. They commonly stated that IDPs have not got a formal sense of solidarity that unites all IDP communities in Georgia. That is, there is no holistic initiative such as an association or a union. There are of course several IDP NGOs, but these organizations are limited to a small number of people and do not reach all IDPs. The nature of such group solidarity and its reasons will be elaborated in the following parts of this chapter. At this point, it should be noted that the type of solidarity IDPs have is based on kinship, neighborly relations, and common places of origin. IDPs stated that, although they do not have a formal unity, they have solidarity with their neighbors in the collective centers and with their relatives. According to an academician from Tbilisi State University, solidarity based on kinship and neighboring is more noticeable among IDPs from Abkhazia than those from South Ossetia due to their regional characteristics.³¹³ Some IDPs also confirmed this view. For instance, an IDP woman from South Ossetia who

³¹¹ Interviewee 43, Tbilisi, 06.12.2016.

³¹² Interviewee 53, Tbilisi, 01.12.2017.

³¹³ Interviewee 69, Tbilisi, 04.12.2014.

came to Tbilisi in early 1990s said, “IDPs from Abkhazia have a stronger network. This is their character; we are more individualistic people. It would be nice to have such a network.”³¹⁴ Likewise, the most common reply of IDPs from Abkhazia was “we are like a family, we help each other”. An IDP from South Ossetia reported that they also have solidarity in their compact settlement:

We do not have a formal type of solidarity, but we are looking after each other with my neighbors. This is a building only IDPs are residing in. I have difficulty to walk, so my neighbors go and do my grocery and other things. Every day, they come and check on me to see I am alright.³¹⁵

An academician from the Tbilisi State University, Department of Anthropology gave a detailed response about how IDPs form and practice this in-group solidarity:

They are trying to maintain social and especially economic contact within the group. Here the major role belongs to mutual assistance during those not happy times. To this end, they have activated the traditional Georgian ethnographic practices through supporting kin group during funerals, weddings, during everyday life through supplying what is needed. For this, some people are responsible for organizing help not only for the kin but also for neighbors who come from their native villages or cities. And this creates strong physical connection even if they don't live in the same place. For instance, if one of the kin is living in West of Georgia and the other in South Georgia, they still are responsible for taking care of each other and keeping in contact ...

The main actors of the community are first of all the spiritual leaders. They are not necessarily from official spiritual bodies, but they are respected people of these communities. These can be old as well as young people who have different features that attract the members of the society and raise their respect.³¹⁶

As discussed in Chapter 2, according to the Social Identity Theory, even in the small scale laboratory experiments, participants generate in-group favoritism and out-group differentiation. Nevertheless, the fieldwork data demonstrated there is

³¹⁴ Interviewee 12, Tbilisi, 25.11.2014.

³¹⁵ Interviewee 14, Tbilisi, 25.11.2014.

³¹⁶ Interviewee 84, Tbilisi, 29.11.2017.

more to it than mere group differentiation that generates in-group favoritism among IDPs. Due to having strong empathy for each other, the Georgian IDPs prefer to socialize with each other. Also, the host community does not always let IDPs integrate with them (e.g., not preferring their children to marry an IDP). In addition, although IDPs have not got a formal sense of solidarity, they have a tendency to cover each other's back in times of need. A significant part of IDPs said that they "understand each other better" and prefer to socialize within their own group (e.g., preferring their children to marry IDPs, helping the IDPs in need), which corresponds with Goffman's approach on the reasons for group identity formation, which helps them restore their self-esteems and have in-group cooperation.

7.5.3. The Perception of Home and Homeland

On the first two or three days of the fieldwork, the first question to IDP interviewees was about their migration stories, which appears to be a mistake. First, the graphic stories of the loss of family members and belongings, together with the harsh conditions of forced migration, came quite as a shock, and second, this triggered the trauma they experienced, causing them to become reserved in the rest of the interviews. Therefore, the first question was modified simply to have the interviewees describe their home. This question opened up all IDPs, and they felt at great ease as the question reminded them of peaceful memories. Whichever IDP generation (some 1.5th and 2nd generation IDPs have not lived in those houses), regions, or period they were coming from, all the IDP interviewees easily talked about their houses back in their homelands. Here, the term *homeland* is used as all the IDPs called Abkhazia/South Ossetia as such.

When their current living conditions were considered, the ease with which they talked about their old houses was understandable. All of the IDP interviewees knew what had happened to their homes since some of them visited their houses to see what happened and some heard from their neighbors or relatives. A part of

the IDPs' houses in their homeland were destroyed and others were used by new people. An IDP woman from Abkhazia described her home and what happened to it as follows:

Our life was a fairytale. We were farmers. We had a two-storey house and grape yards. We had livestock. Cars, everything... At first our Abkhazian neighbor took our livestock and promised to return them later. During the war, they were setting houses fire, so our neighbor wrote his name to the gate of our house. He told us it would prevent our home from being burnt. We could not bring our documents. We heard that he sold our house after we left. Now there is a Russian family that stays in our home.³¹⁷

Another IDP man from Abkhazia told about her house as follows:

Our life was a fairytale in Gagra. I am an engineer, and I was working in a sanatorium as the chief engineer. I had a two-storey big house and another small one near it. It was a typical Megrelian house.³¹⁸ It had a garage and a very big yard. The yard was full of fruits. I had the best mandarins, oranges, grapes, and wine. My father was an agriculturist, so he knew all about farming. We had everything. While leaving, I left the key of my house to a friend of mine. He continued to live there until the 2008 War. I have been in Abkhazia three times, but after the war, my connection was lost. I know my house is deserted now.³¹⁹

Knowing their houses was occupied by others or knowing that their houses were destroyed is also a shared trauma for IDPs. An IDP from South Ossetia who migrated to Tbilisi in early 1990s eloquently describes this trauma:

Before the 2008 War, I went to visit my Ossetian neighbor. I couldn't go to my house because someone else was living there. I looked through the window and

³¹⁷ Interviewee 34, Tbilisi, 05.10.2015.

³¹⁸ The interviewees mentioned the traditional house complexes they had in Abkhazia many times. Generally, their homes contain two separate buildings. The bigger dwellings have livingrooms and bedrooms in them, whereas the small cottages have a kitchen, cellars, and extra rooms.

³¹⁹ Interviewee 32, Tbilisi, 05.10.2015.

saw those people walking in the rooms of my house. It was difficult, and it still is.³²⁰

A similar story was told by another IDP woman from Abkhazia:

In Abkhazia, my mother lived close to me, but her house was destroyed during the war. My house is occupied by an Abkhazian family. A few years ago, my mother and sister went to Abkhazia. They wanted to see my house. But that Abkhazian family did not even allow them to see the yard. And then she saw the ruins of her house. When she returned, she got worse. All the sadness came to surface. After a short time, she died because of this.³²¹

Many similar responses show that the IDPs' perception of home is strongly associated with their perception of belonging and homeland. An expert from GRASS, who is an IDP herself, described her view on Abkhazia as follows:

I left my childhood in Sukhumi, and my life started again in Tbilisi. I have graduated from university. I've been working for the last 19 years. I worked in the civil society sector. I even worked in the parliament. I am 32 years old. Even so, my identification is bound to Abkhazia. I am from Sukhumi. It is always something in me because my house is there, and I was forced to leave it. This is very sensitive and difficult for me.³²²

Other than lost homes and lost belongings, the ancestral graves play an important role in their perception of homeland. When responding to questions about their homelands, many interviewees highlighted the importance of the graves of their loved ones. For instance, an IDP man from Abkhazia, who came to Tbilisi in early 1990s said, "I am a part of Abkhazia, not here. How can it be here? My parents' graves are there, my memories are there?"³²³

³²⁰ Interviewee 15, Tbilisi, 25.11.2014.

³²¹ Interviewee 40, Tbilisi, 13.10.2015.

³²² Interviewee 64, Tbilisi, 18.11.2014.

³²³ Interviewee 32, Tbilisi, 05.10.2015.

The perception of homeland is one of the most significant phenomena that affect the IDP identity. All IDPs, even those who were infants when they left their places of origins or those who were born in Georgia proper share the same sentiments regarding their homelands. They are longing for those lands. Below is how one of the experts from Synergy Network put:

Abkhazia is a home, far far away, even if it became mystical. It is there but unreachable. Many IDPs I worked with are getting emotional about the possibility of reaching there. I think they perceive Abkhazia as their homeland being part of Georgia. I call them Abkhazetians.³²⁴

Similarly, an expert from CRRC described young IDPs' perception of homeland as follows:

It is something strange. For instance, Abkhazia and South Ossetia... Some of the young IDPs have never been in these places. They do not have any experience of living with Abkhazians or Ossetians. For them, these territories are something illusionary.³²⁵

According to a report of the Council of Europe which was published in 2012, IDPs have one way or another contact with their homelands. The report estimates that 64% of the IDPs who were once living in Gali and 25% of IDPs who were living in other regions of Abkhazia have visited their places of origins. The reasons for their visits are listed as visiting family members, neighbors, and friends, checking their properties, and visiting their ancestral graves (CoE, 2012b). As stated earlier, all IDPs knew what had happened to their houses even though some have never had the chance to visit their places of origins. They were getting informed by their relatives, family members, neighbors, and friends who were still residing in their homelands. They also used other methods. For instance, one interviewed IDP stated that a foreign friend of hers took pictures of

³²⁴ Interviewee 75, Tbilisi, 14.10.2015.

³²⁵ Interviewee 54, Tbilisi, 11.11.2014.

her home in Abkhazia, and another IDP woman told that she checked her home from Google Earth.

A 1.5th generation IDP from Abkhazia described her first visit to Abkhazia and her feelings for her homeland as follows:

I was 18, when I first went to Abkhazia. My grandmother and grandfather still lived in Gali. Words are not enough to describe my feelings. It was so beautiful; my emotions were all over the place. I was crying all the time. Everything was different there, the sea, the trees, the nature. It was more beautiful. Everybody tells Abkhazia is a paradise. Well, it is true. Even the vegetables and fruits were tastier.³²⁶

During the interviews, the sentiments they carry for their places of origin and their thoughts about returning back were crystal clear. The perception of home and homeland was common in the vast majority of IDPs. In brief, this perception becomes a significant identity marker for Georgian IDPs.

7.5.4. Strong Wish to Return

If the conditions are suitable, the vast majority of the IDPs are willing to return to their homelands. According to a report of UNHCR (2015b: 17), if they had the chance, 88.3% of the IDPs stated that they would return. Nevertheless, the wish to return tends to decrease in the new generations. While the 78% of the IDPs above 60 years of age would return, this number decreases to 66.7% among the IDPs who are between 25 and 39, and even to 58.9% among the IDPs who are between 16 and 24. The same report indicates that having an emotional attachment, their homes and other properties, relatives and family, and their ancestral graves back in their places of origins are the strongest motives of return (UNHCR, 2015b: 17).

³²⁶ Interviewee 54, Tbilisi, 01.12.2017.

The interview inquired into IDPs' expectation about the future of *de facto* states and whether they would want to return to their homeland. The IDPs were pessimistic about the future, so they almost had no hope to return. In fact, not a single interviewee thought there is a possibility of conflict resolution. Still, although there are some exceptions, almost all expressed their wish to return. Most of the interviewees even used the same statement "If I had the chance, I would go this moment on barefoot." For instance, a young IDP woman who does not consider returning told that her mother would go that instant. She added,

I do not consider return because, if I return, I will be an IDP again there. I would not be able to integrate. But for my mother, it is different. She constantly talks about her home back there. She says if they allow her to return to her home, she would go on foot. Sometimes, she talks and cries in her sleep, and all she says is Abkhazia, Abkhazia...³²⁷

An IDP man from South Ossetia, who migrated to Tbilisi after the August War, shares an interesting anecdote about IDPs' perception of returning:

People who migrate from one place to another bring their past with them. So, for instance, city names in USA are the remainders of the previous homelands, such as New York, New Orleans etc. But in Georgia, it is not the case. You cannot find a single shop which is named as Sukhumi Market or Hotel Tskhinvali because people do not want to keep these names as nostalgia. They keep the hope of return fresh. I can say that all IDPs believe that they will return, maybe not tomorrow but definitely the day after tomorrow.³²⁸

About his own wish to return, he said, "I am not planning to return to Ossetia under these circumstances, but I should be able to return. I have my home there; I was born there. It is my right to return."³²⁹ Another young IDP from Abkhazia who has no memory of her homeland shared her views as follows:

³²⁷ Interviewee 29, Tbilisi, 03.12.2014.

³²⁸ Interviewee 41, Tbilisi, 14.10.2015.

³²⁹ Interviewee 41, Tbilisi, 14.10.2015.

Everybody including me wants to return there, everybody. My father is 50 years old. This year, he said, "I will go to Abkhazia when I will get old. And I will work and live there." Our houses were burned, both my mother's house and father's flat. There is nothing left. But he said "I will buy a flat there for us, and I will live there because it is my country. I love there. And I cannot live here." Everybody wants to return. In their hearts, everybody believes in that.³³⁰

When I asked the same questions to the out-group agencies, they stated that it is now impossible for IDPs to return. However, if there was a chance, they think all the IDPs would want to return, or they would say they want to return. An expert from CRRC made a related comment:

Most of those people, they have to work even harder to achieve something. Sometimes they are more prominent and educated people than others they compete for the work. There are also some successful people with IDP background because they fight hard for it. Those people always highlight that they are from those regions. I do not know a single case wherein somebody is ashamed or hides his or her places of origin. It is not the case; they say they are IDPs. They say 'I am from Abkhazia or South Ossetia'. And they'll all tell you that tomorrow, if they had the chance, they would return. I do not know how many of them would actually return, but this is what they would tell. This notion actually unites them, the wish to return.³³¹

To conclude, similar to shared trauma of loss and forced migration and perception of home and homeland, strong wish to return is also a remarkable common group characteristic, which differentiates IDPs from the host community and unifies them within the same group identity.

7.6. IDP Strategies: Social Mobility, Social Creativity, and Social Competition

According to Tajfel and Turner, people make their behavioral choices on an interpersonal-intergroup continuum. Correlatively, they build their continuum of system of beliefs. On the one extreme of this continuum stands social mobility,

³³⁰ Interviewee 42, Tbilisi, 18.10.2015.

³³¹ Interviewee 68, Tbilisi, 20.11.2014.

and on the other stands social change (Tajfel and Turner, 2004: 278-279). In other words, if a person has less attachment to the group, he or she tends to develop individual strategies such as social mobility, or if a person has strong attachment to the group (or if social context does not allow the choice of social mobility), he or she tends to develop group strategies of social change (Figueiredo et al., 2014: 15-16). Although the former group was smaller than the latter, both types of IDPs were encountered during the fieldwork of this study. This section focuses on the behavioral choices of IDPs.

7.6.1. Individual Behavioral Choices: Hiding the Stigmatized Identity and Aiming for Social Mobility

During the interviews conducted, many IDP parents claimed that, although they were not integrated into the society, their children had managed to do so, and they stated that their children do not want to reveal their IDP identity to avoid a negative attitude of the host community. The limited number of the younger IDPs in the study group also stated that IDP identity was not something they wanted to reveal. For instance, a young IDP woman from Abkhazia, who was living in a private housing, told the following:

For a long time, I did not want to say I am from Abkhazia because I did not want to hold this identity. Because I was living in Senagi [a small city in Samegrelo region], and I wanted to be an ordinary child just like the local kids.³³²

A young IDP man who came to Tbilisi after the 2008 War and who was living in a private housing similarly expressed his feelings as follows:

When I came to Tbilisi, there were two groups of people. One group acts as if you are an extra. In Georgia, in Tbilisi, IDPs didn't choose to come wherever they came. They were forced to do so. But these kinds of people are deliberately showing that you are an outsider. The other group pities you. They say 'oh poor guy, you saw war, we want to help you'. For me, the second group is less

³³² Interviewee 54, Tbilisi, 01.12.2017.

favorable; at least the first group honestly tells what is really on their mind. The second group, on the other hand, feels relief because they are not from the conflict region, and they pity us for that. Even here, you see positive discrimination. It means that they are stigmatizing your situation. I was something that was pitied. So at first I was hiding I was an IDP. I wasn't ashamed of course, I was just tired of that reaction.³³³

According to the Social Identity Theory, social mobility is an individual act, a motivational strategy. It is less likely to occur if the tension with the dominant group is on rise. By contrast, if the tension tends to decrease, the member of the less advantageous group, in our case IDPs, may choose to integrate with the dominant group, namely the locals. The fieldwork revealed that, as the time passes, the tension between the IDPs and the host community decreases and new IDP generations are coming. These young IDPs are mostly born and raised in Georgia proper and have little or no memory of their places of origin. That is why their integration rate is higher than their parents' and grandparents'. An expert from Synergy, who is an IDP herself, explained the generational difference with herself and her children as follows: "My children tell that they are from Tbilisi. They have good jobs, high social status, and they are integrated. They have a lot of Tbilisian friends, and they feel like Tbilisians."³³⁴ When I asked other experts and prominent people in Georgia about IDPs and their integration process, some also pointed out the difference between the young and old generations. An expert from ISNC made the following comment:

In my personal point of view, the young generation won't return. Many of them were already born here. They know Tbilisi and other parts of Georgia, but they do not know Abkhazia. So I think the young IDPs belong here more than there.³³⁵

Similarly, a former high ranked state official shared his views:

³³³ Interviewee 41, Tbilisi, 14.10.2015.

³³⁴ Interviewee 74, Tbilisi, 14.10.2015.

³³⁵ Interviewee 71, Tbilisi, 06.10.2015.

