

MOBILIZATION IN CIVIL WAR:  
LATENT NORMS, SOCIAL RELATIONS, AND INTER-GROUP VIOLENCE  
IN ABKHAZIA

by

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## **Abstract**

What explains individual and small group mobilization for inter-group violence? How does participation in inter-group violence inform high-risk action in subsequent cycles of mobilization? This dissertation poses four puzzles of violent mobilization across the pre-, civil war, and post-war stages in the conflict cycle to analyze mobilization in civil war. These puzzles place the question of civil war mobilization in a historical trajectory of conflict and include pre-war violent mobilization despite the risks of state repression and inter-group opposition; immediate mass mobilization on a weaker side in the war at the stage of civil war onset; retention of fighters in the course of civil war; and protracted violent mobilization in the post-war period.

Analysis is based on over 150 in-depth interviews with participants and non-participants in mobilization and extensive archival and secondary material gathered through fieldwork over 2010-2013 in Abkhazia—a case of civil war and Georgia’s breakaway territory,—Georgia, and Russia. The wide scope of Abkhaz mobilization in the pre- (1921-1992), civil war (1992-1993), and post-war (1993-2008) periods allows examining within-case temporal and spatial variation, tracing the process of mobilization across the conflict cycle, and drawing generalizable conclusions.

The study adopts a normative, socially-embedded approach to mobilization in civil war and critically engages with rationalist approaches to civil war. Explanation of mobilization is achieved through the conceptual and theoretical development of the latent normative framework activation mechanism. This normative framework for action, comprising underlying social norms, emergent understandings of history and identity, and resultant prescribed action, forms in the pre-war period, to be activated at the civil war onset stage through threat-framing triggers at the micro, meso, and macro levels of the social structure. Individuals and small groups adopt varying mobilization roles depending on whether threat perception is self- or collectivity-oriented. The normative framework transforms and continues to affect mobilization in the course of the war and in the post-war period.

This research contributes to our conceptual and theoretical understanding of participation and organization of inter-group violence, the interaction between norms and social relations in civil war mobilization, research methods in conflict zones, and the understudied case of Abkhazia.

## **Preface**

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## **List of Abbreviations**

### *Appendix A*

#### Self-identified:

A	Abkhaz
AR	Armenian
G	Georgian
O	Ossetian
R	Russian
U	Ukrainian

#### Location:

A	Adler, Russia
B	Bzyb
D	Durypsh
GA	Gagra
GU	Gudauta
P	Pitsunda
S	Sukhum/i

#### Pre-war mobilization:

OA	Organizational affiliation
SM	Spontaneous mobilization
SI	Serious injury

#### War mobilization:

OM	Organized mobilization (Abkhaz Guard)
----	---------------------------------------

SM	Spontaneous mobilization (Defence Volunteers)
C	Commandership
SI	Serious injury
EF	Escaped fighting in Abkhazia
FA	Fled Abkhazia
IF	Immediate family member fought/died
P	Protected person
WJ	War journalist

Post-war mobilization:

PM	Police Abkhaz-Russian border mobilization
RM	Reservist Abkhaz-Russian border mobilization
C	Commandership
SI	Serious injury

Post-war organizations:

ASUN	Abkhaz Association in Support of UN
AWA	Association of Women of Abkhazia
CDHR	Center for Democracy and Human Rights
CHP	Center for Humanitarian Programs
CIMF	Civil Initiative and Man of the Future
CR	Conciliation Resources
ADWV	Gudauta Association of Disabled War Veterans
IOFA	International Organization of Folk Art with UNESCO
MPSJ	Mothers of Abkhazia for Peace and Social Justice

CWPFS	Pitsunda Committee of Widows and Parents of Fallen Soldiers
UDA	Union of Defenders of Abkhazia
UWA	Union of Women of Abkhazia
WWV	World without Violence
YOMA	Youth Organization Molodaja Abkhazija

Post-war media outlets:

AP	Apsnypress
EA	Echo Abkhazii
EK	Echo Kavkaza
GTV	Gagra TV
GV	Gagrskij Vestnik
RA	Respublika Abkhazija

*Appendix B*

Location:

SD	San Diego, CA, USA
T	Tbilisi, Georgia
G	Gori, Georgia
M	Moscow, Russia

Organizations:

ACIE	American Councils for International Education
BSPN	Black Sea Peace Network Project
CIDPP	Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development
CRC	Center for Research on the Caucasus at MGIMO-University



CSCA	Center for the Study of Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Volga-Urals, Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences
CMI	Crisis Management Initiative (Martti Ahtisaari Centre)
ECMI	European Center for Minority Issues (Caucasus)
GFSIS	Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies
RCIA	Russian Council on International Affairs
UGAMF	Union Georgian-Abkhazian Mixed Families

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*To my family*

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Civil War Mobilization: Stages and Vignettes

#### 1.1.1 Pre-War Stage

*1. A brawl* “We had a magnificent bar on the 14<sup>th</sup> floor,” an Ossetian woman, former hotel staff, says in an interview, describing everyday social relations in Soviet Abkhazia,

Four-five well-dressed Abkhaz men came and began singing an Abkhaz song, when Georgian [tourists] intruded: “You have no right to sing your Abkhaz songs here. This is the Georgian land.” Can you imagine this? That in our own home we could not sing our own songs and someone told us not to... The Abkhaz continued to sing. Georgians threw a champagne bottle on the table, and a brawl began. They took it outside. Georgians called their own—other tourists; the Abkhaz their own from Pitsunda. I was afraid that they would smash the windows. They all shouted. One Georgian woman was screaming: “This is our land, our sea!” I called the police. But she denied she said that, and they let her go.