Maybe not in the former generation, but definitely in this generation, the IDP identity's significance is fading. Some of them re-established themselves. Among IDPs, there are millionaires. Some even went to Russia and made considerable money and returned. Their social status has increased.³³⁶

In addition, an academician from Tbilisi State University drew attention to the difference in the behavioral choices of those who live in compact settlements and those who live in private housings:

There is an assumption in the society that IDPs are poor and bad. So they have a stigmatized identity. When they live separately from each other, the IDP identity is less influential. But if they live compactly, it is more visible and recognizable so has a greater power on them.³³⁷

The IDP identity, which is a stigmatized identity as many interviewees put it, is not distinguishable until the holder of this identity reveals it. Since the IDPs are ethnic Georgians holding this most prominent characteristic as their most salient identity, some of them are reluctant to reveal their IDP identity deliberately. Those who are reluctant to carry an IDP identity are mostly those who live in private housings and who are the younger ones. They are also the ones who are integrated with the rest of the society more effectively. Not surprisingly, their IDP identity is less salient. In other words, the level of in-group belonging also varies among generations and among individuals of different settlement types.

7.6.2. Group Behavioral Choices: Social Change (Social Creativity and Social Competition)

According to Tajfel and Turner, social change is a group behavior in two ways: social creativity and social competition. Social creativity is a defense mechanism of the inferior group resorted to redefine the “elements of the comparative

³³⁶ Interviewee 77, Tbilisi, 17.10.2015.

³³⁷ Interviewee 79, Tbilisi, 05.12.2016.

situation” if they lack a positive distinctiveness in the ongoing inter-group interaction. Social creativity can occur in three ways: the inferior group may find new criteria of comparison with the superior group; they may redefine their negative features more positively; they may change the out-group with another, to which they are more advantageous (Tajfel and Turner, 2004: 287; Derks, Van Laar and Ellemers, 2007: 16; Ashforth and Mael, 1989: 24). Social competition, on the other hand, is a “unified group action” (i.e. social movement) (Tajfel and Turner, 2004: 279). It means that the inter-group relations are transformed from social comparison to a competition. This section focuses on the group behavioral choices and presents that, while IDPs show signs of social creativity due to a lack of a political and holistic sense of group solidarity, they do not perform social competition as a group behavior.

7.6.2.1. Social Creativity: Redefining of the Identity and Comparison in Different Dimensions

During the interviews with the IDPs and also some experts, it was clear that the attribution to homeland and their group characteristics were things to be proud of. When asked where they had migrated from, they proudly manifested their places of origin and when their group characteristic and their relations with the host community were inquired, they mostly (distinctively IDPs from Abkhazia) voiced that they are hardworking people and it is why the host community has a negative attitude towards them. In a way, they were reconstructing their IDP identity towards a more positive direction, which had always been associated with vulnerability. For instance, while they were describing themselves as IDPs, they were referring to their places of origins such as “I am from Abkhazia/South Ossetia”. That is, there was a shift from status based IDP identity to a “place based identity”. An academician from Tbilisi State University confirmed this point of view:

I cannot say that the IDP identity is disappearing, but it is definitely fading out among young IDPs. They prefer to refer to themselves with their places of origins. By referring to their places of origins, they increase their self-esteem. Maybe, yes, it is better to consider it as a place identity.³³⁸

Another academician from Tbilisi State University agreed with this: “Yes, they prefer to say that ‘I am from Sukhumi, I am from Gali’. I think it is transforming from that vulnerable identity to a proud identity.”³³⁹

“I am proud of being from Abkhazia”³⁴⁰ is one of the most frequent sentences Abkhazia IDPs uttered. For instance, a 1.5th generation IDP woman said, “A lot of actors, journalists, or intelligent people are from Abkhazia, and they are proud of this, we are proud of them.”³⁴¹ A 2nd generation IDP stated the following:

My whole family is proud to be from Abkhazia. I do not remember there because I was born here. But because of my family, because of how they feel about Abkhazia, it is valuable for me too. If I had the chance, I would return.³⁴²

As to why IDPs are proud of being from Abkhazia or why they believe they are different from the host community, they stated that sedulity is a regional characteristic of them. For example, an IDP woman from Abkhazia told, “The people of Western Georgia are more hardworking people, and when we came here and started a new life, we worked so hard. That is why many locals hated

³³⁸ Interviewee 79, Tbilisi, 05.12.2016.

³³⁹ Interviewee 69, Tbilisi, 04.12.2014.

³⁴⁰ Interviewee 31, Tbilisi, 03.12.2014.

³⁴¹ Interviewee 54, Tbilisi, 01.12.2017.

³⁴² Interviewee 45, Tbilisi, 06.12.2016.

us.”³⁴³ Similarly a 1.5th generation IDP from Abkhazia explained why they are different from the host community as follows:

IDPs from Abkhazia, especially Megrelians, did everything to reconstruct, to recover in their lives. It is not only my opinion. Tbilisians also think so. That is why they are jealous. But those Megrelian IDPs, they are hardworking. They do everything to work. Some of them are now living in Russia or in other countries abroad. They work so hard and their conditions got better. So people sometimes think that ‘what kind of a *ItoIvili* they are, they have everything’. People should be happy for them for reconstructing their lives, but no. People are jealous of them.³⁴⁴

Their attitude is in concordance with what Tajfel and Turner suggest with social creativity: after being alienated and stigmatized for years, they were associating their groupness with their homeland and the positive aspects of their group, such as sedulity, cultural norms, and unity. Hence, they were shifting inter-group comparison to contexts where they are no more the disadvantageous side.

7.6.2.2. The Lack of Social Competition

The fieldwork data demonstrated that IDPs do not have a formal sense of solidarity. During the interviews, they were asked if they have it or not. Their answer was mostly an immediate “no” because what they understood from solidarity was an association like formation. Indeed, after they answered “no”, they added that they were helping each other within their own community (in their collective centers, neighborhood, or to their kin), which is already reported in the previous parts of this chapter. The response of a young IDP man from South Ossetia who came to Tbilisi after the 2008 War clearly shows the existence and extent of this solidarity:

³⁴³ Interviewee 35, Tbilisi, 05.10.2015.

³⁴⁴ Interviewee 53, Tbilisi, 01.12.2017.

Not really, I don't know if we have such a thing. But again, when we moved here the first time, there was a children's park near Dinamo Arena Stadium, and everyday people from Akhgori would meet there. They were meeting to share information and their experiences, and people were searching for their relatives there. At the time we occupied a building, and we invited people who had nowhere to stay. We worked collectively at that time. We contacted with NGOs for supplies and help. The building had neither electricity nor gas. So we searched for cables together, we contacted with the gas company together. It was really nice.³⁴⁵

An expert from Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD) thought that IDP solidarity was only limited to their small circles and did not spread to the whole IDP community. She said,

In early 1990s, the war broke out in South Ossetia and then in Abkhazia. So there were different migration waves. Those different IDP groups were settled in different settlements. They had common problems, common actions and reactions, but somehow they could not mix. It is mostly because of living in separate areas.³⁴⁶

Although there are several IDP NGOs, the general IDP population does not get organized, nor does it act together and take political initiatives. Because of living in different collective centers and settlements, they have almost no connection with the other IDP groups. Most importantly, the IDPs in the compact settlements are economically so vulnerable that surviving the day is the main concern for most IDPs. An expert from ECMI explained the situation as follows:

They have solidarity and they have different organizations like IDP NGOs. They have leaders who are trying to lobby for their interest in the government and in civil society of course, but not many IDPs were enrolled in these entities. Mainly these ordinary IDP people are jobless. Employment is a serious problem in Georgia, and of course many IDPs are looking for jobs and are not motivated to join these formations because they do not have time for it.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁵ Interviewee 41, Tbilisi, 14.10.2015.

³⁴⁶ Interviewee 70, Tbilisi, 02.10.2015.

³⁴⁷ Interviewee 54, Tbilisi, 11.11.2014.

In terms of civic initiative, the most widespread formation of IDP community is Community Representatives (in Georgian *Mama Saxlisis*). Almost each IDP compact settlement has an elected representative, who acts as the spokesperson to express the needs of the communities and give the petitions to the authorities (mostly MRA). According to a recent World Bank report (2016: 52), IDPs are skeptical about the real intentions of these representatives and think that they are “biased in favor of the government interests” because they receive their wages from the Ministry. But such mistrust did not emerge in the interviews with IDPs. Actually, they did not dwell on the subject and they simply stated that they have these representatives in their compact settlements as in the words of an IDP woman from Abkhazia below:

We have no political group solidarity, but we have kinship and neighboring solidarity. Except in some settlements, there can be a representative of IDPs who collects petitions and apply to state apparatus. For example, my godfather is a representative in his settlement.³⁴⁸

The lack of political solidarity was also brought up by many interviewees. Although IDPs have an immense voting power, they mostly support the ruling parties. In 2006, a political party called the European Democrats of Georgia was established. The founder of this party, Paata Davitaia, was an IDP himself from Abkhazia, who had worked in Abkhaz Government in Exile. Although the party mostly focused on the improvement of IDP conditions and rights and won a seat in the parliament, it did not attract the attention of the IDP community (World Bank, 2016: 52). The reason for a lack of political solidarity was explained by an expert from ISNC:

It is not like they have no connection, but as a political power, they could make it through transforming themselves to a political community. They have no idea what future will bring; they have collective hopes, but they are also realistic. They have been in a terrible situation for the first 20 years. It was only survival

³⁴⁸ Interviewee 53, Tbilisi, 01.12.2017.

for most of them. Now some of them are living ok, but some barely have the minimum living conditions.³⁴⁹

Another ISNC expert also explained the situation by pointing out different reasons:

The Georgian governments are afraid of the potential power of IDPs. They wanted to integrate IDPs so that they wouldn't need a special IDP party. The second problem seems to be that IDPs do not have a strong, charismatic, clever, and powerful leader.³⁵⁰

As they do not form a political unity, IDPs mostly support the political parties on the winning sides. An academician from Tbilisi State University explained its reasons as follows:

Usually IDPs from Abkhazia support the ruling government because they are dependent on the support of the government. They support it because they think that government will support them back. They supported Shevardnadze though they also blamed him. And they supported Saakashvili even more.³⁵¹

What distinguishes a collective identity from a social identity is that it has the potential to mobilize its members. In other words, although all collective identities are social identities, not all social identities have the potential to transform into a collective identity. The above quotations show that the case of the Georgian IDPs is an example to this situation. Although they form informal solidarity among relatives and neighbors in their close circles due to living in a survival mode and living separately, IDPs do not form a holistic group initiative, so they cannot perform social competition. As they cannot do so, the IDP identity cannot be transformed into a collective identity.

³⁴⁹ Interviewee 75, Tbilisi, 14.10.2015.

³⁵⁰ Interviewee 74, Tbilisi, 14.10.2015.

³⁵¹ Interviewee 61, Tbilisi, 14.11.2014.

To conclude, this chapter sought answers to a set of questions based on the fieldwork data; it inquired into whether IDPs can be considered as a social group, whether IDP identity is a salient social identity, and if so, what the group behavior patterns of Georgian IDPs are. The fieldwork data revealed that IDPs can be referred to as a social group and IDP identity can be considered as a salient social group identity. However, one must note that the IDP identity happens to be an inferior identity compared to the host community because, over the years, it is highly associated with “vulnerability” and stigmatization.

Several indicators affect the identity formation of IDPs, some of which are not even about IDPs. First of all, the spatial environment of IDPs and their harsh economic conditions is a triggering factor. The fieldwork data and other research (Gegeshidze and Chomakhidze, 2008; Salukvadze et. al., 2013; Åhlin, 2011) indicate that the absence of adequate physical conditions in collective centers, as well as the economic difficulties, cause IDPs to withdraw into their shells, causing them to have social isolation. They, especially the elderly IDPs, prefer to spend time with their own group members rather than the members of the host community.

Nevertheless, the major factor that triggers the formation of such a group identity is the high influence of the external definition. The external definition is not limited to the host society. The state apparatus and the civil society organizations also have an immense effect on IDP identity construction. The fieldwork data revealed that Georgian IDPs trust neither the state nor the civil society organizations. Regarding the state, IDPs believe in unison that the state was not paying attention to the needs of IDPs on the most fundamental issues such as accommodation, employment, and healthcare. That is why most of the IDPs stated that they were not expecting anything from the state anymore. They also resented the fact that political actors contacted them only during the elections. Therefore, IDPs thought that they were neglected by the state and not given the respect given to an ordinary citizen. This caused them to be further alienated

from the society as they believe they deserve respect. Furthermore, the official IDP status given by the state comes with several social benefits although these benefits are quite limited. Even so, during the interviews IDPs stated that these aids, especially the monthly allowance of 45 GEL per person, have a symbolic value for many IDPs. According to them, this 45 GEL is a reminder that the government still remembers them. Regarding the Georgian civil society, IDPs have strong dislike for them. During the fieldworks, this problem emerged because when I wanted to have an interview with them, their initial reaction was “no” as they thought I was an NGO staff. IDPs do not think that civil society organizations represent them or provide assistance on humanitarian needs or advocate them. They generally perceive the civil society organizations to be accountable to their donors rather than to the IDPs.

The fieldwork data confirm that there is an “us and them” polarity between the IDPs and the host community. However, it is noteworthy that the boundaries of these groups become clear or vague depending on the circumstances in the country. In other words, the host community’s attitude swings at multiple directions from cooperation, support to indifference, alienation, and discrimination in different periods. According to IDP interviews, the cooperation in the early days of independence turned into hostility, indifference, and alienation after it was understood that IDPs would not return to their places of origin. Since IDPs casted an economic burden in the country, the host community started to stigmatize the existing terms *devnili* and *ltovli*, and over the course of the time, IDPs started to be despised by those labels, which alienated them further. In addition, as discussed earlier, IDPs depend mostly on state allowances and social benefits, which, although a minimal amount, sometimes cause host community’s negative reaction and tense inter-group relations. Many IDPs stated that they were disapproved by the locals for receiving state support. In other words, if the resources are scarce, it affects the intergroup boundaries. The fieldwork also yielded that, as most IDPs from

Abkhazia have Megrelian sub-ethnic identity, the host community may approach both IDP and Megrelian identities as if they are one.

Another important fieldwork finding was internalization of external definition on the self-identification process of IDPs. Over the course of the years, the “vulnerable” and “stigmatized” IDP identity were internalized mostly by the elderly IDP generations. In addition, during the IDP interviews, it was observed that several shared notions have a significant effect on the strengthening of IDPs’ group boundaries and IDP identity. These are shared trauma, in-group favoritism, the attributed meaning to the homeland, and the discourse of strong wish to return to the homeland. Although IDPs come from different regions in different periods, the trauma of losing everything and harsh conditions of forced migration conduced to a sense of empathy for one another. This empathy also manifests itself in in-group favoritism; many IDPs stated their preference to have relations with other IDPs rather than the host society. IDPs also unite on how they attribute meaning to home and homeland. Almost all the interviewed IDPs, old or young, consider their places of origins as their homeland, and according to them their home is there. Besides a few young IDPs, who stated that they are fully integrated to their new places of origins, almost all IDPs expressed such a strong wish to return to their homelands that the wish to return became an important identity marker for Georgian IDPs.

Finally, this chapter focuses on the behavioral patterns of IDPs. Parallel to the social identity theory, IDP individuals display both individual (social mobility) and group (social creativity) behavioral patterns depending on their stance at the interpersonal-intergroup continuum. The fieldwork data revealed that those IDPs, mostly younger ones and the ones who are living in private housings, integrated with the society more easily. They mostly avoid identifying themselves with the IDP identity and have little, if any, intention to return. Regarding their group behavior patterns, IDPs use social creativity approach but they show no signs of social competition. Most of the interviewed IDPs accept

that they are IDPs and they have no need to hide this identity. The IDP interviews revealed that they use 'social creativity' as a defense mechanism, through which they transform their identity to a more positive one by attributing it different meanings and redefining it with a different perspective. Their attribution to homeland and to their group characteristics were something to be proud of. They associate their group identity with positive aspects such as sedulity, cultural norms, and unity, instead of 'vulnerability'. And rather than referring to themselves as IDPs, they identify themselves with their places of origins such as "I am from Abkhazia/South Ossetia/Gali/Sukhumi/Akhalgori". This indicates that there is a shift from a status based identity to a place identity.

Finally, it was observed that IDPs do not perform social competition as a group behavior. They do not have a formal sense of group solidarity due to low socio-economic conditions. Although there are several IDP NGOs and a political party, these organizations do not attract the attention of Georgian IDPs. As a result, IDPs do not perform social competition as a group behavior, so their group identity does not transform to a collective identity.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

The main objective of this thesis was to analyze Georgian IDPs within a sociological perspective. Correlatively, it also inquired whether IDP identity is a salient social identity form in Georgia, how intergroup relations with the host community, state, and civil society organizations affect the group formation of IDPs, which in-group determinants cause IDPs to form this social group identity, and finally, if IDP identity is a social identity form in Georgia, whether it would remain, transform, or disintegrate with regard to individual-based and group-based behavioral choices the IDP community members.

In the framework of the questions mentioned above and the data gathered from the documentary research and the field research conducted in Georgia between 2014 and 2017, this thesis is constructed on a series of arguments. The first argument is that the IDP identity is a stigmatized social identity form in Georgia since they are considered as the vulnerable part of the Georgian society. As many interviews revealed, due to the challenge they pose to the Georgian economy, at times, they are perceived as a “burden” by the country. This causes an “us and them” separation among the IDPs of Georgia and the host community. The second argument of this thesis is that the group boundaries of IDPs tend to change due to social changes. In other words, if the resources of the country get scarce, the friction between the IDPs and the host society increases, if the country gets back to normal, the group boundaries became vague. The third argument of this thesis is related to the behavioral patterns of the Georgian IDPs. The IDPs have both individual-based and group-based behavioral motives. The younger IDP generations and the IDPs, who are living in private housings, generally work for social mobility through social integration, whereas the older

generations and those who are living in collective settlements display group strategies such as attributing positive features to their identity or transforming their status-based identity to a 'place identity'. The final argument of this thesis is that, although IDP identity is a social identity form, the group suffers socio-economic handicaps and lacks the necessary ground for social competition, making it difficult for their identity to transform into a collective one.