*2. The “Abkhaz letter”* Up to 30,000 people gathered at the historic Lykhnashta field to seek the restoration of the status of Abkhazia as a Soviet Socialist Republic, transformed in 1931 to an Autonomous Republic of Georgia. A former member of Aidgylara (Unity), the core of the Abkhaz movement, explains the situation and subsequent escalation of tension:

The Abkhaz had to preserve themselves. A question about an Abkhaz plebiscite emerged. On 18 March, 1989, we held the Lykhny gathering. The Abkhaz people all came. So many attended that there was no place to stand. Even [Soviet] party [members], whom we did not expect, showed up. We called on Russia to at least merge us with [Russia’s] Krasnodar region, to save us, that we were not Georgian in any way. All [those present] signed [the Lykhny statement]. Once we made this appeal, [Georgians] went out control. They organized such an event [in Sukhum/i]! All streets were closed. They did the same at the stadium in Gagra on 9 April. Our [Aidgylara members] went there, tried closing off the streets, so that no clash would happen. But people clashed anyway.

*3. An armed clash* As inter-group tensions in Abkhazia escalated in 1989, the first events of public, mass violence took place. On 16 July, 1989, a photojournalist of the *Aidgylara* newspaper drove to the Rustaveli Park in Sukhum/i to capture Georgian demonstrators protesting against the Abkhaz claims voiced earlier in Lykhny. An Abkhaz commentator describes what followed:

Georgians attacked [him], beat him up, and took his camera... [They] hit the car with hands, feet, and dustbins. Policemen (*militsija*) tried pushing Georgian demonstrators away and rolling out the car, when an Abkhaz crowd approached, shouting: “Ours are being beaten!”

A witness reports that the Abkhaz

took whatever they could—armature, sticks—and the clash began... [Someone] said, “Let us cut down trees, so that [Georgian reinforcements] would not get through,” and we did. But they appeared on trucks, half naked, wearing white arm bands, with guns attached to their trucks. The only thing that helped us was that they... did not have the time to shoot... Tqvarchelians [a city in eastern Abkhazia] used explosives to scare them off.

### **1.1.2 War Stage**

**4. Mass resistance** On 14 August, 1992, justified by the Georgian hostage release and railroad security, a heavily armed and manned force of the Georgian State Council entered Abkhazia from its eastern boundary with Georgia. The next day Georgian marines landed in western Abkhazia and established control over the border with Russia, effectively encircling the territory of Abkhazia in the span of a day. This two-part “shock attack” that launched the operation Sword was intended to paralyze the Abkhaz population; yet, it was met with immediate mass resistance by the Abkhaz and their continued mobilization in the course of the war. An Abkhaz fighter participating in the events captures the clash in Tsandrypsh (Georgian Gantiadi), where Georgian marines landed:

[T]here stood our boys—some with weapons, others without... They managed to mobilize to meet [Georgian] marines, gathered spontaneously, without organization, and stood there. The first [Abkhaz] casualties took place in Tsandrypsh... Then our army was formed [and] we won.

### **1.1.3 Post-War Stage**

**5. Border defence** “After the [Abkhaz] victory [in 1993],” an Abkhaz police officer reports,

we were sent to the border with Georgia; each brigade stayed 10 days at a time. We guarded the 90 km [security] zone in sections. In 1995 our reconnaissance in Sukhum found out that [Georgian] partisans infiltrated... We pushed them out... [in] a “cleaning” [operation]. At the border, [Georgian] organized groups carried out sorties... from village to village to gain control of the territory, see who is where. They knew that the Abkhaz could not fully hold that territory. This was done for the Abkhaz not to be recognized. How can you recognize a state that cannot control its territory fully?

The five vignettes presented above illustrate focal processes and repertoires of mobilization across the pre- to post-war stages in the conflict cycle in the case of Abkhazia and more generally. They outline a pattern of evolution of violent conflict and point to the existence of the overarching normative, socially-embedded framework linking the pre-war, civil war, and post-war stages in the conflict. These vignettes range in scope, from micro-level everyday resistance, as in the case of a bar brawl, to political contention organized by social movements, exemplified by an Abkhaz letter, to spontaneous violent confrontation, such as an armed clash in the park in the capital, to the initial mass resistance and ongoing organized armed mobilization by the Abkhaz in the Georgian-Abkhaz war and their defence of what was achieved in the preceding cycles of mobilization in the post-war period. These types of mobilization can be placed on continua, from spontaneous to organized and private to public action. They involve a range of actors and social structures, from quotidian family and friendship networks at the individual, micro level, to the public in the villages, towns, and cities and the elite linking these units to the broader social structures at the meso level, and organizations, or social movements, and national leaders at the state, macro level.

This chapter draws on the mobilization vignettes to introduce the underlying subject of the dissertation—mobilization in civil war. The questions of civil war mobilization—who participates, under what conditions, how, and why—are important for understanding civil war and conflict more broadly. Research on civil war mobilization “shed[s] light on the origins and evolution of [violent] conflicts” (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008: 436). It exposes the local processes and mechanisms of civil war, emphasising the social structures it involves (Wood, 2003; Petersen, 2001; Parkinson, 2013b). It recognizes the agency of “ordinary people and the roles they come to play” in times of crises (Petersen, 2001: 1; Fujii, 2009). These mobilization roles range from direct participation in violence to such hidden processes as support and logistical apparatuses (Parkinson, 2013a, 2013b).

Studying mobilization as well helps get at other central processes of civil war. Mobilization has been shown to impact the internal structure of the rebel groups (Staniland, 2010, 2012b). Types of initial civil war mobilization affect patterns of selective and indiscriminate violence in civil wars (Weinstein, 2007). Civilian support for war parties influences civil war outcomes (Kalyvas, 2006). Understanding individual and group motivations for mobilization can help devise better “strategies of conflict resolution and postconflict reconstruction” (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008: 436). Yet, few studies in the literature on civil war specifically address the problem of civil war mobilization, and fewer look at mobilization across the conflict cycle, from the pre- to post-war stages.<sup>1</sup>

This dissertation studies in depth high-risk mobilization across the conflict cycle, using the Abkhaz case to draw general conclusions on this process. The objectives of the study are four-fold. First, I identify four puzzles of violent mobilization that span the pre- to post-war stages and apply broadly to cases of civil war and specifically to the case of Abkhazia. The dissertation is structured around these puzzles. Second, I consistently engage with the civil war literature to problematize the assumptions adopted with regard to each puzzle. Third, I analyze each puzzle vis-à-vis the literature and the Abkhaz case.<sup>2</sup> Finally, I integrate an overarching normative, socially-embedded argument through the analysis of these four puzzles and introduce what I call the *latent normative framework activation mechanism* to explain high-risk mobilization at the stage of civil war onset.<sup>3</sup>

I discuss these objectives in the remainder of this chapter. First, I pose the four puzzles and corresponding assumptions. The puzzles are presented generally and contextualized in the Abkhaz case. I then outline the overall argument and research design of the dissertation. Finally, I identify the contributions of this research and conclude with the chapter outline.

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<sup>1</sup> Petersen (2001) comes closest to capturing the variation in mobilization patterns across the conflict cycle.

<sup>2</sup> I focus on mobilization by the Abkhaz, but integrate a discussion of Georgian actors and structures where necessary.

<sup>3</sup> In this dissertation the mechanism is demonstrated at the stage of civil war onset, but it applies beyond this context to other situations where a collectivity is known or is perceived to be gravely threatened. See Chapter 8 for a discussion.



## 1.2 Four Puzzles of Violent Mobilization

What motivates individuals and small groups to participate in events of collective violence? What accounts for violent mobilization in the conditions where it is unlikely to take place? In other words, how do individuals and small groups make decisions about violent mobilization in the face of high risk? Does mobilization associated with varied risks, such as repression and civil war, differ in kind? Finally, why do individuals and small groups *continue* to mobilize once the events related to the initial high-risk mobilization are over?

The civil war literature has addressed some aspects of these questions. Studies have looked at the individual determinants of participation, including political, economic, and social grievances (Gurr, 1970; Horowitz, 1985), selective incentives, social sanctions (Weinstein, 2007; Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008), emotional or moral drives (Petersen, 2001; Wood, 2003; Lynch, 2013), and security-seeking motives (Kalyvas, 2006; Kalyvas and Kocher, 2007). Scholars have, furthermore, differentiated between various extents (Petersen, 2001), individual trajectories (Viterba, 2006), and roles adopted by individuals and small groups in high-risk mobilization (Parkinson, 2013a, 2013b).

However, the literature on civil war has focused predominantly on mobilization that sets off with the civil war onset, stressing rebel group recruitment strategies (Gates, 2002; Weinstein, 2007; Eck, 2010). Pre- and post-war mobilization has not been given due consideration—as causes and consequences of civil war or as part of the overall process of civil war—and the impact of varying degrees of risk on mobilization has not been systematically explored. While pre-war risks of state repression are different from the risks of violence in civil war and post-war security challenges, varying expressions of mobilization occur throughout. This dissertation thus poses the four puzzles of violent mobilization across the pre- to post-war conflict cycle.

I look at the case of Abkhazia to explore these puzzles. It is a critical yet understudied case of civil war, where violent mobilization took place across the conflict cycle (1921-2008), allowing for its comprehensive examination. The roots of the conflict in Abkhazia go back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Georgian population began resettling Abkhazia depopulated by the Russian Empire. As the Russian Empire crumbled, the Abkhaz sought help from Georgia in the struggle of 1918 against the Bolsheviks. A period of Georgian military presence in Abkhazia that followed greatly impacted the Abkhaz perceptions of Georgia, leading to Abkhaz support for the introduction of Soviet power across Abkhazia in 1921. At that time Abkhazia was granted a largely independent Soviet Socialist Republic status and was associated with Georgia through an alliance treaty.

A decade later Abkhazia was formally integrated into Georgia as its Autonomous Republic. Along with the repression of the Abkhaz in the political, economic, and cultural realms, a period of mass resettlement of the Georgian population into Abkhazia took place following this 1931 status change. The process dramatically altered the demographic composition of Abkhazia and Georgian-Abkhaz tensions in Abkhazia both at the macro and micro levels intensified as a result. The Abkhaz elite constantly appealed to the Soviet center in Moscow in an attempt to restore the region's rights. Abkhaz gatherings were periodic (1931, 1957, 1965, 1967, 1978, 1988, and 1989), culminating in the first events of public, mass inter-group violence in the late 1980s and the war of 1992-1993.

Abkhazia emerged from this war as a winner militarily and in the popular imagination. Yet, its status remains contested. To date, Abkhazia's independence from post-Soviet Georgia has been recognized only by Russia and a few other states. Decades of peace negotiations with Georgia have not resulted in a normalization of relations. The Georgian population displaced by the war has not been able to return. In these conditions, the post-war situation in Abkhazia has not been peaceful, with low- and large-scale violence characterizing the border area between Georgia and Abkhazia. The following sections draw on this discussion to introduce the puzzles of violent mobilization.

### 1.2.1 Pre-War Mobilization and Violence Onset

The opening puzzle of this dissertation focuses on pre-war mobilization. I problematize the dual assumption commonly made in the civil war literature that, first, violence arises with the civil war onset (Blattman and Miguel, 2010) and, related, the violence that is relevant to the research on civil war is that which occurs once the civil war takes its course (Kalyvas, 2006: 22-23). In contrast, I find that relevant events of violence take place prior to the onset of civil war and argue that these events significantly influence its course by informing war-time decisions, especially on individual and small group mobilization for war.