These arguments are generated in the light of Social Identity Theory of two social psychologists, Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner. Although Social Identity Theory is a social psychology theory, it is utilized in many social sciences disciplines, so it is an important tool used to investigate the intergroup relations of various interdisciplinary actors. The Social Identity Theory not only sheds light onto the inclination of in-group favoritism and out-group differentiation but also defines the formation of a social group. In addition, it provides the in-group behavioral patterns, which helps predict what would happen to a group through time (strengthen, transform, or dissolve). Thus, Social Identity Theory provided an effective theoretical framework for the explanation that Georgian IDPs, who do not differ from the rest of the society in terms of their most salient social identity, Georgianness, still have integration problems and form a separate social group.

Also, Eric Goffman's stigma identity clarified the power of external definition in the establishment of this social identity. The meaning Goffman attributed to stigma presents an organizing concept, which both shows the classification of the disadvantaged (including discriminatory social reflexes, attitudes, and practices) through social interaction and explains stigmatized people's management of their disvalued characteristics. Goffman's approach provided an alternative explanation of the power of external definition and IDPs' strategies to cope with their disvalued identity. Thus, Goffman's approach supported the argument that IDP identity is a stigmatized identity in Georgia.

Social Identity Theory seems to have made a modest contribution to the existing literature on IDPs. The mainstream literature on internal displacement focuses on either defining an internationally recognized IDP concept or establishing preventive and protective strategies. Specific works on Georgian IDPs vastly concentrate on accommodation problems, low socio-economic conditions, and integration problems, while others on conflict resolution are mainly prepared by the state bodies, supranational organizations, and international and local civil society organizations.

Another objective of this thesis was to cast some light on the core reasons for the ethnic conflicts that caused the forced migration of Georgian IDPs. To this end, the process-tracing method was used to investigate the historical breaking points, which are interpreted differently in the historiographies of the three conflicting ethnic groups, Georgians, Abkhazians, and South Ossetians. The recent studies on Georgian IDPs focus on the recent history to explain the ethnic conflicts which caused their forced displacement. Indeed, these studies mostly dwell on the political turmoil of the late Soviet and the early independence period of Georgia. However, the present study has demonstrated that the ethnic conflicts between Georgia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia are not necessarily the result of nationalist discourses that escalated in the 1980s. In fact, Georgia's conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia resulted from a historical accumulation and the roots of these conflicts go back to much earlier times when there was a strong impact of the Russian domination.

The findings of this research demonstrated that after centuries under the domination of first Tsarist Russia and then the Soviet Union, Georgia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia were affected by Russian domination in varying degrees and dimensions. The period under the dominance of Russian Empire encompassed the first impact on the national discourses of Georgians, Abkhazians, and Ossetians. In fact, it was in the 19th century that the Ossetian national ideology started to develop. During this period, Russian authorities referred to northern

Georgia as South Ossetia for the first time, which caused distress among Georgians. The same period also had an immense effect on the Abkhazian national ideology, which was constructed on the notion of ‘survival against extinction’. The Abkhazians, who strongly resisted to the Russification policy of the Tsardom through three major uprisings and through their alliance with the Ottomans during the Russo-Turkish War, were under great pressure by the Tsarist Russia. Indeed, in the 19th century, 60% of the Abkhaz population was forced to leave homeland. However, Abkhaz historiography does not blame the Russification policies, but the Georgians for acting “opportunist” as they (mostly Megrelians) settled to the lands which Abkhazians deserted. Abkhazian and Georgian national discourses appeared to be in collusion for the first time in this era. The effect of the Tsarist Russia on Georgian national discourse was also immense and quite paradoxical. The Russian Empire was not only perceived as a gateway to Europe and a protector against the Muslim World, but it also united the Georgian lands under a single political authority securing the Georgian ethnos. However, as the Russian Empire imposed its Russification policies and threatened to devastate the Georgian culture, the nationalist political elite in Georgia inevitably emerged.

Another remarkable period for the national discourses of these three nations was between the Bolshevik Revolution and the entry of the South Caucasus into the control of the Soviet Union (1917-1921). Within the three years after Georgia declared its independence from the Transcaucasian Federation on May 26, 1918, it went under an important state-building process through reforms implemented in political, cultural, and economic spheres. Most notably, on February 20, 1921, the Constitution of the Republic of Georgia was accepted in the parliament. This constitution guaranteed the autonomy of Adjara, Abkhazia, and Zaqatala (yet not of South Ossetia). Nevertheless, the Abkhazian SSR independent from Georgia was already established on March 31, 1921. Last but not least, this period was a turning point in the fraction of the Georgian-South Ossetian relations, which was narrated differently in the national discourses of the two conflicting parties.

During that period, three major South Ossetian uprisings occurred. Although the first two uprisings were based on socio-economic motives, the third turned into an ethnic confrontation since the landlords were ethnic Georgians whereas the peasants were predominantly ethnic Ossetians. According to the Georgian narration, by means of these uprisings, South Ossetians collaborated with the Russian Soviet to secede from Georgia, hence aimed to break the territorial integrity of Georgia. On the other hand, the Ossetian narrative is based on the claim that the intervention of Georgia to the uprisings was a 'genocide' attempt to exterminate the Ossetian people.

When the Soviet rule was restored in the region, the nationalist discourses of the ethnic groups were restricted in the public sphere due to the Marxist historical materialism. Nonetheless, they did not disappear as they were preserved in private spheres of Georgians, Abkhazians, and South Ossetians. In addition, Soviet nationalities policies such as right to self-determination and *korenizatsiia* (indigenization policy) had an impact on the identity construction of all ethnic groups from titular nations to minority communities as they created a system of hierarchy. At the top of this hierarchy was the Russians, followed first by titular nations and then minorities. This hierarchy continued to affect the post-Soviet period nationalist discourse, as all the post-Soviet nations were geared towards a (re)form of their national identities with essentialist and primordialist colorings. In other words, to prove their rights on the lands they claimed, Georgians, Abkhazians, and South Ossetians got involved in the antiquity debates, which led to an augmentation in the nationalist conflicts among those who claimed the same lands.

Furthermore, several historical periods under the Soviet rule had damaged the inter-ethnic relations of the titular nation Georgia, with its minorities, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. For instance, although during the Stalin's era all nations in the Soviet Union were repressed, Abkhazia was subjected to further repression thanks to the political influence of Lavrenti Pavlovich Beria. As Zverev (1996)

states, Beria added an “ethnic coloring” to the Stalinist repression in Abkhazia, gaining a special place at the Abkhazian collective memory. He was not only responsible for the purge of Abkhazian cadres, but he also changed the ethno-demographic structure of Abkhazia through planned settlement policies. As a result, while the Abkhaz intelligentsia was replaced with the Georgian counterparts, the Abkhaz population was reduced to the 15.1% in their native lands in 1959. In addition, Abkhazian culture was threatened. For instance, Abkhaz toponyms were replaced with Georgian ones; Abkhaz script was Georgianized, and Abkhaz language was prohibited at schools. As a result, in Abkhazian national discourse, this period is a further attempt to eradicate Abkhazians and Abkhazian culture in the region, triggering anti-Georgian sentiments among Abkhazians. The above-mentioned policies against the Abkhazian culture were reversed after Khrushchev came to power, since when Abkhazians have experienced positive discrimination.

In the Brezhnev era, the nationalist discourses of both titular nations and minorities were on rise. The new intellectuals such as Merab Kostava and Zviad Gamsakhurdia started to be influential in Georgia. Meanwhile, Abkhazians periodically applied to Moscow for the change of ASSR status to SSR. Their demands caused resentment among Georgians and gradually increasing a tension among Georgians and Abkhazians. When Gorbachev came to power in 1985, nations in the Soviet Union were demanding their independences. Following the Baltic states, in 1988, Gamsakhurdia and his proponents established the Georgian Popular Front. His attempt was countered by the Abkhazian and South Ossetian elites, who also formed their Popular Fronts. The parties began to take their reciprocal positions, and counter protests started. The first blood was shed in Sukhumi, Abkhazia on July 15-16, 1989. South Ossetian elites supported Abkhazians with an open letter, in response of which Gamsakhurdia gathered a rally of 20 thousand protesters in Tskhinvali. This protest was perceived as a show of strength by South Ossetians, and eventually, due to the increasing ethnic disputes, the second blood was shed in South Ossetia. The findings of this

research demonstrated that the above-mentioned historical moments, which are narrated differently by the Georgians, Abkhazians, and South Ossetians, paved the way to the conflicts that occurred in the recent history. Just before Georgia declared its independence in 1991, the nationalist discourse reached its peak not only in Georgia but also in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The rise in the nationalist discourse resulted in the secessionist armed conflicts, first in South Ossetia (1990-1992) and then in Abkhazia (1992-1994), which caused hundreds of thousands of people to be displaced.

Another finding is that, regarding the international politics, the negotiation attempts for conflict resolutions were not successful during Shevardnadze's presidency. Consequently, in early 2000s, Shevardnadze sought assistance of international organizations. These organizations formed a dialogue with the government through local civil society organizations, which mushroomed with the donor funding. However, during this period, the Georgian civil society organizations lacked the necessary capacity to participate in the governmental decision-making process on the IDP matters. Hence, IDPs were handled efficiently. In the domestic level, the government took several steps to deal with IDPs. First and foremost, in 1996, an IDP law was enacted and the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees of Georgia was established. While the ministry assumed the responsibility of IDP issues, the law determined the application procedures for IDP status and the status-based governmental assistance (i.e. monthly allowances and social services). Although, the state took necessary steps for improving the legislative structure for IDPs, implementation of the law and policies was minimal. In fact, for the first 20 years, the Georgian IDPs were neglected by their state as they were expected to return to their places of origins. However, the return has never come.

During Shevardnadze's presidency, the negligence of IDPs became an unspoken state policy, which was referred to as 'partial integration' by the experts and

academicians interviewed during this research. Partial integration policy means that the Georgian state did not choose to implement any sorts of durable solutions for IDPs for two main reasons. As stated by the interviewees, first, if the state would provide durable solutions to IDPs, it would give the message that the state was giving up its demand on the *de facto* lands. Subsequently, the IDPs, who were living in extremely difficult conditions, became the showcase of the consequences of the conflicts in the international arena. Secondly, it was discussed by many interviewees that the Georgian state had neither the necessary economic and political conditions nor the institutional capacity to deal with IDPs. As a result, for decades, the majority of the Georgian IDPs were doomed to live in isolation at compact settlements which had substandard living conditions. During these two decades, IDPs' trust to state and civil society organizations was damaged. As they got increasingly more isolated, IDPs started to be alienated from the society.

The research also demonstrated that, in 2003, international actors played the kingmaker role and supported the opposition of Saakashvili, who overthrew Shevardnadze from presidency. During this period, the Georgian civil society focused on the areas of Westernization, political transition, and democratization since international funding was allocated to these fields. In other words, IDPs were not a prior subject, and they continued to be overlooked. Meanwhile, Saakashvili started a fast transition policy to market economy, and his initial action involved the privatization of the IDP collective centers, which were located at the center and valuable locations. As a result, many IDPs were evicted from their residences and sent to remote areas, which caused not only an unrest among those IDPs but also their further alienation.

IDPs were placed on the state agenda only after the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on the Human Rights of IDPs, Dr. Walter Kälin's visit to Georgia in 2005, and then after steps were taken for durable solutions for IDPs. For instance, segregated IDP schools were abolished, and IDP pupils were

integrated with the national education system in 2005. In 2006, an inventory of IDP properties in their places of origins was taken (though this policy did not turn out to be effective). In the same year, the state involved Georgian civil society organizations in strategy-making and action plan for IDPs. Although this strategy plan was adopted in 2007 and the action plan was adopted on July 30, 2008, they both became ineffectual since a war broke out after a week on August 7, 2008.

The war was partially the result of the miscalculation of Saakashvili. When he came to power, one of his aims was to succeed the integration of minority groups through infrastructure developments, and cultural and educational reforms. He accomplished his policy in Adjara (at Muslim Georgians), Kvemo Kartli (at Azeri minority), and Samtskhe-Javakheti (at Armenian minority) regions. Nevertheless, his policy did not work in South Ossetia. His maneuvers in South Ossetia escalated the already existing tension. With the involvement of Russian Federation, the war broke out, causing the second biggest IDP wave since early 1990s.

As reported in related studies and by many interviewees, when the second IDP hit Georgia after the 2008 War, this time the international actors pressed Georgia to provide humanitarian assistance and to mediate between the conflicting parties. Mediation efforts were futile as the *de facto* authorities were reluctant to negotiate on breaking the status quo of the frozen conflicts. For instance, *de facto* authorities did not allow supranational organizations such as UNOMIG, EUMM, and the OSCE Mission to Georgia to continue monitoring activities in the *de facto* regions. In addition, although Georgian representatives continued their lobbying activities at UN and CoE and ensured annual adaptation of resolutions, these resolutions had little, if any, impact on the negotiations between the conflicting parties as they do not have a sanction power. On the humanitarian assistance level, the intervention of international actors was relatively more successful. Only a few days after the war, under UN's 'Flash Appeal', 4.5 billion

USD was pledged from donating international actors and over \$450 million USD was planned to be allocated solely for the needs of the IDPs (Transparency International Georgia, 2008: 2; UN and the World Bank, 2009: 4; Hovey, 2013; Dunn, 2014: 289-290; CoE, 2009a). However, the utilization of this significant amount of financial aid caused criticisms as they did not actually reach the IDPs and instead were directed to their main needs. Furthermore, the distribution of the aid among the old and new IDPs caused further criticisms (Dunn, 2014: 289; Dunn, 2018: 66). As many interviewees pointed out, Saakashvili called them “my IDPs”; the new IDPs were provided with new housings, whereas the vast majority of the old IDPs could not benefit from a similar state support. Although the new IDPs were provided with new housings, their locations were at remote areas, which isolated them from the rest of the society.

Starting from 2013, the new Georgian government continued to implement a variation of the strategy of the former Saakashvili government. First of all, in order to systemize the IDPs assistance, a new IDP registration process was initiated, so the latest IDP figures were determined. The new government was aware of the lack of transparency and a systematic approach for a durable housing program, which was constantly reminded by the international donors. To this end, the new government initiated a scoring system to determine the eligible IDPs. This, however, was not capable of differentiating the target IDPs. All IDP groups, regardless of whether they lived in private housings or compact settlements, whether they became IDP in early 1990s or in 2008, were approached equally. However, as many IDP interviewees stressed, the new system had also flaws, and many IDPs, who really needed the state assistance on durable solutions, could not benefit from it. Nevertheless, the state continued to concentrate on durable solutions for the accommodation problems of all IDP groups. As of January 31, 2020, of 90.831 registered IDP families, 41.263 benefited from the state’s housing program, and 41.738 families are still in the waiting list (The Public Defender of Georgia, 2019: 317). However, the process

seems to be slower than the previous years because the financial support of the international actors decreased perceptibly.

According to the findings of this thesis, another important development was the change in the state's social welfare policy. The government has shifted its approach from a status-based assistance to needs-based assistance. The main indicator of this is that the monthly IDP assistance started to be given only to IDPs below a certain income. Many interviewed IDPs stated that this monthly IDP allowance has a symbolic meaning and is indicative that the state remembers them. Thus, it could be concluded that the state's IDP status is an important parameter affecting the IDP identity and one of the key findings of this thesis in terms of displaying the importance of external definition on the making of IDP identity.

The above-mentioned findings are both driven from documentary research and fieldwork data. In this sense, fieldwork findings were supported by official documents of the Georgian state, international organizations (i.e., UN, CoE, the World Bank and NRC), local NGOs and the Public Defender of Georgia. Hence, it is observed that, recent documents confirm fieldwork findings and demonstrate that the same findings are valid today. Based on my documentary and field research manifests that limited state initiatives and civil society assistance caused IDPs to feel neglected by the authorities. Limited assistance, low socio-economic living conditions at collective centers, and high unemployment rates among IDPs placed them at the lower socio-economic echelon in the country. Consequentially, this social status inhibited their integration into the rest of the society, even though they have common ethnic, religious, and cultural background.

Although many studies widely report IDP's conditions, the field research conducted within the scope of this study between 2014 and 2017 has further revealed the gravity of the conditions IDPs are living in. Having witnessed the

socio-economic conditions of ordinary IDPs, especially those who are living in compact settlements, they are unlikely to achieve integration and develop a social identity which will provide them with a sense of high self-esteem and a sense of distinctiveness. However, Social Identity Theory asserts that all people are inclined to achieve higher self-esteem and become a member of a social group that sustains this self-esteem by providing both a sense of distinctiveness and the support mechanism of group solidarity. Consequently, one of the findings of this thesis is the embedment of the IDP identity by the displaced community. While one of the reasons for the embedment of the IDP identity is the above-mentioned IDP-status given by the state's laws and regulations, another is the impact of the external definition of the out-group members which are generated through intergroup relations. Hence, it is of importance to cast some light onto the intergroup relations between the Georgian IDPs and the host community.

The research demonstrated that, together with the first migration waves in the early 1990s, the society showed great examples of solidarity. Relatives and friends took their IDP acquaintances to their homes. Strangers helped strangers, and the society united in the times of need. However, Georgia was in an economic and political turmoil, and when it was obvious that IDPs were not returning to their places of origin, society's reaction transformed, and IDPs started to be perceived as a 'burden'. During the interviews with both out-group agencies (experts, politicians and academicians) and Georgian IDPs, mentioned salient topic was how IDPs were perceived by the host community. Many interviewees remarked that IDPs are perceived as an economic challenge to the host community because they constitute a low paid workforce. For example, they brought up IDP's selling goods on streets without paying any taxes. In addition, they are perceived as a surplus population who are overcrowding the big cities like Tbilisi. In brief, for a long time, IDPs challenged the host community economically especially when the Georgian economy was in recession. As a result, the IDPs and host community were fragmented, which resulted in an "us

and them” situation, which is an expected phenomenon for the Social Identity Theory. Some interviewees stated that, because of the way they were perceived by the host community, IDPs sometimes faced discrimination. This caused IDPs to be differentiated by the host community, and consequently a social comparison occurred between IDPs and the host community. This social situation is in agreement with what is proposed by the Social Identity Theory. Social Identity Theory asserts that in a social context where resources are scarce, social groups consider differences to enjoy superiority through social comparison, and social comparison resulted in one group to be superior and the other inferior. Furthermore, the general inclination of the superior group is to protect its social position, so the members of the superior group hold on the distinctiveness of their group from the inferior one. Overall, the fieldwork revealed that the host community holds the superior position, whereas the IDPs constitute the inferior group since IDPs lack the necessary social networks to find employment unlike the host community; they also lack the necessary socio-economic capacity for social competition. What is more, to keep their position, the host community used the strategy of stigmatizing the IDP identity by utilizing different labels for IDPs. This is actually one of the important findings of this thesis.