What is puzzling about pre-war mobilization is that it often occurs in presence and in spite of serious risks, such as inter-group violence and repressive measures taken by states in response to violent mobilization. Cross-national studies of civil war have established that civil wars commonly unfold in states with low economic development (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004) and weak institutions (Fearon and Laitin, 2003). Some studies have related the risk of civil war onset with regime change. The onset of civil war has been found to be more likely in the early phases of incomplete transitions to democracy in poor and weakly institutionalized states (Hegre et al., 2001; Mansfield and Snyder, 2002, 2005, 2009). In these conditions, inter-group violence is common (Horowitz, 2001), although states retain a repressive capacity and use it to suppress and punish violent mobilization (Rummel, 1997; Collier and Rohner, 2008; Davenport, 2004, 2007; Zanger, 2000).<sup>4</sup> Repression takes multiple forms, from search and surveillance of potential mobilizers to imprisonment and “physical coercion of challengers” (Tarrow, 1994: 170). As Tarrow argues, “[m]ovements that employ violence invite physical repression”—an extreme form of punishment (168).

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<sup>4</sup> On the one hand, civil war is found to take place in states with weak institutions because they cannot crush dissent. In this argument, regime does not play a role (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; Fearon and Laitin, 2003). Civil war is related to state inability to police, practice counterinsurgency, and maintain presence, especially in mountainous areas (Fearon and Laitin, 2003). On the other hand, civil war is said to occur in transitional states with weak institutions. In these states, attempts by leaders to retain power lead to pre-war repression.

Pre-war mobilization, particularly its violent forms, is puzzling for this reason. Why, in the face of dangerous inter-group opposition and prospective state repression, do individuals and small groups mobilize to participate in pre-war violence events? How does non-violent contention of the pre-war period turn violent in the conditions of state repression? Does the occurrence of pre-war violence relate to the onset of civil war and how?

In the case of Abkhazia, the Abkhaz responded to the state repression that followed the 1931 status change with non-violent mobilization. As in the first two vignettes depicted above, everyday resistance defined the daily lives of the Abkhaz. Riskier expressions of political contention, such as making appeals to the Soviet center and public gatherings, as well took place.

The landscape of state repression in Abkhazia changed with the Soviet opening of the late 1980s, when the opportunity was given for national movements to develop in the collapsing Soviet Union. The Abkhaz national movement grew in scope and organization under these conditions. As in the third vignette presented above, the confrontation between the Abkhaz and Georgian national movements became overt and now turned violent. The discussion of the puzzle of violent pre-war mobilization in this dissertation thus focuses on the period of the late 1980s.

State repression of violent nationalist mobilization continued in this period. Participants in nationalist mobilization, mainly leaders of the Abkhaz movement, were punished through dismissal from employment or imprisonment. It was not only the central Soviet and Georgian state structures that had a capacity to repress Abkhaz movement participants. The Georgian national movement did too, as it gained support among the Georgian population in Georgia and Abkhazia and was stronger than the Abkhaz movement numerically and in terms of access to arms and political institutions. Hence, if not for the intervention by the Soviet armed forces, the Abkhaz would easily be crushed by the Georgian movement in the first inter-group violent events in Abkhazia in the late 1980s.

Violent pre-war mobilization by the Abkhaz in this context is puzzling. Why, recognizing the consequences of inter-group violence and state repression, did the Abkhaz mobilize to confront the superior force of the Georgian national movement?

### **1.2.2 Mobilization in Civil War**

If pre-war violent mobilization is dangerous due to the possibility of repression by the state and inter-group opposition, once the civil war begins, a new set and scope of risks are involved in individual and small group mobilization. As Kalyvas (2006) argues, civil war violence is distinctive in its degree and kind. The total number of deaths in pre-war violent mobilization “is negligible compared with the total number of deaths” in civil wars (Gurr, 1986: 52 in Kalyvas, 2006: 22). This second puzzle of the dissertation addresses mobilization at the stage of civil war onset when critical decisions are made by individuals and groups regarding participation in this highly violent form of conflict. Here I problematize a more recent assumption gaining acceptance in civil war studies that mobilization for civil war increases, rather than reduces, participants’ safety (Kalyvas and Kocher, 2007). The argument follows the logic of strategic interaction between the war parties and civilians and suggests that civilians will mobilize on the side that offers greater chances of personal safety and military success in the war.

To critically engage with this assumption, I look at situations of civil war where the risks of violent mobilization are especially severe and where civilians are most likely to follow the strategic interaction logic.<sup>5</sup> This is particularly true of civil wars where there is a power asymmetry and the forces of the war parties involved are significantly disproportionate in manpower and weapons. In other words, “one belligerent possesses an invasion capability and the other does not” (Mack, 1975: 182). If we accept the assumption of strategic interaction, we should expect civilians to mobilize on the stronger side, likely to offer greater personal safety and a potential of military success.

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<sup>5</sup> This is an easy test for the strategic interaction argument yet a difficult one for arguments beyond the rationalist logic.

I find, however, that even in such situations of heightened civil war risks, civilians mobilize on the weaker side, which provides neither a prospect of personal safety, nor a promise of potential victory. The puzzle of mobilization at the stage of civil war onset thus involves two aspects. First, why does mobilization occur in the heightened risk conditions presented by civil war (as compared to pre-war violent mobilization)? Second, why do individuals and small groups join a weaker side in civil wars, especially where the forces are highly disproportionate, such as in asymmetric wars, and the safety of participants, not to say military success in the war, are perceived and/or known to be improbable?

The Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-1993 is a case of civil war with the clear asymmetry of power. The Georgian armed forces that entered Abkhazia in 1992 were disproportionately stronger than any resistance which could be mounted on the Abkhaz side, unprepared for a war. At the time, neither Georgia nor Abkhazia had functioning regular armies; yet, before the war Georgia inherited weapons and armaments of the Transcaucasus Military District of the Soviet Army, whereas the Abkhaz did not have a ready access to arms. The 93,000 Abkhaz did not stand a chance before the 240,000 Georgians living in Abkhazia and the five-million population of Georgia, of which 70.7% were Georgian. The Georgian forces were thus better armed and stronger numerically.

Despite the sheer preponderance of force on the Georgian side and suddenness of the attack, an unexpectedly large proportion of the Abkhaz population joined the war effort. Immediate mass mobilization on the weaker, Abkhaz side in the conditions of serious power asymmetry is a critical puzzle of the Georgian-Abkhaz war and the core puzzle of this dissertation. It can help understand individual and small group mobilization in the conditions where it is least expected. Why, given the heightened risks of civil war, did the Abkhaz mobilize to fight against the much stronger Georgian forces? How did the struggle attract such a large proportion of the Abkhaz?

### 1.2.3 Retention and Civil War Outcome

Following the initial mobilization for civil war, the question of fighters' retention becomes relevant (Gates, 2002). That is, why do individuals and small groups *continue* to participate in civil war? Furthermore, why does mobilization continue on the side joined initially, even if its weakness as compared to the adversary is evident? In other words, why do individuals and small groups *not* defect in the course of civil war (Kalyvas, 2008a; Lyall, 2010; Staniland, 2012a)? Finally, why do *new joiners* mobilize on the weaker side?

To explore these questions, I look at the puzzle of ongoing mobilization and victory on the weaker side in civil wars. By addressing this puzzle, I tackle the assumption commonly adopted in the literature on civil war that the rebel forces are irregular. That is, as the weaker side in civil war, they “refuse to face the stronger [adversary] directly” or engage in large-scale face-to-face military confrontations (Kalyvas, 2006: 67). Consequently, rebel victory is not a usually expected outcome of civil war. Furthermore, if it does take place, it is often attributed to the involvement of external forces on the side of the rebels, rather than the internal dynamics of mobilization.

Mobilization in the asymmetric power conditions is a difficult test for explanations of rebel, weaker side's victory, as such victory is highly unlikely in these conditions. Civil war outcomes in asymmetric war studies are argued to be shaped by interest asymmetries due to the different stakes involved for the war parties, with common unity being a strong feature of the weaker side (Mack, 1975), and strategic choices made in the course of fighting (Arreguín-Toft, 2001). The asymmetry of power between the sides is assumed to be static in this literature. Warfare tactics of the stronger and the weaker sides, as a result, are assumed to be conventional and irregular respectively for the duration of the war. The war in this scenario protracts and rebel success is brought about only by the withdrawal of the exhausted stronger party, rather than rebel military victory on the battlefield.

I find, however, that the rebel forces are not necessarily irregular. Even if they start as such at the outset of the civil war, they can transform into a coherent, unified force in its course (Sanín and Giustozzi, 2010). As research on civil war shows, cohesion is decisive for civil war outcomes, such as rebel victory (Staniland, 2010; McLachlin and Pearlman, 2012; Cunningham et al., 2012; Bakke et al., 2012). Moreover, external support need not be the driver of the weaker side's success. I argue that as the "rebels" build conventional armed forces they develop necessary skills to engage in large-scale face-to-face battles with the opponent and can thus achieve battlefield victory.

As the fourth war-time vignette presented above suggests, the Abkhaz side in the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-1993 lacked sufficient human resources, weaponry, and preparation to sustain the struggle against its stronger opponent. It was assumed to be an irregular, separatist force relying on external support (King, 2001). Contrary to this assumption, however, it is the emergent regular Abkhaz army that won the war. How did the small, initially lightly armed Abkhaz population transform into an army and win the war against the significantly stronger opponent? What explains continued commitment by the Abkhaz to the struggle?

#### **1.2.4 Post-War Mobilization and Protracted Violence**

Once civil war is formally over, the stage of the "post-conflict" peace process is assumed to start.<sup>6</sup> Continued *post-war* mobilization and violence are thus rarely a subject of civil war research. Yet, violence frequently protracts into the post-war period. Countries with civil war experience are expected to fall back (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; WDR, 2011; HSR, 2012). Civil war leaves grave political, economic, social, and psychological legacies, solidifying the problems that resulted in the initial war in what is known as the "conflict trap" (Collier et al., 2003). Multiple lower-level forms of violence persist as well (WDR, 2011).

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<sup>6</sup> This is especially the case in the literature on "post-conflict" peacebuilding and conflict transformation. For a review, see Ramsbotham et al. (2011). Suhrke and Berdal (2012), among others, problematize the assumption.



If the continuation of violence into the post-war stage is recognized, it is typically assumed to subside with time, economic development, and peacebuilding efforts, including the negotiations process and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of combatants.<sup>7</sup> Yet, I find that individuals and small groups continue to mobilize in the post-war period, albeit in different ways, and the violence often protracts beyond expectations, which is a puzzling outcome.

As the fifth vignette above implies, the Abkhaz continued to mobilize after the war of 1992-1993. Violence recurred in the post-war period up until the recognition of Abkhazia by Russia and joint border fortification in 2008. My discussion of the puzzle thus spans the years of 1993-2008.<sup>8</sup> In these two decades following the termination of the Georgian-Abkhaz war, what emerged as the border area between Georgia and Abkhazia as a result of the war was marked by multiple, diverse forms of post-war violence. This area was relatively peaceful before and barely touched during the war, but became the epicenter of violence in Abkhazia as the war ended.

Post-war violence in the area included protracted armed clashes, low-level guerilla activity, and warlordism, or “nut racket,”<sup>9</sup> in the lowlands of the Gal/i region as well as repeated episodes of fighting with heavy weaponry in the highlands of the Kodor/i Gorge. Surprisingly, it was not the weaker, Abkhaz side in the war that led guerrilla warfare following the war, as typically expected. Rather Georgian guerrilla groups formed and infiltrated Abkhazia to carry out guerrilla acts against the Abkhaz officials and military personnel and civilians collaborating with the Abkhaz. This low-scale violence escalated into large-scale events of 1998 and 2008 in Gal/i and Kodor/i respectively. Why did the Abkhaz continue to mobilize after the war? Why did the post-war violence not subside with time and political efforts to halt it, continue in the border area, and take the observed forms?

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Pouligny et al. (2007). See Theidon (2007, 2009), among others, on the problems of DDR.

<sup>8</sup> Occasional violence occurred thereafter, but was no longer as widespread as in the period between 1993 and 2008.