The research revealed that IDP identity became a stigmatized identity over the course of the time. This especially manifests itself at the terms utilized to define IDPs in Georgia. Although not carrying any negative meaning literally, *devnili* and *ltolvli*, for example, was attributed negative meaning in time, at least due to how they are perceived by the IDPs. In other words, it is not what these terms actually mean, but the implication or the purpose they are used for. IDP interviewees often stated their dislike for the terms, but especially for *ltolvli*, which has been through decades associated with vulnerability and poverty. Many IDP interviewees stated that this term clearly shows host community’s contempt for them and is used as a means of discrimination.

According to the Social Identity Theory, the salience of a group identity is correlatively dependent on the salience of the out-group through social comparison. The more differences are brought forth, the more vivid the group boundaries get. Nevertheless, the theory also asserts that the salience of the group boundaries fluctuates depending on the social context. In other words, the more there is to compete for, the more the groups get into comparison, which transforms into a social competition. The fieldwork data is parallel to the Social Identity Theory as it revealed that the fragmentation between the IDP and the host community increases at times of crises (i.e. economic and political turmoil). As stated earlier, a period of cooperation in the first years of the displacement was followed by incidents of hostility and discrimination. However, the country gradually turned back to its normal (in comparison to the first years of independence); IDPs were no longer a priority in the country, and the vividness of the group boundaries got blurred. Nevertheless, although the discriminatory acts and hostility decreased over time, as stated by IDPs, the above mentioned terms continued to be used by the host community, which caused IDP identity to remain intact.

Up to this point, the effects of both the social context and the interaction with the out-group agencies (both state and host community) on the identity formation of Georgian IDPs have been covered. Regarding the effects of out-group agencies, how intergroup interaction occurs among the host community and IDPs, how IDPs are defined by the host community, and how social comparison occurs among the two groups have been discussed. According to the Social Identity Theory, effective as they are, they alone are not sufficient for the formation of IDP identity. Tajfel and Turner states that, for a group identity to develop, three cognitive stages are needed: social categorization, social comparison, and social identification. Therefore, it is of great importance to dwell on the social identification stage as well. Social identification is a self-evaluative process, through which individuals choose to categorize themselves in one group, and not another. In other words, although social comparisons with the host community

and external definition by them have an immense effect on the identity formation of IDPs' group identity, internalization of the external definition is also needed. The fieldwork data revealed that, regardless of whether they prefer to be referred to as IDPs or not, IDP identity is embedded to their social selves because they accept the significance of this identity on their self-identification. A major finding of this thesis is that IDP's of Georgia have no connection with each other because they came to Georgia proper from different regions in different time zones and they resettled at their collective settlements separately. For instance, IDPs of the 2008 War were immediately placed in compact settlements, which were quickly built by the state in remote areas near the border with South Ossetia. IDPs of the early 1990s, on the other hand, were resettled in all over Georgia at the buildings they occupied or were allowed to reside by the state. All IDP groups are isolated at their compact and segregated settlements and have limited interaction with out of their settlements. Another field research finding is that IDPs from Abkhazia and those from South Ossetia have some regional and characteristic differences. The former are mostly Megrelians, which is a sub-ethnic identity in Georgia. However, almost all interviewed Megrelian IDPs equated being Megrelian to being Georgian. Hence, this sub-ethnic identity does not pose a challenge to their most salient social identity, namely Georgianness. In addition, while IDPs of Abkhazia have greater group solidarity (due to strong neighborly relations and kinship), those of South Ossetia have somewhat weaker group solidarity and act mostly in an individualistic manner.

Still, the field research has revealed common characteristics that bring IDPs from the two different regions together, rather than the features that separate them. First and foremost, IDPs have a strong empathy for one another. This empathy is a result of the shared trauma of lost and forced displacement. They believe that only IDPs like themselves would understand what they had been through. This caused them to develop a preferential attitude towards other IDPs. In other words, they build in-group favoritism for their group members. As stated in the previous chapter, some IDPs stressed that they prefer their children to marry an

IDP rather than a local, or they stated that they easily develop good relations when they hear the person they meet is an IDP. In addition, although they do not build a formal type of group solidarity, they have strong informal ties in their close circles and they support each other in times of need. This attitude is in accordance with both the Social Identity Theory, which foresees in-group favoritism as a group characteristic, and Goffman's argument about the holders of the stigma identity. He argues that group members hold on to each other for cooperation to restore their self-esteem and to cope with their disvalued stigma identity.

Another common characteristic of Georgian IDPs is the meaning they attribute to their homes and homelands. This notion is by far one of the most significant identity markers of IDPs, and as discussed in the following part of this chapter, IDPs have a tendency to transform their IDP identity to a 'place identity'. Almost all the interviewed IDPs, except some 2nd generation ones, perceive their places of origins as their real homeland, and what they call as home is not their current dwellings, but the ones they were forced to leave. Interviewees made it clear that, their homeland is not only the land they had to leave but it is also the land where their ancestral graves, relatives, and friends were left. During the out-group interviews, many experts expressed that the IDPs almost mythicize their homelands. This strong attachment affects another important commonality among the IDPs, which is 'the strong wish to return'. According to the report published by UNHCR (2015b: 17), if the conditions are suitable, 88.3% of the IDPs wish to return to their places of origins. This was a frequently brought up theme during the interviews. Although they are pessimistic about the future of the *de facto* states and the chance to return, the most common statement they worded was "If I had the chance, I would go this moment on barefoot" except for a few 1.5th and 2nd generation IDPs who think that return would be another displacement.

The above-mentioned findings of this research indicate that IDP identity is a social identity form in Georgia, yet it is a stigmatized identity due to the Georgian social context, the interaction of IDPs with out-group agencies (state, civil society organizations and the host community), the internalization of external definition, and the common characteristics and notions that IDPs are sharing. As indicated earlier in this chapter, if IDP identity is a social form of Georgian identity, a further inquiry of this thesis is the in-group behavioral patterns of IDPs. The behavioral patterns of Georgian IDPs are critical because, according to Tajfel and Turner, they are what designate the future of a social group. More precisely, in order to restore their self-esteem and maintain a positive identity, the members of the inferior group develop behavioral strategies according to where they stand at the interpersonal-intergroup continuum. The more a group member is close to the interpersonal edge of this continuum, the more she/he develops individual-based motivational strategy. Furthermore, if the members of the inferior group are closer to the intergroup edge of the continuum, they are more likely to develop group-based strategies of social change, which are social creativity and social competition. If the majority of the group members opt for individual-based strategies of social mobility, the group may lead to disintegration. If the group members succeed in their social creativity and/or social competition strategies, this may consolidate or transform the group identity.

The fieldwork data revealed both individual-based (social mobility) and group-based behavioral (social creativity) choices among IDPs, with the former being observed less than the latter. The members, who are seeking social mobility, are mostly the younger generations and those who are living in private housings. They were observed to be reluctant to reveal their IDP identity in their social interactions. This also is in concordance with Goffman's stigma identity in that stigma identity holders generally avoid revealing their devalued identity if it is not explicit. The older generations and the ones who are living in compact settlements perform poorly in social integration, so they develop different

strategies to transform their social identities, or as Social Identity Theory argues, social creativity. It was observed that this second group seeks mechanisms of social creativity by attributing positive features to their group identity, such as sedulity, cultural norms, and unity. Common IDP statements such as “We, IDPs, are more hardworking people” or “We have strong group solidarity in comparison to locals” can be given as examples to this kind of group behavior. By doing so, they aim to shift the comparison to other contexts from the one in which they are already in a disadvantageous position. In other words, they aim to elude from the status-based vulnerable IDP identity and recreate a more positive version of their identity. Another mechanism they use is to associate their group identity with their homeland hence they are transforming the IDP identity to a ‘place identity’. In fact, most interviewees preferred to emphasize their places of origins rather than calling themselves as IDP. Mostly they were inclined to say “I am from Abkhazia/South Ossetia/Sukhumi/Gali/Akhalgori/Tshinvali”.

Tajfel and Turner suggest that group-based strategy of social change is based on two maneuvers. The first one is social creativity, which as fieldwork findings indicate, Georgian IDPs are utilizing; the other one is social competition. According to Social Identity Theory, either because of objective or subjective reasons, the social comparison among the inferior and superior groups may turn into a social competition, and the competitiveness of the groups may trigger both groups to generate “unified group actions” (i.e. social movement). The last finding of this thesis is that, IDPs do not employ social competition as a group strategy. First and foremost, although there were occasional tensions between the IDPs and the host community, this did not turn into a full-fledged conflict due to the changes in the social context (i.e. survival of Georgia from economic and political turmoil of the early 1990s) and sharing the most salient identity (Georgianness) with the host community. Secondly, although IDPs have a sense of solidarity, it is only limited to their close circles (i.e., relatives, compact settlements, region of origin). In addition, IDPs do not have the necessary socio-

economic capacity to form a politicized type of solidarity, through which they would fight for their rights.

To conclude, although it is not one of the most dominant identities like Georgianness or Georgian Orthodox Church membership, IDP identity is a prominent social identity form in Georgia. The research revealed that this identity is a stigmatized identity which is associated with vulnerability and poverty. Factors such as external definition and intergroup relations have an important role in the formation of it. However, these two factors alone are not sufficient in the process of forming this social identity. As field data show, even though they are not content with their identity to being associated with vulnerability, the IDP identity is internalized by the in-group members. In addition to the internalization of the IDP identity, a number of common in-group notions exist that reinforce their identity. These notions appear as shared trauma of loss and forced displacement, in-group favoritism, the perception of homeland, and their strong wish to return. As the IDP identity puts them in an inferior position in society, IDP group members also develop a number of individual-based and group-based strategies to cope with their disvalued identity and to restore their self-esteem. Especially young generation IDPs and those living in private housing do not disclose their identities unless necessary and have the motivation of social mobility through social integration. On the other hand, since social mobility is not an easy option for the older generations and for the IDPs living in collective settlements, it has been observed that they develop group-motivated strategies. They attribute positive meanings to their IDP identity, or they aim to shift their IDP identity to a 'place identity' through associating their identity with their homelands. On the other hand, the IDP identity, which is a social identity, does not turn into a collective identity since they are no longer in conflict with the society and since they do not have the sufficient socio-economic capacity to form a politicized group solidarity. In other words, social competition is not a group-motivated strategy used by IDPs. As a result, it can be concluded that integration of future IDP generations will be more

successful than older generations and, as they are currently transforming their identity by referring to regional elements, the IDP identity that exists today is in a state of flux.

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APPENDICES

A. INTERVIEW LIST

In-Group Agencies/ IDPs						
Int.	Settlement	New/Old Comer	From	Gender	Generation	Date
1.	Private Household	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1.5 th	18.11.2014
2.	Sakartvelo Hotel	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1 st	24.11.2014
3.	Sakartvelo Hotel	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1 st	24.11.2014
4.	Sakartvelo Hotel	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1 st	24.11.2014
5.	Sakartvelo Hotel	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1.5 th	24.11.2014
6.	Sakartvelo Hotel	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1 st	24.11.2014
7.	Sakartvelo Hotel	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1 st	24.11.2014
8.	Sakartvelo Hotel	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1 st	24.11.2014
9.	Sakartvelo Hotel	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1 st	24.11.2014
10	Sakartvelo Hotel	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Male	1 st	24.11.2014
11	Sakartvelo Hotel	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1 st	24.11.2014
12	Koheti Hotel	Old IDP	S.Ossetia	Female	1 st	25.11.2014
13	Koheti Hotel	Old IDP	S.Ossetia	Female	1.5 th	25.11.2014
14	Koheti Hotel	Old IDP	S.Ossetia	Female	1 st	25.11.2014
15	Koheti Hotel	Old IDP	S.Ossetia	Male	1 st	25.11.2014
16	Alekseevka Settlement New Building	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Male	1 st	26.11.2014
17	Alekseevka Settlement New Building	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Male	1 st	26.11.2014
18	Ruinous Settlement near Alekseevka S.	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1 st	26.11.2014
19	Nadzaledevi Settlement	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Male	1 st	28.11.2014
20	Tserovani Sett.	New IDP	S.Ossetia	Female	1 st	30.11.2014
21	Tserovani Sett.	New IDP	S.Ossetia	Female	1 st	30.11.2014
22	Tserovani Sett.	New IDP	S.Ossetia	Male	1 st	30.11.2014
23	Tserovani Settlement	New IDP	S.Ossetia	Male	1 st	30.11.2014
24	Tserovani Settlement	New IDP	S.Ossetia	Male	1 st	30.11.2014

25	Private Household	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1 st	30.11.2014
26	Bagebi Settlement	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Male	1 st	02.12.2014
27	Bagebi Settlement	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1 st	02.12.2014
28	Bagebi Settlement	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	2 nd	02.12.2014
29	Tbilisi Sea Sett.	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1.5 th	03.12.2014
30	Tbilisi Sea Sett.	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1 st	03.12.2014
31	Tbilisi Sea Sett.	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1 st	03.12.2014
32	Sakartvelo Hotel	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Male	1 st	05.10.2015
33	Sakartvelo Hotel	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Male	1 st	05.10.2015
34	Sakartvelo Hotel	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1 st	05.10.2015
35	Sakartvelo Hotel	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1 st	05.10.2015
36	Settlement at Temka District	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Male	1 st	08.10.2015
37	Settlement at Temka District	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1 st	08.10.2015
38	Settlement at Ninoshvili Street	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1 st	13.10.2015
39	Settlement at Ninoshvili Street	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1 st	13.10.2015
40	Settlement at Ninoshvili Street	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1 st	13.10.2015
41	Private Household	New IDP	S.Ossetia	Male	1 st	14.10.2015
42	Private Household	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1 st	18.10.2015
43	Settlement at Guramishvili Street: Tskneti	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1 st	06.12.2016
44	Settlement at Guramishvili Street: Tskneti	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1.5 th	06.12.2016
45	Settlement at Guramishvili Street: Tskneti	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Male	2 nd	06.12.2016
46	Settlement at Guramishvili Street: Tskneti	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1 st	06.12.2016
47	Settlement at Guramishvili Street: Tskneti	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Male	1 st	06.12.2016
48	Koheti Hotel	Old IDP	S.Ossetia	Male	1 st	29.11.2017
49	Koheti Hotel	Old IDP	S.Ossetia	Female	1 st	29.11.2017

50	Settlements at Tsothe Dadiani Street	Old IDP	S.Ossetia	Female	1 st	30.11.2017
51	Settlements at Tsothe Dadiani Street	Old IDP	S.Ossetia	Female	2 nd	30.11.2017
52	Settlements at Tsothe Dadiani Street	Old IDP	S.Ossetia	Male	1.5 th	30.11.2017
53	Private Household	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1.5 th	01.12.2017
Out-Group Agencies (Experts, Academicians, State Officials, Politicians)						
Int.	Organization	New/Old Comer (If IDP)	From (If IDP)	Gender	Generation (If IDP)	Date
54	Expert from ECMI (European Center for Minority Issues)	-	-	Male	-	11.11.2014
55	Expert from ECMI	-	-	Male	-	11.11.2014
56	Expert from GFSIS (Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies)	-	-	Male	-	11.11.2014
57	State Official from the Ministry of Correction	-	-	Male	-	12.11.2014
58	Academician from Tbilisi State University (TSU)	-	-	Male		12.11.2014
59	Expert from GFSIS	-	-	Male		13.11.2014
60	Expert from EPFOUND (Eurasia Partnership Foundation)	-	-	Male		13.11.2014
61	Academician from Tbilisi State University	-	-	Male		14.11.2014
62	Academician from Ilia State	-	-	Male		17.11.2014

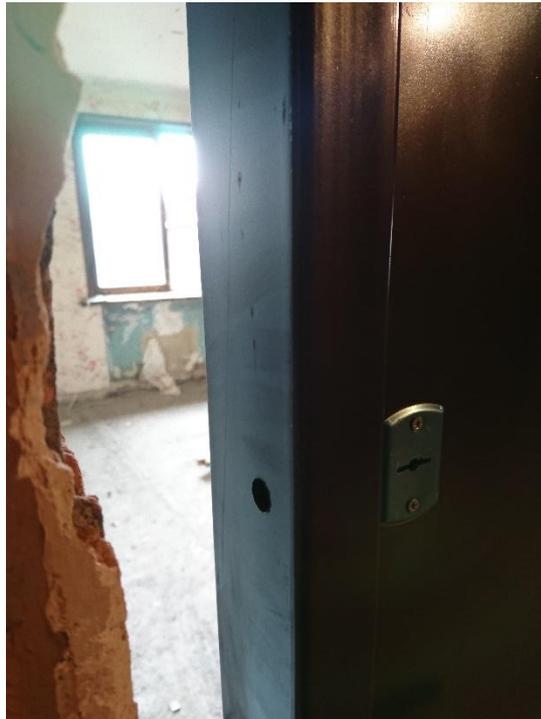
	University					
63	Expert from IPS (Institute for Policy Studies)	-	-	Male		17.11.2014
64	Expert from GRASS (Georgia's Reform Associates)	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1.5 th	18.11.2014
65	Politician from Democratic Movement-United Georgia IDP from Abkhazia	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Male	1 st	19.11.2014
66	Academician from Sukhumi State University	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1 st	19.11.2014
67	Politician from United National Movement	-	-	Female	-	19.11.2014
68	Expert from CRRC (Caucasus Research Resources Center)	-	-	Male	-	20.11.2014
69	Academician/expert from IPS	-	-	Female	-	04.12.2014
70	Academician/expert from Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD)	-	-	Female	-	02.10.2015
71	The Institute for the Study of Nationalism and Conflicts (ISNC)	-	-	Female	-	06.10.2015
72	State Official	-	-	Male	-	07.10.2015
73	Academician from TSU	-	-	Female	-	07.10.2015
74	Expert from IDP Network 'Synergy'	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1 st	14.10.2015
75	Expert from IDP	-	-	Male	-	14.10.2015