<sup>9</sup> In this dissertation I focus on organized collective political violence and do not discuss this largely criminal aspect of the post-war violence environment in Abkhazia.

### 1.2.5 Summary

Table 1 (below) summarizes the four puzzles of violent mobilization across the pre-, civil war, and post-war stages in the conflict cycle addressed in this dissertation. It relates these puzzles to the corresponding assumptions made in the literature on civil war, which I problematize. These assumptions are drawn from the conception of civil war as temporally bounded and disconnected from the pre- and post-war conflict stages and reflect rationalist underpinnings of much literature on civil war. These issues are discussed theoretically in Chapter 2 and applied to the puzzles in the substantive Chapters 4-7. Finally, the table outlines the application in the case of Abkhazia.

Table 1. Four Puzzles of Violent Mobilization

<b>Stage in Conflict Cycle</b>	<b>Pre-war</b>	<b>Civil War</b>		<b>Post-war</b>
<b>Puzzle</b>	Mobilization despite inter-group violence and state repression	Mobilization on the weaker side despite high violence and low chances of success	Continued mobilization on the weaker side and asymmetric victory	Continued mobilization in “post-conflict” conditions
<b>Assumption Challenged</b>	Violence starts with civil war onset; violence relevant for civil war studies is that which takes place during civil war	Civilians will mobilize on the stronger side for personal safety and potential success in war	Civilians will defect to the stronger side; victory by the weaker side is unlikely	Mobilization and violence will subside with time in the “peace process”
<b>Case application</b>	The Abkhaz movement mobilizes; clashes with the stronger Georgian movement	The Abkhaz mobilize en masse on the weaker, Abkhaz side	The Abkhaz do not defect and continue to mobilize; the weaker, Abkhaz side wins	The Abkhaz continue to mobilize for border defence

### 1.3 Argument

Departing from the narrow conceptualization of civil war as bounded and separate from the pre- and post-war stages in the conflict cycle, I find that these stages are in important ways related to civil war. Looking closely at these stages can help us gain a more informed understanding of the dynamics of civil war. In particular, I argue that the process of mobilization—an ongoing process of individual and group participation in and organization of collective action, including violence,—links these stages in the conflict cycle. In contrast to a view of mobilization decisions as merely rationalist calculation based on material concerns, I argue that the process of violent mobilization is deeply connected to the development of an ideational structure of social norms and understandings I label as the *latent normative framework* (LNF). To explain mobilization at the stage of civil war onset—my core puzzle—I propose the *LNF activation mechanism*. It unfolds in two phases.

The first phase of the mechanism comprises of formation and transformation of the latent normative framework for action in the process of pre-war mobilization.<sup>10</sup> I argue that formation of the normative basis for action prior to civil war enables mass mobilization in civil war. It combines socialization into fundamental social norms and emergence in the process of mobilization of shared understandings of history and identity, impacted by the patterns of inter-group relations involved in the conflict. Together the dimensions of the LNF, namely, pre-existing social norms and emergent understandings of history and identity, provide the foundation for action at the stage of civil war onset, when important mobilization decisions have to be made absent sufficient information. This latent normative framework is supported and continuously reinforced in the subsequent cycles of mobilization and at the different levels of the social structure, from micro-level, informal quotidian networks, to village, town, and city units at the meso level, to the more formal, national institutions at the macro level.

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<sup>10</sup> The framework is latent, that is, present but needing particular conditions to be activated (discussed below).

The latent normative framework for action transforms in the course of mobilization under the influence of internal inter-group violence and external factors. Social norms, the first dimension of the LNF, are sticky. Yet, inter-group violence has transformative effects on norms. It weakens such pre-existing norms as non-violence or inter-ethnic peace and sharpens shared understandings of history and identity. Pre-war inter-group violence is for this reason critical for the course of civil war. Emergent understandings, the second dimension of the LNF, evolve continuously, as history and identity are reinterpreted in the mobilization process in reaction to exogenous processes, such as counter-mobilization or changes in the political opportunity structure.

Activation of the latent normative framework at the stage of civil war onset constitutes the second phase of the mechanism. Framing and perception of threat are central aspects of this phase. The micro-, meso-, and macro-level framing of civil war onset as a threat toward the collectivity to which one belongs triggers threat perception in potential mobilizers.<sup>11</sup> The way in which this threat is perceived by individuals and small groups affects their adoption of different mobilization roles. Whereas self-oriented, rationalist-based threat perception results in no-to-low risk mobilization, collectivity-oriented, normative-based threat perception raises risk acceptance by individuals and small groups and leads to higher-risk mobilization roles.

The latent normative framework continues to influence mobilization after civil war onset. I argue that it legitimizes the sustained struggle during the war and defence of the war achievements at the post-war stage and motivates committed fighters. Overall, an iterative, mutually constitutive relationship evolves among the LNF (structure) and mobilization (agency), whereby these aspects of the conflict process reinforce and inform each other. The LNF continuously transforms in the mobilization process and shapes mobilization in turn. I discuss the mechanism in detail in Chapter 2 and apply it to the Georgian-Abkhaz case throughout the dissertation.

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<sup>11</sup> Potential mobilizers are individuals and small groups in the pool of mobilization across the conflict cycle.

## 1.4 Research Design

This dissertation adopts a within-case comparative research design to analyze mobilization across the conflict cycle. I select a case of civil war, where pre-war, civil war, and post-war mobilization took place, and examine the temporal and spatial variation in mobilization across the stages of conflict and the geographical span of the case. I draw implications from the case study to a broader population of civil war cases. In this section I discuss the scope conditions, case selection, methodology, and data collection strategies employed in the study.

### 1.4.1 Scope Conditions

This dissertation looks at mobilization in the cases of civil war. I follow Kalyvas (2006: 5) in characterizing civil war as “*armed combat within the boundaries of a recognized sovereign entity between parties subject to a common authority at the outset of the hostilities*” (emphasis in original). I am primarily interested in the cases of irregular civil war, where “the weaker actor refuses to face the stronger one directly and... military asymmetry” is evident (67). Kalyvas outlines the universe of cases of irregular war:

Irregular war, broadly conceived, has been practiced in “backward” areas invaded by regular armies (e.g., wars of empire and colonization); in areas that had been already colonized (wars of decolonization); in modern states whose regular armies have been defeated on the battlefield (wars of occupation); in weak but modernizing states bent on centralization and the subjugation of their periphery; and in “failing” or “failed” states (67).

In these situations mobilization on the weaker side in the war is not predicted. Potential participants will not expect it to increase their chances of survival. A prospect of military success will as well be improbable. For these reasons, studying mobilization in these difficult conditions of irregular civil war makes for a difficult test of mobilization theories and makes it possible to discover the causal mechanisms leading to mobilization.

## 1.4.2 Case Selection

Mobilization across time and space over the cycle of conflict in Abkhazia is the core of my dissertation research. Abkhazia is a partially recognized *de facto* state and a breakaway territory of Georgia comprising the tenth of Georgia's territory. It is located on the Black Sea in the north-west Transcaucasus (Figure 1 locates Abkhazia within Georgia). It borders the Russian Federation to the north and north-west and the Georgian provinces of Mingrelia and Svanetia to the south and south-east. The territory of Abkhazia is relatively small, with the area of 8,700km<sup>2</sup> stretching over 170km along the coast of the Black Sea and 66km from south to north (Dbar: 2013, 23). In comparison this territory is smaller than that of Cyprus.

Figure 1. Map of Abkhazia within Georgia



Source: Based on UN map of Georgia, August 2004

Abkhazia consists of densely populated regions along the Black Sea and in the mountainous areas. The regions within Abkhazia are organized around its seven major cities (see Figure 2 below). The capital of Abkhazia, Sukhum/i, is the center of the Sukhum/i region. The other six regional centers include Gagra, Gudauta, Gulripsh, Ochamchira, Tqvarchel/i, and Gal/i.

Figure 2. Regional Composition of Abkhazia



Source: Based on UN map of Georgia, August 2004

The case of Abkhazia satisfies all three case selection criteria posed by the scope conditions of my research. First, it is a case of civil war. Abkhazia fought a war against Georgia in 1992-1993, coded as an intra-state (civil) war over territory in the major datasets (UCDP, 2013; COW, 2010). It was fought between the forces of the Abkhaz leadership and those of the State Council of Georgia, including the National Guard and the paramilitary group Mkhedrioni, with the involvement of the local population and international elements, specifically Russia and foreign fighters, on both sides.

Second, the Georgian-Abkhaz war is an irregular civil war. The preponderance of force on the Georgian side was evident from the outset of the war. As I argued above, Georgia inherited the equipment and weapons of the Transcaucasus Military District of the Soviet Army prior to the war. The Abkhaz, on the other hand, did not have a nearly comparable access to arms needed in the war. Due to the violent inter-group events of the pre-war period in Abkhazia the Abkhaz population was disarmed before the war. The Soviet stockpiles located in Abkhazia, which the Abkhaz had access to, did not store the equivalent volume of weapons to that of the Transcaucasus District taken over by Georgia. Furthermore, the pre-war demographic situation placed the Abkhaz in a disadvantaged position. According to the census of 1989, the Georgian population comprised 45.7% (239,872) of Abkhazia in contrast to 17.8% (93,267) Abkhaz and Georgia had a five-million large population, of which 70.7% were Georgian. The Georgian government, therefore, could easily mobilize sufficient support from within Georgia and Abkhazia to crush the resistance mounted by the Abkhaz.

Mobilization was not predicted in this case (Beissinger, 2002: 222).<sup>12</sup> Yet, at least 13% of the population mobilized to fight on the Abkhaz side during the war.<sup>13</sup> This satisfies the third case selection criterion that mobilization in fact takes place on the weaker side in the unlikely conditions of irregular civil war. Hence, I select my case based on the outcome of interest—in this dissertation, mobilization. While this case selection strategy is not advisable in variable-oriented research (King et al., 1994; Geddes, 1990), I adopt a causal process view of causation (Brady and Collier, 2004). I treat the Abkhaz case as a difficult test for existing mobilization theories (McKeown in Brady and Collier, 2004) and argue that this puzzling case of mobilization is suitable for producing a nuanced understanding of mobilization and tracing its process and causal mechanisms (George and Bennett, 2005; Munck in Brady and Collier, 2004).

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<sup>12</sup> According to Beissinger's (2002) model, "one would have predicted a .13 *probability* that a group with the structural characteristics... of the Abkhaz would have engaged in separatist mobilization" (222, emphasis added).

<sup>13</sup> This figure is calculated based on the number of fighter casualties in the total population (see Ch. 5: 171).



As I demonstrated in the discussion of the puzzles addressed in this dissertation, the Abkhaz case is characterized by the wide variation in the patterns of mobilization over time and space. This variation allows not only to examine the individual puzzles of mobilization, but also to address the subject of mobilization as a broader process in the conflict cycle. Specifically, Abkhaz mobilization took various forms and involved a large range of actors and social structures both within and across the pre-, civil war, and post-war stages of conflict. Abkhaz mobilization, furthermore, varied over space. Abkhaz mobilization in the pre-war period varied not only across urban and rural areas, but also across geographical districts of Abkhazia—eastern, central, and western. These districts were then segmented and fragmented in terms of territorial control during the war as the Georgian forces established control over eastern and western Abkhazia, including the capital Sukhum/i, at the war onset and the Abkhaz leadership and military headquarters moved to central Abkhazia (see Figure 3 below).<sup>14</sup> Post-war mobilization then focused on the border area between Georgia and Abkhazia.