	Network 'Synergy'					
76	State official from MRA	-	-	Male	-	15.10.2015
77	A retired high ranking state official	-	-	Male	-	17.10.2015
78	Expert from Ombudsman Office, ex-state official from MRA	-	-	Female	-	22.10.2015
79	Academician from TSU	-	-	Female	-	05.12.2016
80	Academician from TSU	-	-	Female	-	03.04.2017
81	Expert from IDP Network 'Synergy'	Old IDP	Abkhazia	Female	1 st	04.04.2017
82	Expert from Caucasian House	-	-	Male	-	06.04.2017
83	Expert from GFSIS	-	-	Male	-	29.11.2017
84	Academician from TSU	-	-	Female	-	29.11.2017
85	Expert from Caucasian House	-	-	Male	-	29.11.2017

B. PHOTOS FROM THE COLLECTIVE CENTERS

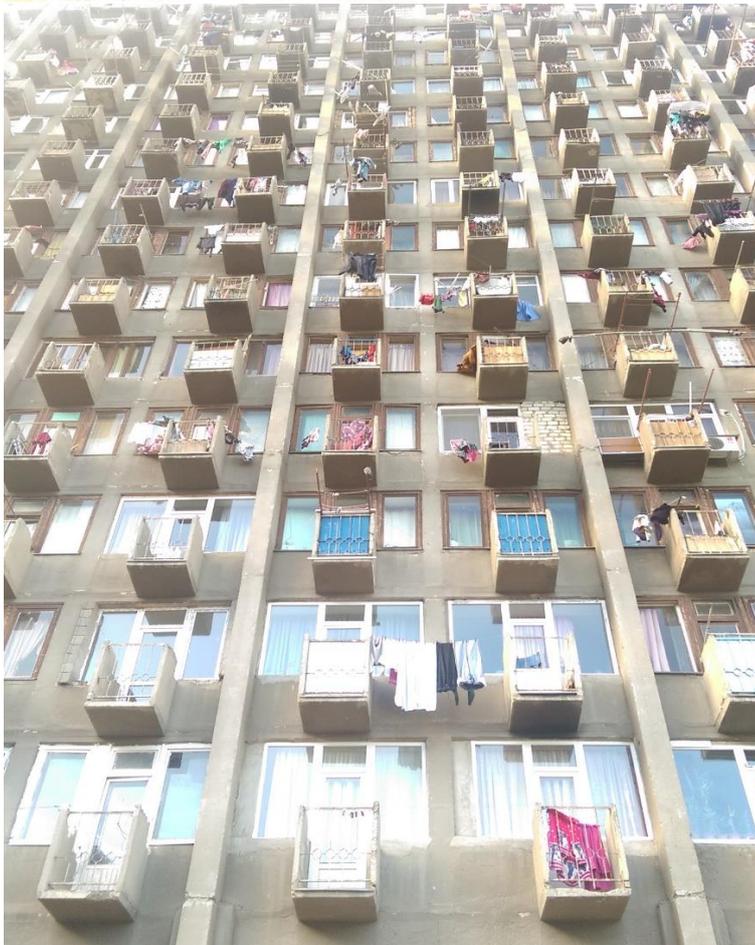
Old Settlements

Hotel Kolheti (evicted in 2017)





Settlement at Bagebi (Ex-Dormitory Complex)



Tbilisi Sea Settlements



New Settlements

Settlement at Tsothe Dadiani Street



Tserovani Settlement



(Image Source <http://mtskheta-mtianeti.gov.ge>)

Alekseevka Settlement



C. TURKISH SUMMARY/ TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Bu tez, Bu tez, Gürcistan'da yerinden edilmiş kişilerin (*IDP*'lerin) sosyolojik bir analizini yapmakta, onları ayrı bir sosyal grup olarak ele almakta ve *IDP*'leri gruplararası ilişkiler perspektifinden inceleyen alternatif bir yaklaşım geliştirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Literatürde *IDP*'lere odaklanan çalışmalar ya betimleyici vaka çalışmalarıdır ya da müdahale stratejilerini içeren çalışmalardır. Dolayısıyla bu tezin kuramsal önemi, Tajfel ve Turner'ın (1978) sosyal kimlik kuramı ile *IDP* kavramını sorgulaması ve Abhazya ve Güney Osetya'dan farklı dönemlerde göç etmek zorunda kalan Gürcü *IDP*'lerin kimlik oluşum süreçlerinin etkili bileşenlerini analiz etmesidir.

1991'de bağımsızlığının ilanından sonra Gürcistan'da ulus ve devlet inşası birbirine koşut olarak hayata geçirilmiştir. Ancak ülke; Sovyet sonrası birçok devletin yaşadığı iç savaşlar, etnik çatışmalar, toprak bütünlüğü tehditleri, siyasi çalkantılar ve ekonomik istikrarsızlıklar gibi ciddi krizlerle karşı karşıya kalmıştır. Sovyetler Birliği'nin son yıllarında Baltık Devletleri'nde alevlenen ve ardından Güney Kafkasya'ya yayılan demokrasi talebi, bu eski cumhuriyetlerdeki milliyetçi söylemlerle hızla iç içe geçmiştir (Gooding, 1992: 56; Muiznieks, 1995: 6; Gürsoy, 2011: 40-42). Milliyetçilik, Gürcüler için olduğu gibi Gürcistan'daki etnik azınlıklar (Abhazlar ve Güney Osetler) için de her zaman güçlü bir duygu olmuştur. Bu nedenle, 1990'ların başında tetiklenen etnik çatışmalar birdenbire ortaya çıkmamıştır. Aksine bu çatışmaların kökleri çok daha eskiye dayanmaktadır. Her üç etnik grup da kendi mitleri ve tarih yazımlarıyla kendilerini bölgenin eski sakinleri olarak görmektedir (Aydınün ve Asker, 2012: 124-125).

Gürcistan 1991 yılında bağımsızlığını ilan ettiğinde sınırları içinde iki özerk cumhuriyet ve bir özerk bölge bulunmaktaydı: Acaristan Özerk Sovyet Sosyalist Cumhuriyeti (Acaristan ÖSSC), Abhazya Özerk Sovyet Sosyalist Cumhuriyeti

(Abhazya ÖSSC) ve Güney Osetya Özerk Oblastı (Güney Osetya ÖB). Aslan Abashidze'nin siyasi liderliğinde, o dönemde çoğunlukla etnik olarak Gürcü Müslümanlardan oluşan Acaristan Özerk Cumhuriyeti, Gürcistan'daki çatışma evresinden kabuğuna çekilerek ve neredeyse devlet içinde bir devlet olarak kurtulmuştur (Gürsoy ve Katliarou, 2016: 195). Ancak iki özerk bölge olan Abhazya ve Güney Osetya'da gerilim tırmanmıştır. Ayrılıkçı çatışmalar önce Güney Osetya'da (1990-1992) başlamış ve ardından Abhazya'ya (1992-1994) sıçramıştır. Ayrıca Tiflis'teki siyasi çalkantı ülkeyi bir askerî darbeye (Aralık 1991-Ocak 1992) ve bir iç savaşa (1992-1993) sürüklemiştir. Şevardnadze, 1992 yılında ülkenin ikinci cumhurbaşkanı olarak iktidara geldiğinde aynı yıl Güney Osetya ile silahlı çatışmaya son vermeyi başarmış ve 1994 yılında imzalanan ateşkesle Abhazya ile de savaşı sonlandırmıştır. Ancak bu çatışmalar önemli insani krizlere neden olmuştur. Bahsi geçen iki etnik çatışma sonucunda 300.000'den fazla insan yerlerinden edilmiştir.

1990'ların başındaki Abhaz-Gürcü ihtilafı sırasında 240.000 etnik Gürcü ve bilinmeyen sayıda etnik Abhaz yerlerini terk etmek zorunda kalmıştır. 1994 ateşkesinin imzalanmasından sonra, 50.000 civarında etnik Gürcü, Abhazya'ya geri dönmeyi başarmıştır. İlk göç dalgasının ikinci kısmı Güney Osetya-Gürcistan ihtilafı sonucunda yaşanmıştır. Yaklaşık 60.000 civarındaki zorunlu göç mağdurunun 50.000'ini etnik Osetler oluştururken (yaklaşık 40.000'i Kuzey Osetya'ya kaçan mülteciler ve 10.000'i Oset *IDP*) 10.000'ini etnik Gürcüler oluşturmuştur

2008 yılında Gürcistan ile Rusya Federasyonu arasında Güney Osetya üzerinden patlak veren Ağustos Savaşı'nın (5 Gün Savaşı) sonucunda Gürcistan 2. zorunlu göç dalgası ile karşı karşıya kalmıştır. Zorunlu göçe maruz kalan yaklaşık 158.000 kişinin, yaklaşık 128.000'ini Gürcistan'a kaçan etnik Gürcüler oluşturmuştur. Bu Gürcü *IDP*'lerden bazıları savaştan hemen sonra evlerine geri dönmüşse de, yaklaşık 22.000'ini kalıcı olarak Gürcistan'ın diğer bölgelerine yerleşmiştir. Günümüzde, birinci göç dalgasıyla gelen *IDP*'ler "eski *IDP*'ler"

veya “Shevardnadze’nin *IDP*’leri” olarak anılmaktayken ikinci göç dalgası ile gelenler için “yeni *IDP*’ler” veya “Saakaşvili’nin *IDP*’leri” tanımlaması kullanılmaktadır. Gürcistan’ın İşgal Altındaki Topraklarından Gelen Ülke İçinde Yerinden Edilmiş Kişiler; Çalışma, Sağlık ve Sosyal İşler Bakanlığı tarafından sağlanan verilere göre, Aralık 2019 itibariyle, Gürcistan’da yaşayan 301.000 kayıtlı *IDP* bulunmaktadır (IDMC, 2020: 1).

Günümüzde *IDP*’ler Gürcistan’ın en hayati sorunlarından birini oluşturmakta ve kendilerine yönelik kriz yönetiminin başarısı (özellikle ilk dalgayla gelenler açısından) tartışılmaktadır. Yaşadıkları toprakları ve tüm varlıklarını geride bırakan *IDP*’ler, sosyoekonomik sorunlarla mücadele etmeye devam etmektedirler. *IDP*’lerin temel sorunlarının başında barınma, düşük yaşam standartları, işsizlik, yabancılaşma ve zaman zaman ayrımcılıklara maruz kalma gelmektedir. *IDP*’lerin yaşadığı sosyoekonomik sorunlar, onların yerel halk ile sosyal etkileşimini etkileyerek entegrasyon sorunları yaşamalarına neden olmaktadır. Etnik kökenlerinin yanı sıra, *IDP*’ler yerel Gürcülerle aynı dine (ağırlıklı olarak Gürcü Ortodoks Kilisesi’nin üyeleridirler) ve kültürel normlara (bölgesel özelliklerden dolayı küçük farklılıklar vardır) sahiptirler. Böylece ortak yanları nedeniyle topluma entegrasyonlarının daha kolay olması beklenmektedir. Ancak bu beklentinin tersine, bu tez kapsamında gerçekleştirilen saha araştırmaları da dahil olmak üzere birçok rapor ve çalışma, *IDP*’lerin hâlâ önemli entegrasyon sorunlarının olduğunu göstermektedir.

Tezin Argümanları

Bu tez dört temel soruya yanıt vermeyi amaçlamaktadır: 1) *IDP* kimliği Gürcistan’da baskın bir sosyal kimlik biçimi midir? 2) Öyleyse bu grup kimliğinin oluşmasına neden olan temel faktörler nelerdir? 3) *IDP*’ler gruplararası ve grup içi ilişkilerinde hangi davranış biçimlerini kullanırlar? 4) *IDP* kimliği Gürcistan’da baskın bir sosyal kimlikse toplumsal bağlamdaki

değişikliklere göre bu kimlik kalıcı mıdır, dönüşüm içinde midir yoksa çözülme aşamasında mıdır?

Yukarıdaki sorular ışığında, bu tezin dayandığı ilk argüman, Gürcistan'daki *IDP*'lerin *titüler* ulusun bir parçası olmalarına ve ilk göç dalgasının üzerinden yaklaşık otuz yıl geçmesine rağmen hâlâ entegrasyon sorunlarıyla karşı karşıya olduklarıdır. Sosyoekonomik sorunlar ve toplumsal hiyerarşinin en alt tabakalarında yer almaları, kimi zaman *IDP*'lerin toplumdan yabancılaşmalarına ve ayrımcılığa maruz kaldıklarını hissetmelerine neden olmaktadır.

Bu tezin ikinci argümanı *IDP* kimliğinin zaman içinde kazandığı nitelikle ilgilidir. Gürcistan, bağımsızlık mücadelesi sırasında ve sonrasında ciddi ekonomik sıkıntılarla yüz yüze gelmiş ve bu durum sadece *IDP*'leri değil toplumun tüm kesimlerini etkilemiştir. Kaynakların kıt olduğu bu süreçlerde, *IDP*'ler toplumun geri kalanı tarafından kimi zaman “yük” olarak algılanmışlardır. Bu durum, *IDP*'ler ve yerel halk arasında “biz ve onlar” ayrışmasını oluşturmuştur. Hatta *IDP*'leri tanımlamakta kullanılan terimler zaman içinde negatif anlam kazanarak bir *stigmalaşmışlardır*.

Bu tez ayrıca *IDP* kimliğinin öneminin ülkedeki değişimlerle birlikte dalgalandığını ileri sürmektedir. Ülkede yaşanan kriz ve sıkıntı dönemlerinde, *IDP*'ler ile göç ettikleri yerdeki halk arasındaki ayrışma artmaktayken ekonomik istikrar ve siyasi konsolidasyon dönemlerinde *IDP* kimliğinin sınırlarının belirginliği azalmaktadır. Saha verilerinden hareketle, günümüzde *IDP*'lerin hâlâ “alt” bir sosyal grup olarak algılandığını, yerel halkın ise sosyal etkileşimlerinde “üst” sosyal grup konumunda olduğunu söylemek mümkündür.

Bu nedenle, *stigma* kimliğinin getirdiği negatif etkilerden kurtulmak için *IDP*'lerin bireysel ya da grup motivasyonlu birtakım davranış stratejileri geliştirmeleri de bu tezin bir diğer argümanıdır. Bireysel strateji olarak genç ve toplu yerleşkelerden farklı konutlarda yaşayan *IDP*'ler arasında, sosyal hareketlilik

eğilimi varken yaşlı ve toplu konutlarda yaşayan *IDP*'ler arasında grup temelli strateji geliştirme (gruba atfedilen özellikleri değiştirme ve kimliğin dönüştürme) eğilimi bulunmaktadır.

Bu tezin son argümanı, *IDP*'lerin toplumsal kimliklerinin kolektif bir kimliğe dönüşmediğidir. Her ne kadar *IDP*'ler akrabalık, komşuluk ve hemşerilik temelinde bir dayanışma şekli geliştirmişlerse de sosyoekonomik durumları *IDP*'lerin güçlü ve siyasal boyut kazanmış homojen bir dayanışma mekanizması kurmasına engel teşkil etmektedir.

Kuramsal Çerçeve

Bu tezde Henri Tajfel ve John C. Turner'ın sosyal kimlik kuramından yararlanılmıştır (Tajfel ve Turner, 1979; 1986). İkilinin kuramı, sosyal kimliği, grup üyeliğinden türetilen benliğin bir parçası olarak formüle eder. Sosyal kimlik kuramında, Tajfel ve Turner, bireyin en temel amacının yüksek özgüven sahibi olmak olduğunu ve bir gruba üyeliğin aidiyet duygusunu artırarak bu özgüveni güçlendiren bir kaynak haline geldiğini savunur.

Sosyal kimlik kuramı, insanların sosyal dünyalarını (biz ve onlar olarak) kategorize etme eğiliminde olduklarını ve buna göre kendilerini “sosyal kategorizasyon”, “sosyal özdeşleşme” ve “sosyal karşılaştırma” diye adlandırdıkları üç aşama sonucunda belirli bir gruba konumlandıklarını öne sürer. Bu bağlamda, bireyler grup içi benzerlikleri ve grup dışı farklılıkları sivriltme eğilimindedirler. Diğer bir ifadeyle, kendi grupları ve diğer grup(lar) arasında sosyal karşılaştırma içindedirler. Ancak toplumsal koşullara bağlı olarak gruplararası karşılaştırma illa ki sosyal bir çatışmaya dönüşmeyebilir; çatışma, kaynakların kıt olduğu koşullarda beklenen bir durumdur. Bu bağlamda sosyal kimlik kuramı, Gürcü örneğiyle güçlü bir şekilde örtüşmektedir. Daha önce de belirtildiği gibi, bu tezin ana argümanlarından biri, *IDP* kimliğinin

belirginliğinde ve dolayısıyla *IDP* grubunun ev sahibi toplumdaki farklılaşma düzeyinde ülke ekonomisindeki değişimler etkin bir rol oynamaktadır.

Gürcü *IDP*'lerin grup oluşumu ve kimlik süreçlerini açıklamadaki etkinliğinin yanı sıra, sosyal kimlik kuramı ayrıca grup içi üyelerin davranış kalıplarını (yani sosyal hareketlilik ve sosyal değişim) da açıklamaktadır. Ayrıca bir grubun dönüşümüne veya dağılmasına yol açan koşullara da sistematik bir yaklaşım geliştirmiştir (Tajfel ve Turner, 1979). Bu tezde gruba aidiyet seviyesi ve kimlik oluşumundaki duygusal ve bilişsel süreçler gibi konular ele alınmadığından yeni sosyal kimlik kuramları (benlik kategorizasyon kuramı (Turner, 1985; Turner ve diğerleri, 1987), optimal ayırt edicilik kuramı (Brewer, 1991), belirsizlik-kimlik kuramı (Hogg, 2000) ve gruplararası duygu kuramı (Smith ve Mackie, 2015; Mackie, Smith ve Ray, 2008; Smith, 1993)) kullanılmamış, temel sosyal kimlik kuramına sadık kalınmıştır.

Tezde Kullanılan Yöntemler

Bu tezde süreç izleme, doküman analizi ve saha araştırması yöntemleri benimsenmiştir. Süreç izleme, bir vakadaki nedensel mekanizmaların nasıl işlediğini anlamayı amaçlayan ve bu mekanizmaların ayrıntılı şekilde izini süren bir araştırma yöntemidir (Levy, 2002; Bennet ve Elman, 2007; Venneson, 2008). Bu yöntemle öncelikle üç etnik grubun (Gürcüler, Abhazlar ve Güney Osetyalılar) tarih yazımlarını inceleyerek hem etnik çatışmalara yol açan tetikleyici olayları tespit etmek hem de bu üç grubun bu tetikleyici olaylara bakış açılarını ve algılarını da anlamak hedeflenmiştir. Ayrıca *IDP* grup kimliğinin öne çıkmasını etkileyen olayların araştırılması da amaçlanmıştır.

Doküman analizi kapsamında, Gürcistan'ın *IDP*'lere ilişkin mevzuatında yer alan resmî belgeler (kanunlar, yönetmelikler, açıklamalar), uluslararası kuruluşlar (Avrupa Konseyi, Birleşmiş Milletler, UNHCR, Dünya Bankası, Norveç Mülteci Konseyi) tarafından hazırlanan raporlar, yerel sivil toplum

kuruluşlarının ve Gürcistan Kamu Denetçisinin raporları, vaka çalışmaları, tavsiyeleri ve analiz belgeleri kullanılmıştır.

Saha çalışması yöntemiyle bir yandan *IDP*'lerin içinde yaşadıkları kendine özgü fiziksel ortamı gözlemlemek, diğer yandan yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine mülakatlar yapılması amaçlanmıştır. Görüşülen kişiler, grup içi (*IDP*'lerden) ve grup dışı temsilcilerden seçilmiştir. Grup içi temsilciler olan *IDP*'ler üç gruptan oluşmaktadırlar; 1) 1990'ların başında Abhazya'dan gelen *IDP*'ler, 2) 1990'ların başında Güney Osetya'dan gelen *IDP*'ler ve 3) 2008 savaşından sonra Güney Osetya'dan gelen *IDP*'ler. Grup dışı temsilcileri ise devlet yetkilileri, politikacılar, akademisyenler ve sivil toplum kuruluşu uzmanları oluşturmaktadır.

Yöneltilen soruların bazıları hem grup içi hem de grup dışı temsilcilere sorulurken bazı sorular gruplara özel hazırlanmıştır. Grup içi temsilciler için hazırlanan sorular beş temel tema altında toplanmıştır; 1) kişisel göç hikayesi, 2) ekonomik koşullar (konaklama, yaşam koşulları, istihdam), 3) toplumsal koşullar (eğitim, toplumla etkileşim, entegrasyon, yabancılaşma/ayrımcılık, dayanışma, yerel halk için algı, yerel halkın *IDP*'ler için algısı, diğer *IDP* grupları için algı, vatan algısı, buldukları yere aitlik), 4) siyasi koşullar (hükümet/STK'lar/siyasi partiler ile etkileşim, devletten/STK'lardan beklentiler, sosyal haklar konusundaki farkındalık) ve 5) geleceklerine ilişkin düşünceleri (*de facto* bölgeler hakkındaki görüşler, geri dönme istekliliği ve olasılığı, gelecek beklentileri).

Birinci tema dışındaki sorular, grup dışı temsilcilere de yöneltilmiştir. Grup dışı temsilcilerden bu soruları hem kendi bakış açılarını ifade ederek hem de *IDP*'lerin bakış açılarını betimleyerek yanıtlamaları beklenmiştir. Bazı durumlarda, görüşülen kişiler her iki grubun da üyesi olmuştur. Örneğin, saha araştırmalarında *IDP* geçmişine sahip STK uzmanları ve politikacılarla da görüşme şansı yakalanmıştır.

Saha Araştırması Süreci

Hâlihazırda *IDP*'ler Gürcistan'ın tüm bölgelerinde yaşamaktadırlar ancak en büyük *IDP* nüfusu Tiflis'te ikamet etmektedir. Bu nedenle bu tezin saha çalışması başkentte gerçekleştirilmiştir. Görüşülen birçok *IDP* için başkente göç, daha iyi iş fırsatları ve yaşam koşulları anlamına gelmektedir. Ayrıca Tiflis kozmopolit bir yapıya sahiptir ve *IDP*'lerin yerel halk ile etkileşimlerinin gözlemlenmesi açısından en önemli merkezlerden biridir. Bu bağlamda, 2014-2017 yılları arasında Tiflis'te beş saha çalışması gerçekleştirilmiş, bu saha çalışmalarında bazıları iki kez olmak üzere toplamda on bir *IDP* yerleşkesi ziyaret edilmiştir. Tiflis dışında ziyaret edilen tek *IDP* yerleşkesi, Mtsheta bölgesinde (Güney Osetya ile Tiflis arasında) bulunan Tserovani Yerleşkesi olmuştur. Zira Yeni *IDP*'ler 2008 Savaşı'ndan sonraki üç ay içinde sınır bölgesine yakın bu ve benzeri yerleşkelere yerleştirilmişlerdir.

2014-2017 yılları arasında toplam 85 derinlemesine mülakat gerçekleştirilmiştir. Görüşmeler ortalama 1-1,5 saat (bazıları 15-30 dakika, bazıları 3 saatten fazla) sürmüştür. Bu mülakatların 32'si grup dışı temsilcilerle (5'i ayrıca *IDP*'dir de), kalan 53 mülakat *IDP*'lerle gerçekleştirilmiştir. Görüşülen 58 *IDP*'ten (5'i *IDP* geçmişi olan STK ve siyasi parti temsilcisidir), 40'ı kadın ve 18'i erkektir. Ayrıca görüşülen *IDP*'lerin yaşlarının 18 ile 80'ler arasında olması, farklı *IDP* jenerasyonlarını da gözlemlene fırsatını vermiştir. Görüşülen 58 *IDP*'den 47'si 1., 8'i 1,5. ve 3'ü 2. nesil *IDP*'lerdir. Görüşülen 58 *IDP*'den 52'si eski *IDP* (43'ü Abhazya'dan, 9'u Güney Osetya'dan), 6'sı (2008 savaşı sonrası Güney Osetya'dan) yeni *IDP*'dir.

Yukarıda bahsedildiği gibi, 10 *IDP* görüşmesi dışında, 48 *IDP* görüşmesi 12 *IDP* yerleşkesinde gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu yerleşkelerdeki alan sorunları nedeniyle bazı görüşmeler tüm aile bireyleriyle aynı anda yapılmak zorunda kalmış ancak sorular tüm görüşmecilere ayrı ayrı sorulmuş ve bireysel yanıtlamaları beklenmiştir. Eski *IDP*'lerin yerleşkeleri çoğunlukla şehir merkezinde ve

Tiflis'in eteklerinde bulunurken Güney Osetya'dan gelen yeni *IDP*'lerin yerleşkeleri Tiflis'ten 40 km uzaklıkta ve Güney Osetya sınırına yakın bir noktada yer almaktadır.

Tezin Bölümleri

Birinci bölüm olan girişte, incelenen sosyal grup tanıtılmakta; tezin ana soruları, argümanları ve bu çalışmada neden sosyal kimlik kuramının kullanıldığı açıklanmaktadır. Giriş bölümü ayrıca tezde kullanılan yöntemler ve gerçekleştirilen saha çalışmasına ilişkin kapsamlı bilgi sunmaktadır.

İkinci bölümde literatür taraması ve kuramsal çerçeve detaylandırılmıştır. Bu bölümün ilk kısmı, *IDP* kavramının uluslararası ve Gürcü literatüründe nasıl ele alındığı incelemektedir. Bölümün ikinci kısmında sosyal kimlik kuramı kapsamlı bir şekilde tartışılmıştır. Bu kısımda önce sosyal bilimlerde kimlik üzerine yapılan tartışmalar değerlendirilmiştir. Sonrasında, temel kimlik kategorileri ve kimlik kavramına yaklaşımlar incelenmiştir. Ardından sosyal kategori ile sosyal grup arasındaki ayrım analiz edilmiştir. Bu bölüm aynı zamanda *stigma* kimliğinin inşasında grup dışı tanımlamanın gücünü de sorgulamaktadır. Son olarak bu bölümde, sosyal kimlik kuramı çerçevesinde Gürcistan'daki *IDP* kimliğinin nasıl ele alındığı irdelenmiştir.

Üç, dört ve beşinci bölümler; Gürcistan, Abhazya ve Güney Osetya arasındaki etnik çatışmaların köklerini ve ayrıca bu çatışmaların zorunlu göç dalgalarıyla nasıl sonuçlandığını açıklamayı hedeflemiştir. Bu bölümlerde, *IDP* dalgalarının ve ilgili çatışmaların kronolojik bir listesini vermekten ziyade, çatışan tarafların ulus inşa süreçlerini araştırmak amaçlanmıştır. Altıncı bölümde, Gürcistan devleti ile sivil toplumunun ve uluslararası aktörlerin ülkedeki *IDP*'lerin durumuna ilişkin attıkları adımlar ele alınmıştır.

Saha çalışması bulgularına odaklanan yedinci bölüm, Gürcü *IDP*'lerin güncel durumlarını ve kimlik inşalarını şekillendiren faktörleri analiz etmektedir. Bu bölümde, *IDP*'lerin grup özellikleri, grup içi ve gruplar arası etkileşimleri, ayrıca bu iki grubun *IDP* kimliğine ilişkin algıları odak noktaları olmuştur. Bu bölümde ayrıca grup dışı aktörlerin Gürcü *IDP*'lere yönelik algıları ve yaklaşımları irdelenmiştir. Bu bağlamda, *IDP*'lerin toplum, devlet ve sivil toplum ile ilişkileri analiz edilmiştir. Bu bölümün son kısmında, bir sosyal kimlik olarak *IDP* kavramının evrimi ve Gürcü *IDP*'lerin davranış kalıpları değerlendirilmiştir. Sekizinci ve son bölüm, sosyal kimlik kuramının Gürcü *IDP*'ler üzerindeki uygulanabilirliğine ilişkin sonuç açıklamalarını ve değerlendirmeleri içermiştir.

Araştırma Bulguları

Bu tezin ilk bulguları süreç izleme metodu ile çatışma tarihi üzerine olmuştur. Bu bağlamda, Gürcü *IDP*'lerin zorunlu göçüne neden olan etnik çatışmaların temel nedenlerine ilişkin olarak, çatışan üç etnik grubun (Gürcüler, Abhazlar ve Güney Osetyalılar) tarih yazımlarında farklı şekilde yorumlanan tarihsel kırılma noktaları incelenmiştir.

Önce Çarlık Rusya'nın, ardından Sovyetler Birliği'nin egemenliğinde geçen yüzyıllar içerisinde Gürcistan, Abhazya ve Güney Osetya, Rus egemenliğinden farklı düzeylerde ve boyutlarda etkilenmiştir. Örneğin 19. yüzyıl, Oset ulusal ideolojisinin gelişmeye başladığı dönem olmuştur. Bu dönemde, Rus yetkililer ilk kez kuzey Gürcistan'dan Güney Osetya olarak bahsetmeye başlamışlardır. Aynı dönem, “yok olmaya karşı hayatta kalma” kavramı üzerine inşa edilen Abhaz ulusal ideolojisi üzerinde de büyük bir etkiye sahip olmuştur. Çarlığın Ruslaştırma politikasına üç büyük ayaklanma ve Osmanlı-Rus Savaşı sırasında Osmanlılara verdikleri destekle güçlü bir direnç gösteren Abhazlar, Çarlık Rusya'nın ciddi baskısına maruz kalmışlardır. Öyle ki 19. yüzyılda Abhaz nüfusunun %60'ı yurtlarını terk etmek zorunda kalmıştır. Ancak Abhaz tarih yazımında, Abhazlardan boşalan topraklara Gürcülerin (çoğunlukla Megrellerin)

yerleşmesi nedeniyle Ruslaştırma politikaları yerine Gürcüleri “fırsatçı” davranmakla suçlamışlardır. Bu dönem, Abhaz ve Gürcü ulusal söylemleri arasındaki farklılaşmada ilk nokta olarak gözükmektedir. Çarlık Rusya’nın Gürcü ulusal söylemi üzerindeki etkisi de çok büyük ve oldukça paradoksaldır. İmparatorluk, Gürcü tarih yazıcılığında, sadece Avrupa’ya açılan bir kapı ve Müslüman dünyasına karşı bir koruyucu olarak algılanmamış, aynı zamanda Gürcü topraklarını tek bir siyasi otorite altında birleştiren bir güç olarak da kabul edilmiştir. Böylece Gürcü *ethosu* güvence altına alınmıştır. Ancak aynı tarih yazıcılığı Çarlık otoritesinin paradoksal etkisini de göz ardı etmemiştir. İmparatorluğun Ruslaştırma politikalarını dayatması ve Gürcü kültürünü kökünden sökmekle tehdit etmesi, Gürcistan’da kaçınılmaz tepki yaratmış ve milliyetçi siyasi bir elit grubunun da ortaya çıkmasına neden olmuştur.

Bu üç halkın ulusal söylemleri açısından bir başka dönüm noktası da Bolşevik Devrimi ile Güney Kafkasya’nın Sovyetler Birliği’nin denetimine girmesi arasındaki dönemdir (1917-1921). Gürcistan 26 Mayıs 1918’de Transkafkasya Federasyonu’ndan bağımsızlığını ilan ettikten sonraki üç yıl içinde siyasi, kültürel ve ekonomik alanlarda gerçekleştirdiği reformlarla önemli bir devlet inşa sürecine girmiştir. En önemlisi, 20 Şubat 1921’de Gürcistan Cumhuriyeti Anayasası parlamentoda kabul edilmiştir. Bu anayasa Acara, Abhazya ve Zakatala’nın özerkliğini garanti ederken Güney Osetya’ya yer vermemiştir. Ancak zaten bu anayasadan önce 31 Mart 1921’de, Abhazya SSC’si kurulmuştur. Bahsi geçen dönemin en ayırt edici özelliklerinden biri, bu dönemin Gürcü-Oset çatışmasının fitilinin ateşlendiği ilk dönem olmasıdır. Bu dönem, Gürcü ve Oset ulusal söylemlerinde farklı şekilde yorumlanmaktadır. Bu dönemde Güney Osetya’da üç büyük ayaklanma meydana gelmiştir. Önceki iki ayaklanma sosyoekonomik güdülere dayansa da toprak ağalarının etnik Gürcülerden, köylülerin ise ağırlıklı olarak etnik Osetlerden oluşması nedeniyle üçüncü ve son ayaklanma etnik çatışmaya dönüşmüştür. Gürcü anlatımına göre Güney Osetler bu ayaklanmalar aracılığıyla Rus Sovyeti ile işbirliği yaparak bölgeyi ayırmayı, dolayısıyla Gürcistan’ın toprak bütünlüğünü bozmayı

amaçlamışlardır. Oset anlatısı ise Gürcistan'ın ayaklanmalara müdahalesinin Oset halkını yok etmeye yönelik bir “soykırım” girişimi olduğu iddiasına dayanmaktadır.

Bölgede Sovyet egemenliği tesis edildiğinde etnik grupların milliyetçi söylemleri tarihsel materyalizm nedeniyle kamusal alanda engellenmiştir. Ancak bu söylemler Gürcüler, Abhazlar ve Güney Osetyalıların özel alanlarında korunarak yok olmamıştır. Buna ek olarak, kendi kaderini tayin hakkı ve *korenizatsiya* (yerleştirme politikası) gibi Sovyet milliyet politikaları, bir hiyerarşi sistemi oluşturdukları için *titüler* milletlerden azınlık topluluklarına kadar tüm etnik grupların kimlik inşasını etkilemiştir. Bu hiyerarşinin en tepesinde Rus kültürü yer alırken onu önce *titüler* milletler, sonra da azınlıklar izlemiştir. Oluşturulan bu hiyerarşi, Sovyet sonrası dönemde de milliyetçi söylemi etkilemeye devam etmiş ve tüm Sovyet sonrası uluslar, ulusal kimliklerini özcü renklerle (yeniden) şekillendirmiştir. Başka bir deyişle, iddia ettikleri topraklar üzerindeki haklarını kanıtlamak için o bölgede ne kadar eski olduklarını iddia eden çalışmalar yapmışlardır. Bu durum aynı topraklarda hak iddia eden gruplar arasında etnik çatışmalara varan bir mücadeleye neden olmuştur.

Bu bağlamda, Gürcistan 1991'de bağımsızlığını ilan etmeden hemen önce, milliyetçi söylem sadece Gürcistan'da değil, Abhazya ve Güney Osetya'da da zirveye ulaşmıştır. Milliyetçi söylemin yükselişi, önce Güney Osetya'da (1990-1992), ardından Abhazya'da (1992-1994) ayrılıkçı silahlı çatışmalarla sonuçlanmıştır.

Bahsi geçen çatışmalar sonrasında, Şevardnadze'nin cumhurbaşkanlığı döneminde uluslararası siyasette çatışmaların çözümüne yönelik müzakere girişimleri sonuç vermemiştir. Ancak 2000'li yılların başında Şevardnadze, uluslararası kuruluşları daha çok finansal yardım sağlamak için Gürcistan'a davet etmiştir. Bu kuruluşlar, bağış fonlarıyla yerel sivil toplum kuruluşlarının sayılarının kısa bir sürede artmasına neden olmuştur zira uluslararası kuruluşlar

yerel sivil toplum kuruluşları aracılığıyla hükümetle diyaloga geçmiştir. Ancak bu dönemde Gürcü sivil toplum kuruluşları, *IDP* meseleleriyle ilgili hükümetin karar alma süreçlerine katılmak için gerekli kapasiteden yoksun olduğundan *IDP*'lerle etkin bir şekilde ilgilenmemişlerdir.

İç siyasetteyse hükümet *IDP*'lere yönelik birtakım mevzuat çalışmaları gerçekleştirmiştir. Öncelikle 1996'da bir *IDP* yasası çıkarılmış, ardından Gürcistan İşgal Altındaki Topraklardan Ülke İçinde Yerinden Edilmiş Kişiler, Konaklama ve Mülteciler Bakanlığı kurulmuştur. Bakanlık *IDP*'ler hakkındaki tüm konuların sorumluluğunu üstlenirken *IDP* statüsü ve statüye dayalı devlet yardımı (yani aylık ödenekler ve sosyal hizmetler) için başvuru prosedürlerini ise bahsi geçen yasa belirlemiştir. Her ne kadar, Gürcü devleti *IDP*'ler için yasal yapının iyileştirilmesi için gerekli adımları atmış olsa da yasa ve politikaların uygulanması mütevazı düzeyde kalmıştır. Daha doğrusu, ilk 20 yıl boyunca Gürcü *IDP*'ler, anayurtlarına geri dönecekler beklentisiyle devletleri tarafından ihmal edilmiştir. Zira bu dönüş, küçük bir grup dışında hiç gerçekleşmemiştir.

Şevardnadze'nin cumhurbaşkanlığı döneminde *IDP*'lerin ihmali, dillendirilmeyen bir devlet politikası haline gelmiş ve bu politika mülakat yapılan uzmanlar ve akademisyenler tarafından "kısmi entegrasyon politikası" olarak adlandırılmıştır. Kısmi entegrasyon politikası, Gürcistan devletinin yerinden edilmiş kişiler için herhangi bir kalıcı çözüm uygulamamayı seçmesi anlamına gelmektedir ve bu politikanın uygulanmasının altında iki temel neden yatmaktadır. İlk olarak, *IDP*'ler uluslararası siyasette bir politika aracı haline gelmiştir. Devlet yerinden edilmiş kişilere kalıcı çözümler sunarsa devletin *de facto* bölgeler üzerindeki talebinden vazgeçtiği mesajını vereceği düşünülmüştür. Ayrıca son derece zor koşullarda yaşayan *IDP*'ler, ülkenin uluslararası arenada çatışmaların daimi birer kanıtı olarak vitrin unsuru haline gelmişlerdir. İkinci olarak, bu dönemde Gürcistan devleti *IDP*'lerle başa çıkmak için ne gerekli ekonomik ve siyasi koşullara ne de kurumsal kapasiteye sahip olmuştur. Sonuç olarak, onlarca yıl boyunca Gürcü *IDP*'lerin çoğu, hiçbir yeterli yaşam standardı

koşuluna sahip olmayan kompakt yerleşim yerlerinde tecrit halinde yaşamaya mahkûm edilmişlerdir. Bu yirmi yıl boyunca *IDP*'lerin devlete ve sivil toplum kuruluşlarına olan güveni zedelenmiş *IDP*'ler izole olmaya izole oldukça topluma yabancılaşmaları da sürmüştür.

2003 yılında, uluslararası aktörler kral-yapıcı (İng. *kingmaker*) rolünü oynayarak Saakaşvili muhalefetini destekleyince Şevardnadze'nin cumhurbaşkanlığı sona ermiştir. Bu dönemde Gürcistan sivil toplumu, uluslararası fonların batılılaşma, siyasi dönüşüm ve demokratikleşme alanlarına akması nedeniyle bu alanlara odaklanmıştır. Başka bir deyişle, *IDP*'ler öncelikli bir konu olmamış ve ihmal edilmeye devam etmişlerdir.

Bu arada Saakaşvili, piyasa ekonomisine hızlı bir geçiş politikası başlatmış ve ilk eylemlerinden biri de merkezde ve değerli yerlerde bulunan *IDP* kolektif merkezlerini özelleştirmek olmuştur. Sonuç olarak, birçok yerinden edilmiş kişi evlerinden tahliye edilmiş ve şehir dışındaki (genellikle ıssız) bölgelere gönderilmiştir. Bu durum sadece *IDP*'ler arasındaki huzursuzluğun artmasına değil, aynı zamanda onların topluma ve ülkeye daha fazla yabancılaşmalarına neden olmuştur.

IDP'ler ancak *IDP*'lerin İnsan Hakları Özel Temsilcisi BM Genel Sekreteri Dr. Walter Kälin'in 2005 yılında Gürcistan'a yaptığı ziyaretin ardından Saakaşvili hükümetinin gündeminde yer almaya başlamışlardır. Bu tarihten itibaren hükümet tarafından kalıcı çözüm amacıyla politikalar üretilmeye başlanmıştır. Örneğin, sadece *IDP* öğrencilerinin gittiği okullar feshedilmiş ve 2005 yılında *IDP* öğrencileri ulusal eğitim sistemine dâhil edilmiştir. 2006 yılında, *IDP*'lerin anayurtlarındaki mülklerinin bir envanteri çıkarılmıştır. Aynı yıl devlet, Gürcü sivil toplum örgütlerini *IDP*'ler için bir strateji ve eylem planı oluşturma sürecine dâhil etmiştir. Bahsi geçen strateji planı 2007 yılında, eylem planı ise 30 Temmuz 2008 tarihinde kabul edilmiş olsa da 7 Ağustos 2008'de yani eylem

planının ıkmasından tam bir hafta sonra Rus-Gürcü Savaşı'nın patlak vermesi neticesinde bu planlar işlevsiz hale gelmiştir.

2008 Savaşı kısmen Saakaşvili'nin yanlış hesaplamalarının bir sonu olmuştur. İktidara geldiğinde Saakaşvili'nin amaçlarından biri, azınlıkların yoğun olarak yaşadığı bölgelerde altyapıyı geliştirmek ve bu azınlıklara yönelik kültürel ve eğitim reformları gerçekleştirmek olmuştur. Böylece Saakaşvili, koşulları iyileştirilen azınlıkların entegrasyonunun başarılı olacağını öngörmüştür. Aslına bakılırsa bu politikalar Acara (Müslüman Gürcülerde), Kvemo Kartli (Azeri azınlığında) ve Samsthe-Cavahetya (Ermeni azınlıkta) bölgelerinde gözle görülür birer başarı sağlamıştır. Ancak bu politika Güney Osetya'da işe yaramamıştır. Saakaşvili'nin Güney Osetya'daki birtakım manevraları zaten var olan gerilimi tırmandırarak, Rusya Federasyonu'nun da dâhil olmasıyla savaş patlak vermiştir. Savaş 1990'ların başından bu yana gerçekleşen en büyük ikinci *IDP* dalgasına neden olmuştur.

2008 Savaşı'ndan sonra ikinci *IDP* dalgası Gürcistan'ı vurduğunda bu kez uluslararası aktörler insani yardım sağlamak ve çatışan taraflar arasında arabuluculuk yapmak için hızlıca Gürcistan'a varmışlardır. Arabuluculuk çabaları, *de facto* makamların müzakere ve donmuş ihtilafların statükosunu kırma konularındaki isteksizlikleri nedeniyle sonuçsuz kalmıştır. İnsani yardım düzeyindeyse uluslararası aktörlerin müdahalesi nispeten daha başarılı olmuştur. Savaştan sadece birkaç gün sonra, BM'nin "Flaş Çağrısı" kapsamında uluslararası aktörler 4,5 milyar ABD bağışlamayı taahhüt etmiş ve bu meblağın 450 milyon ABD dolarından fazlasının salt *IDP*'lerin ihtiyaçları için ayrılması planlanmıştır. Ancak bu önemli miktardaki maddi yardımın ne şekilde kullanıldığı, tamamının *IDP*'lere ulaşip ulaşmadığı ve onların temel ihtiyaçları için harcanıp harcanmadığı yönünde soru işaretleri oluşması, eleştirileri de beraberinde getirmiştir. Ayrıca sağlanan yardımın eski ve yeni *IDP*'ler arasındaki dağılımı da bir başka eleştiri konusu olmuştur. Saakaşvili'nin yeni *IDP*'ler için "IDP'lerim" demesinin akabinde onlara ivedilikle yeni konutlar

sağlanırken eski *IDP*'lerin büyük çoğunluğu benzer bir devlet desteğinden yararlanamamıştır. Gerçi yeni *IDP*'lere bahsi geçen yeni konutlar sağlanmış olsa da bu toplu konutların yerleşimden uzak bölgelerde düşük kaliteli malzemelerle inşa edilmiş olması, *IDP*'lerin eleştirilerine ve onların toplumun geri kalanından izole edilmelerine neden olmuştur.

2013 yılından itibaren yeni Gürcistan hükümeti, bazı farklılıklarla Saakaşvili hükümetinin *IDP* stratejisine devam etmiştir. Öncelikle *IDP* yardımlarının sistemleştirilmesi için yeni bir *IDP* kayıt süreci başlatılmış ve böylece son *IDP* rakamları belirlenmiştir. Yeni hükümet, uluslararası bağışçılar tarafından sürekli hatırlatıldığı üzere yürüttükleri sürekli konut programında şeffaflık ve sistematik bir yaklaşım eksikliği olduğunun farkında olduklarından yeni yerleşke desteğinden faydalanmaya uygun *IDP*'leri belirlemek için bir puanlama sistemi başlatmıştır. Bu puanlama sisteminde *IDP*'lere hangi dönemde hangi bölgeden geldiklerine ve toplu konutlarda mı özel konutlarda mı yaşayıp yaşamadıklarına bakılmaksızın eşit olarak yaklaşmıştır. Ancak mülakat yapılan birçok *IDP*'nin vurguladığı gibi, yeni sistemde aksaklıklar ve eksiklikler oluşmuş ve kalıcı çözümler konusunda devlet yardımına gerçekten ihtiyaç duyan birçok *IDP* bu yardımlardan yararlanamamıştır. Yine de devlet, tüm *IDP* gruplarının barınma sorunlarına kalıcı çözümler bulma politikasına devam etmiştir. 31 Ocak 2020 itibarıyla 90.831 kayıtlı yerinden edilmiş aileden 41.263'ü devletin konut programından yararlanmış ise de 41.738 aile hâlâ bekleme listesindedir. Öte yandan uluslararası aktörlerin finansal desteğinin hissedilir şekilde azalması nedeniyle sürecin önceki yıllara göre yavaşlamış olduğunu belirtmek yanlış olmayacaktır.

Saha çalışması verileri, *IDP*'lerin bir sosyal grup olarak adlandırılabilceğini ve *IDP* kimliğinin belirgin bir sosyal grup kimliği olarak kabul edilebileceğini ortaya koymuştur. Bununla birlikte, *IDP* kimliğinin ev sahibi topluluğa kıyasla daha düşük bir kimlik olduğunu unutmamak gerekir çünkü toplumun geneli

tarafından *IDP*'ler uzun yıllar boyunca “toplumun en mağdur kesimi” olarak tanımlanmışlardır.

Saha araştırmasında *IDP*'lerin kimlik oluşumunu etkileyen çeşitli olgular bulunduğu gözlemlenmiştir. Her şeyden önce, *IDP*'lerin mekânsal ortamı ve zorlu ekonomik koşulları tetikleyici birer faktördür. Diğer araştırmalar da toplu konutlarda yeterli fiziksel koşulların olmamasının yanı sıra yaşadıkları ekonomik zorlukların *IDP*'lerin kendi kabuklarına çekilmelerine neden olduğunu belirtmektedir (Gegeshidze ve Chomakhidze, 2008; Salukvadze ve diğerleri, 2013; Åhlin, 2011). Dolayısıyla bu koşullar *IDP*'lerin sosyal izolasyona maruz kalmalarına neden olmaktadır. Özellikle yaşlı nesil *IDP*'ler, bu toplu konutlardan çıkmayarak yerel halktan ziyade kendi grup üyeleriyle vakit geçirmeyi tercih etmektedirler.

Ancak böyle bir grup kimliğinin oluşmasındaki en büyük tetikleyici faktör, dışsal tanımın etkisinin yüksek olmasıdır. Dışsal tanımlama, yerel halk ile sınırlı değildir. Devlet aygıtı ve sivil toplum örgütleri de *IDP*'lerin kimlik inşasında çok büyük bir etkiye sahiptirler. Saha çalışması verileri, Gürcü *IDP*'lerin ne devlete ne de sivil toplum kuruluşlarına güvenmediğini ortaya koymaktadır. Devletle ilgili olarak, *IDP*'ler arasında, devletin *IDP*'lerin barınma, istihdam ve sağlık gibi en temel konulardaki ihtiyaçlarına dikkat etmediğine dair ortak bir inanç vardır. Bu nedenle *IDP*'lerin çoğu devletten ve sivil toplum kuruluşlarından bir beklentilerinin olmadığını belirtmişlerdir. Ayrıca siyasi aktörlerin kendileriyle sadece seçimler sırasında iletişime geçmelerine de içerlemektedirler. *IDP*'ler devlet tarafından ihmal edildiklerini düşündükleri ve kendilerini sıradan bir vatandaş kadar saygı görmediklerini hissettikleri için topluma daha fazla yabancılaşmışlardır. Ayrıca devlet tarafından verilen ve çeşitli sosyal yardımlarla birlikte gelen resmî *IDP* statüsü de *IDP* kimliğinin oluşmasında önemli bir etkidir. Mülakatlar sırasında görüşülen *IDP*'ler bu yardımların kısıtlı olsa da (kişi başı aylık 45 Gürcü Lari) *IDP*'ler için sembolik bir değer taşıdığını ifade etmişlerdir. Onlar için bahsi geçen kişi başı aylık bu destek, hükümetin hâlâ

onları hatırladığının bir göstergesidir. Bu bağlamda, devletin yasal olarak verdiği *IDP* statüsü, *IDP* kimliğini etkileyen önemli bir parametre olmaktadır. Diğer bir ifadeyle, bu tezin kilit bulgularından biri olduğu üzere dışsal tanımlama *IDP* kimliğinin oluşmasındaki en önemli etkenlerden biridir. *IDP*'lerin Gürcü devleti gibi, Gürcü sivil toplumuyla ilgili de belirgin bir hoşnutsuzluğu bulunmaktadır. *IDP*'ler, sivil toplum kuruluşlarının kendilerini temsil ettiklerini ya da insani ihtiyaçlar ve hak savunuculuğu konusunda yardım sağladıklarını düşünmemektedirler. Sivil toplum kuruluşlarına ilişkin genel algıları, bu kuruluşların *IDP*'lerden çok bağışçılara karşı sorumlu davrandıkları yönündedir. Saha çalışması verileri, *IDP*'ler ve yerel halk arasında “biz ve onlar” ayrımı olduğunu doğrulamaktadır. Ancak bu grupların grup sınırlarının ülkedeki koşullara bağlı olarak canlandığını veya belirsizleştiğini belirtmek de gerekmektedir. Başka bir deyişle yerel halkın tutumu, farklı dönemlere bağlı olarak dayanışma gösterme, destek verme, kayıtsız kalma, ötekileştirme, ayrımcılık yapma ve *IDP*'ler hakkında yeterli bilince sahip olmama arasında gidip gelmektedir. *IDP* mülakatlarına göre, bağımsızlığın ilk günlerindeki dayanışma ruhu, *IDP*'lerin geldikleri yere geri dönmeyeceklerinin anlaşılmasından sonra yer yer düşmanlığa, kayıtsızlığa ve ötekileştirmeye dönüşmüştür. *IDP*'ler ülkede ekonomik bir yük oluşturmaya başlayınca *IDP*'lerin yerel halk tarafından tanımlanmasında da bir farklılaşma oluşmuştur. Gürcücede *IDP*'leri tanımlamak için kullanılan ve sözlük anlamıyla olumsuzluk taşımayan *devnili* ve *ltovli* gibi terimler *stigmalaştırılarak* *IDP*'ler ötekileştirilmiştir. Ülke ekonomik buhran dönemini atlatmış olsa da bu terimler hâlâ kullanılmakta, *IDP*'ler de kendilerini yabancılaştıran bu etiketlemelere içermeye devam etmektedirler. Ek olarak, daha önce de belirtildiği gibi, yerlerinden edilmiş kişiler çoğunlukla devlet ödeneklerine ve sosyal yardımlara muhtaçtırlar. Bu sosyal destekler son derece kısıtlı olmasına rağmen kimi zaman yerel halkın olumsuz tepkisine ve dolayısıyla gruplararası ilişkilerin gerginleşmesine neden olmuşlardır. Birçok yerinden edilmiş kişi, yerel halktan devlet desteği aldıkları için olumsuz tepkiler aldıklarını yapılan mülakatlarda da dile getirmiştir. Başka bir deyişle kaynaklar kıtsa gruplararası gerginlik

tırmanabilmektedir. Ayrıca, Abhazya'dan gelen *IDP*'lerin çoğunun Megrel alt etnik kimliğine sahip olması nedeniyle, ev sahibi topluluğun hem *IDP* hem de Megrel kimliklerine birmiş gibi yaklaşabildiği de dile getirilen bir başka husus olmuştur.

Bir diğer önemli saha çalışması bulgusu ise yukarıda bahsi geçen dışsal tanımlamanın (yerel halk, devlet ve sivil toplum örgütleri) *IDP*'ler tarafından içselleştirilmesi üzerinedir. Yıllar boyunca kendilerine atfedilen “mağdur” ve “*stigma*” *IDP* kimliği, çoğunlukla yaşlı *IDP* kuşakları tarafından içselleştirilmiştir. Yapılan mülakatlarda, birçok *IDP*, bu tanımlamadan hoşnut olsalar da olmasalar da bu kimliğin içlerine işlediklerini belirtmişlerdir. Bazıları bu kimliğin getirdiği olumsuz algıdan hoşnutsuzluklarını dile getirirken diğerleri kimliğe atfedilen negatif anlamları umursamadıklarını ancak *IDP* olduklarını kabul ettiklerini belirtmişlerdir. Ayrıca *IDP* mülakatlarına göre, paylaşılan travma, grup içi kayırmacılık, anavatana atfedilen anlam ve güçlü geri dönme isteği gibi olguların *IDP*'lerin grup sınırlarının ve *IDP* kimliğinin güçlenmesinde son derece önemli etkenler olduğu saptanmıştır. *IDP*'ler farklı dönemlerde farklı bölgelerden gelseler de maddi ve manevi tüm varlıklarını kaybetmekten kaynaklanan travma ve zorunlu göçün zorlu koşulları *IDP*'lerin birbirlerine güçlü bir empati duymalarına neden olmuştur. Bu empati kendini grup içi kayırmacılıkta da gösterirken birçok *IDP*, yerel halk yerine diğer *IDP*'lerle ilişki kurmayı tercih ettiklerini belirtmiştir. *IDP*'ler ayrıca eve ve anavatana yükledikleri anlam hususunda birleşmektedirler. Mülakat yapılan yerinden edilmiş kişilerin hemen hepsi, ister yaşlı ister genç olsun (hatta anavatanlarında doğmamış olanlar bile), göç etmek zorunda kaldıkları yerleri anavatanları olarak kabul etmektedirler ve onlara göre ev şu an yaşadıkları değil geride bıraktıklarıdır. Ayrıca mülakatlarda yeni geldikleri yerlere tam olarak entegre olduklarını belirten birkaç genç *IDP* dışında görüşülen *IDP*'lerin hemen hemen hepsi anavatanlarına dönme isteklerini dile getirmişlerdir. Bu bağlamda geri dönme arzusu Gürcü *IDP*'ler için önemli bir kimlik belirteci olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır.

Son olarak, bu tezin bir diğere bulgusuysa *IDP*'lerin davranış kalıplarına ilişkindir. Sosyal kimlik kuramına göre bireyler, "kişiler arası-gruplar arası süreklilikteki" pozisyonlarına bağlı olarak hem bireysel (sosyal hareketlilik) hem de grup (sosyal yaratıcılık ya da sosyal rekabet) davranış kalıplarına sahiptirler. Saha çalışması verileri, çoğunlukla genç ve/veya özel konutlarda yaşayan yerinden edilmiş kişilerin topluma uyum sağlama konusunda daha başarılı olduklarını ortaya koymuştur. Az da olsalar bu kesim *IDP*'nin çoğunlukla kendilerini *IDP* kimliğiyle özdeşleştirmekten kaçındıkları ve anavurtlarına geri dönmeye daha az niyetli oldukları ya da hiç niyetli olmadıkları tespit edilmiştir. Bu bağlamda sosyal hareketlilik eğilimindedirler. Yaşlı nesil *IDP*'ler ve/veya toplu konutlarda yaşanan *IDP*'lerin daha çok grup stratejisi geliştirdikleri görülmüştür. Bu ikinci grubun sosyal yaratıcılık stratejisini kullandıkları ancak sosyal rekabet belirtisi göstermedikleri anlaşılmaktadır. *IDP* mülakatları, "sosyal yaratıcılık" bağlamında *IDP*'lerin, *IDP* kimliğine farklı anlamlar yükleyerek, onu farklı bir bakış açısıyla yeniden tanımlayarak kimliklerinin daha olumlu bir versiyonunu yaratma gayesinde olduklarını ortaya çıkarmıştır. Bir tür savunma mekanizması geliştirmeye başlamışlardır. Anavatanlarına ve pozitif kabul ettikleri grup özelliklerine vurgu yapmaları, bu savunma mekanizmasının en önemli göstergeleri olmuştur. *Stigmalaşan* grup kimliklerini "mağduriyet" yerine çalışkanlık, kültürel normlar ve dayanışma ruhu gibi olumlu özelliklerle ilişkilendirmektedirler. Ayrıca kendilerinden *IDP* yerine anavatanlarına atıf yaparak bahsetmeleri de (örneğin Abhazyalıyım/ Güney Osetyalıyım/ Gali'denim/ Sohum'danım/ Akhalgori'denim gibi) bir diğere saha verisi bulgusu olmuştur. Bu durum, statü ve durum tabanlı kimliklerini mekâna dayalı bir kimlik tanımı ile değiştirmekte olduklarını göstermektedir. Ayrıca *IDP*'lerin bir grup davranışı olan toplumsal rekabet içinde olmadıkları da tespit edilmiştir. Düşük sosyoekonomik koşulları nedeniyle homojen bir resmî grup dayanışmasına sahip değillerdir. Birkaç *IDP* sivil toplum kuruluşu ve bir siyasi partisi olmasına rağmen, bu kuruluşlara Gürcü *IDP*'ler tarafından katılım son derece kısıtlıdır. Diğere bir ifadeyle, *IDP*'ler toplumsal rekabeti bir grup stratejisi

olarak kullanmadıklarından sosyal grup kimlikleri kolektif bir kimliğe dönüşmemektedir.

Sonuç olarak, gelecek IDP nesillerinin, eski nesillere göre entegrasyonlarının daha başarılı olacağı varsayılabilir. Ayrıca günümüzde *IDP*'lerin anayurtlarına atıfta bulunarak kimliklerini dönüştürme eğiliminde de oldukları görülmektedir. Bu bağlamda *stigmalaşan IDP* kimliğinin bir değişim sürecinde olduğunu söylemek yanlış olmayacaktır.

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PUBLICATION

- Gürsoy, H. E. (2014) Book Review of “Ahıska Türkleri: Ulus Ötesi Topluluk, Ulus Ötesi Aileler” (Meskhetian Turks: Transnational Community, Transnational Families) by Aydıngün A., Aydıngün İ. *Sosyoloji Konferansları Dergisi*, vol.50.
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FIELDWORKS

- Conducted a field research in Tbilisi, Georgia for the M.S. Thesis: **‘The Role of Civil Society in Democratic Consolidation Process of Georgia’** *Project Coordinator: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ayça ERGUN ÖZBOLAT*, supported by Scientific Inquiry Project of METU (BAP-METU), November-December 2010.
- Conducted a field research in Tbilisi, Georgia for the PhD. Dissertation: **‘Sociological Analysis of ‘IDP’ as a Social Identity Form: A Case Study for the Post-Soviet Georgian IDPs’** related to the project called: *Sovyet Sonrası Gürcistan’da Idp'lere (Ülke İçinde Yerlerinden Olmuş Kişiler) İlişkin Sosyolojik, Siyasi Ve Hukuki Gelişmelerin Karşılaştırmalı Analizi (Comparative Analysis of Sociological, Political and Legal Developments on Post-Soviet Georgian IDPs)* *Project*

Coordinator: Prof. Dr. Ayşegül AYDINGÜN, supported by Scientific Inquiry Project of METU (BAP-METU), November-December 2014.

- Conducted a field research in Tbilisi, Georgia related to the project called: **‘Gürcistan’daki Acaralılar: Ulusal Kimlik İnşa Sürecinde Dini ve Etnik Kimliğim Çatışması’** (Adjarians: The Clash between Religious and Ethnic Identities During the National Identity Building) *Project Coordinator: Prof. Dr. Ayşegül AYDINGÜN, supported by Scientific Inquiry Project of METU (BAP-METU), May 2015.*
- Conducted a field research in Batumi, Georgia related to the project called: **‘Gürcistan’daki Acaralılar: Ulusal Kimlik İnşa Sürecinde Dini ve Etnik Kimliğim Çatışması’** (Adjarians: The Clash between Religious and Ethnic Identities During the National Identity Building) *Project Coordinator: Prof. Dr. Ayşegül AYDINGÜN, supported by Scientific Inquiry Project of METU (BAP-METU), June 2015.*
- Conducted a field research in Tbilisi, Georgia for the PhD. Dissertation: **‘Sociological Analysis of ‘IDP’ as a Social Identity Form: A Case Study for the Post-Soviet Georgian IDPs’** (Comparative Analysis of Sociological, Political and Legal Developments on Post-Soviet Georgian IDPs) *Project Coordinator: Prof. Dr. Ayşegül AYDINGÜN, supported by Scientific Inquiry Project of METU (BAP-METU), September-October 2015.*
- Conducted a field research in Batumi, Georgia related to the project called: **‘Gürcistan’daki Müslüman topluluklar: Azınlık Hakları, Kimlik ve Siyaset’** *Project Coordinator: Prof. Dr. Ayşegül AYDINGÜN and Aslan Yavus Şir AVİM, supported by Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency and Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities., October 2015.*
- Conducted a field research in Tbilisi, Georgia related to the project called: **‘Gürcistan’daki Müslüman topluluklar: Azınlık Hakları, Kimlik ve Siyaset’** (Muslim Communities in Georgia- Minority Rights, Identity and Politics) *Project Coordinator: Prof. Dr. Ayşegül AYDINGÜN and Aslan Yavus Şir AVİM, supported by Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency and Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities., November-December 2015.*
- Conducted a field research in Tbilisi, Georgia related to the project called: **‘Gürcistan’daki Acaralılar: Ulusal Kimlik İnşa Sürecinde Dini ve Etnik Kimliğim Çatışması’** (Muslim Communities in Georgia- Minority Rights, Identity and Politics) *Project Coordinator: Prof. Dr. Ayşegül AYDINGÜN, supported by Scientific Inquiry Project of METU (BAP-METU), April 2016.*
- Conducted a field research in Tbilisi, Georgia for the PhD. Dissertation: **‘Sociological Analysis of ‘IDP’ as a Social Identity Form: A Case Study for the Post-Soviet Georgian IDPs’** *Project Coordinator: Prof. Dr. Ayşegül AYDINGÜN, supported by Scientific Inquiry Project of METU (BAP-METU), November-December 2016.*

- Conducted a field research in Tbilisi, Georgia related to the project called: **‘Genişletilmiş Karadeniz Bölgesi Ülkelerinde Etnik ve Dini Çeşitliliğin Yönetimi ve Bölgeye Etkileri: Bulgaristan, Ukrayna, Azerbaycan Ve Gürcistan Örnekleri’** (Management of Ethnic and Religious Diversities and Their Regional Impacts in Wider Black Sea Region: The Cases of Bulgaria, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Georgia) *Project Coordinator: Prof. Dr. Ayşegül AYDINGÜN*, supported by Scientific Inquiry Project of METU (BAP-METU), April 2017.
- Conducted a field research in Baku, Azerbaijan related to the project called: **‘Genişletilmiş Karadeniz Bölgesi Ülkelerinde Etnik ve Dini Çeşitliliğin Yönetimi ve Bölgeye Etkileri: Bulgaristan, Ukrayna, Azerbaycan Ve Gürcistan Örnekleri’** (Management of Ethnic and Religious Diversities and Their Regional Impacts in Wider Black Sea Region: The Cases of Bulgaria, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Georgia) *Project Coordinator: Prof. Dr. Ayşegül AYDINGÜN*, supported by Scientific Inquiry Project of METU (BAP-METU), November-December 2017.
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- Conducted a field research in Kiev, Ukraine related to the project called: **‘2014’ten Sonra Kırım Tatarlarının Kırım’dan Ukrayna Anakarasına Göçü: Kırım Tatar Teşkilatları ve Türkiye Ukrayna İlişkileri’** (The Migration of Crimean Tatars from Crimea to Mainland Ukraine after 2014: Crimean Tatar Organizations and Turkey-Ukraine Relations) supported by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) project-based Mevlana Exchange Program, January-June 2019.

PROJECT WORKS

- “Gürcistan'da Demokratikleşme Sürecinde Sivil Toplum Örgütlerinin Rolü” (The Role of Civil Society in Democratic Consolidation Process of Georgia) supported by Scientific Inquiry Project of METU BAP-1, 1 January 2010- 1 December 2010 (Researcher)
- “Krasnodar Bölgesinden (Rusya Federasyonu) Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nin Çeşitli Eyaletlerine Göçmen Programı Çerçevesinde Göç Eden Ahıska Türklerinin Sosyo-Ekonomik Durumları ve Entegrasyonu” (The Socio-Economic Conditions and the Integration of Meskhetian Turks Migrated from Krasnodar to USA Under the Framework of Migrant Program) supported by Scientific Inquiry Project of METU BAP-1, January 2014- 1 December 2014 (Project Assistant)
- “Sovyet Sonrası Gürcistan'da IDP'lere (Ülke İçinde Yerlerinden Olmuş Kişiler) İlişkin Sosyolojik, Siyasi ve Hukuki Gelişmelerin Karşılaştırmalı Analizi” (Comparative Analysis of Sociological, Political and Legal Developments on Post-Soviet Georgian IDPs) supported by Scientific Inquiry Project of METU BAP-1, January 2014- 1 December 2016 (Researcher).
- “The Impact of the Turkic Council (TURKKON) on Developing/Improving Relations between Turkey and Central Asia” supported by Scientific Inquiry Project of METU BAP-1, January 2015- 1 December 2016 (Project Assistant)
- “Gürcistan'daki Acaralılar: Ulusal Kimlik İnşa Sürecinde Dini ve Etnik Kimliğin Çatışması” (Adjarians: The Clash between Religious and Ethnic Identities During the National Identity Building) supported by Scientific Inquiry Project of METU BAP-1, January 2015- 1 December 2016 (Researcher).
- “Gürcistan'daki Müslüman Topluluklar: Azınlık Hakları, Kimlik ve Siyaset” (Muslim Communities in Georgia- Minority Rights, Identity and Politics) supported by Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency and Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities., 2015-2016 (Researcher).
- “Genişletilmiş Karadeniz Bölgesi Ülkelerinde Etnik Ve Dini Çeşitliliğin Yönetimi Ve Bölgeye Etkileri: Bulgaristan, Ukrayna, Azerbaycan ve Gürcistan Örnekleri” (Management of Ethnic and Religious Diversities and Their Regional Impacts in Wider Black Sea Region: The Cases of Bulgaria, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Georgia) supported by Scientific Inquiry Project of METU BAP-1, *Project Coordinator: Prof. Dr. Ayşegül AYDINGÜN*, January 2017-December 2018 (Researcher).

- “2014’ten Sonra Kırım Tatarlarının Kırım’dan Ukrayna Anakarasına Göçü: Kırım Tatar Teşkilatları ve Türkiye Ukrayna İlişkileri” (The Migration of Crimean Tatars from Crimea to Mainland Ukraine after 2014: Crimean Tatar Organizations and Turkey-Ukraine Relations) supported by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) project-based Mevlana Exchange Program, *Project Coordinator: Prof. Dr. Ayşegül AYDINGÜN*, September 2018-February 2020 (Researcher).

INTERNATIONAL PRESENTATIONS

- “An Analysis of IDP (Internally Dispalced Person) as a Social Identity: A Case Study for Georgian IDPs” **The 13th METU Conference on International Relations** (17-19 June, 2015, Ankara Turkey).
- “Gürcü Müslüman Olur mu? Milli Kimlik ve Dini Kimlik Arasında Sıkışmış Acaralılar”(Can a Georgian be Muslim? Muslim Adjarians Torn Between National and Religious Identities) **Uluslararası Gürcistan'da İslâmiyet'in Dünü Bugünü Yarını Sempozyumu (International Conference on the Past, Today and Future of Islam in Goergia)** (6-8 May 2016, İstanbul Turkey).
- “Etnik Bir Demokraside Azınlık Tanımı ve Azınlık Hakları: Gürcistan’daki Ahıska Türkleri” (The Definition of Minority and Minority Rights in an Ethnic Democracy: Meskhetian Turks in Georgia) **Uluslararası Ahıska Türkleri Sempozyumu (International Symposium of Meskhetian/Ahıska Turks)** (11-13 May 2017, Erzincan Turkey).
- “Remaining between Religion and Ethnicity: Muslim Georgians of Adjara” **The Joint ESCAS-CESS Conference at AUCA** (29 June 2017, Bishkek Kyrgyzstan).
- “The Humanitarian Consequences of Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia Conflicts: The Case of Azerbaijani and Georgian IDPs” **The Centennial of the Independence of the Three South Caucasus States: Historical Background, Contemporary Developments and Prospects of Peace and Prosperity** (9 November 2018, Ankara Turkey).

OTHER ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES

- Attended to the organization of the workshop of the European Union Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) project called ‘Faith-based Organizations and Exclusion in European Cities’ (FACIT), which concerns the present role of Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) in matters of poverty and other forms of social exclusion in European cities. June 2009.

- Attended to the organization of Second Central Eurasian Studies Society (CESS) Regional Conference, held by the Center for Black Sea and Central Asia (KORA) in cooperation with CESS, July 29-30, 2010.
- Attended NATO Science for Peace and Security Programme ‘Security and Cross-Border Cooperation in the EU, Black Sea and the Southern Caucasus’ held by the Center for Black Sea and Central Asia (KORA) and Xazar University, September 23-24, 2011.
- Attended to the organization of the Round Table called “The European Choice of Ukraine: Euromaidan and the Latest Developments in Ukraine”, held by Eurasian Studies Master Program of the Middle East Technical University, April 29, 2015.
- Attended to the organization of the Panel called “25 years of Turkey-Ukraine Diplomatic Relations: Regional Developments and Prospects for Enhanced Cooperation”, held by Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM), Eurasian Studies Master Program of the Middle East Technical University and the Embassy of Ukraine in Turkey, December 12, 2017.
- Advisory Board Member to the AVİM Conference Book 22, called *25 years of Turkey-Ukraine Diplomatic Relations: Regional Developments and Prospects for Enhanced Cooperation*, July 2018.

CERTIFICATE

- Russian Language Certificate from Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv.

LANGUAGE

- Turkish: Native
- English: Fluent
- Japanese: Intermediate
- Russian: Beginner

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