A comparative analysis of such wide temporal and spatial variation requires mobilization to take place in comparable conditions. Analyzing a single case study is beneficial in this regard since important structural conditions, which could affect mobilization, are held constant<sup>15</sup> in this research design. In the case of Abkhazia these conditions include mountainous terrain, sub-tropical climate, absence of lootable resources, fertile soil, and similar levels of urbanization—the factors that make for a common geography. Furthermore, the case is characterized by the shared legacy of the Soviet past, namely a similar level of social, political, and economic development. Holding constant these factors, known to be significant for civil wars, allows to move on to the exploration of the overall process and the specific causal mechanisms of mobilization.

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<sup>14</sup> Once the Abkhaz regained western Abkhazia, the territory was divided between Abkhaz-controlled western and central and Georgian-controlled eastern Abkhazia.

<sup>15</sup> This is an approximation. Structural conditions slightly vary across time and space, but are similar overall.

Figure 3. Territorial Control in the Georgian-Abkhaz War



Source: Based on UN map of Georgia, August 2004

### 1.4.3 Methodology

This dissertation adopts a case study research design and analyzes the mobilization patterns across time and space in the case of Abkhazia. I follow George and Bennett (2005: 5) in describing the case study approach as “the detailed examination of an aspect of a historical episode to develop or test historical explanations that may be generalizable to other events.” I look specifically at three stages in the historical trajectory of Abkhaz mobilization—pre-war (1921-1992), civil war (1992-1993), and post-war (1993-2008)—to develop a better understanding of mobilization in the case of Abkhazia and other cases of irregular civil war. Analyzing a single case in depth helps “assess... *whether and how* a variable mattered to the outcome” (George and Bennett, 2005: 25). Hence, my central goal in this dissertation is to verify the application of existing alternative explanations to the Abkhaz case and determine if other mechanisms are at work. As Geddes (1990: 149) argues, case studies selected on the outcome of interest—in my case, mobilization—

are ideal for digging into the details of how phenomena come about and for developing insights. They identify plausible causal variables. They bring to light anomalies that current theories cannot accommodate. In so doing, they contribute to building and revising theories.

As I noted above, the Abkhaz case is “an instance of a class of events” of irregular civil war (George and Bennett, 2005: 17). It is a crucial test case of mobilization since theories “only weakly predict an outcome” of mobilization in this case (George and Bennett, 2005: 121). If theories pass the test, they will be strongly supported (George and Bennett, 2005: 253). If not, an alternative has to be developed. Disaggregating units within a conflict and analyzing within-case variation across time and space in a case where mobilization is not otherwise predicted focuses my research on the local-level detail and helps better assess existing theories and advance an alternative explanation of mobilization (Chenoweth and Lawrence, 2010).

Mobilization is a complex process involving a variety of actors, structures, and intervening processes. It is characterized by non-linear patterns of cause and effect, or complex causality, with the multiple antecedent conditions, independent variables, and causal chains, dynamic interactions among independent variables, and path-dependent processes (George and Bennett, 2005). For this reason correlational accounts of mobilization do not get at the core of the process. Instead, I rely on the qualitative process-tracing method that “focuses on sequential processes within a particular historical case”—in this dissertation, Abkhazia (George and Bennett, 2005: 13).<sup>16</sup> Process tracing helps us move from correlational accounts of cause in analyzing mobilization to mechanism-based causation, or theories based on causal mechanisms, which are at once more robust and closer to the complex reality of the actual phenomenon of mobilization (Checkel, 2008c).<sup>17</sup> As Hall (2003: 18) argues,

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<sup>16</sup> For a recent discussion on strengths and limitations of process tracing, see Checkel (2008b); Bennett (2008); Collier (2011); Beach and Pedersen (2013); Bennett and Checkel (2014).

<sup>17</sup> Although the definition of causal mechanisms is debated (Checkel, 2008a), causal mechanisms can be seen as “ultimately unobservable physical, social, or psychological processes through which agents with causal capacities

process-tracing is a methodology well-suited to testing theories in a world marked by multiple interaction effects, where it is difficult to explain outcomes in terms of two or three independent variables—precisely the world that more and more social scientists believe we confront.

The process-tracing method focuses research on fine-grained process-related observations (Brady and Collier, 2004). It helps evaluate an explanation by looking at the finer level of detail on the lower level of analysis than that proposed in existing theories and documenting if a sequence of events in cases is matched by what an explanation predicts as compared to its alternatives (Bennett, 2008). The method privileges quality, rather than quantity of data, in seeking evidence with highest inferential power (Collier, 2011; Beach and Pedersen, 2013).

The central defining characteristic of this method is that “[i]n process-tracing, we theorize more than just X and Y; we also theorize the mechanism between them” (Beach and Pedersen, 2013: 49). In this dissertation the method thus helps generate a more credible explanation of mobilization by devising the intervening causal process—the latent normative framework activation mechanism at the onset of civil war—involved in it. My process-tracing approach includes both deduction and induction, or both theory-building and theory-testing<sup>18</sup> aspects of the method, with generalization beyond the context of Abkhazia as an ultimate goal. Importantly, I do not rely on induction to build the mechanism that I propose. Instead, I use existing theoretical knowledge to build the mechanism, assess alternative theories, and demonstrate each phase of the mechanism with evidence in the case to draw implications for cases of irregular civil war. In other words, I employ the method “to build a generalizable theoretical explanation [by use of] empirical evidence, inferring that a more general causal mechanism exists from the facts of a particular case” (Beach and Pedersen, 2013: 3).

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operate, but only in specific contexts or conditions, to transfer energy, information, or matter to other entities” (George and Bennett, 2005: 137).

<sup>18</sup> In this dissertation I aim to demonstrate the activation mechanism, rather than test it in a strict sense of the term.

In general, I look at how different forms of violent mobilization unfold at each stage of the conflict—pre-war, civil war, and post-war—in Abkhazia and how they relate to one another in the overall process of mobilization. I examine which interactions among actors (for example, Abkhaz and Georgian individuals and groups in Abkhazia) and between actors and structure (for example, the conditions created by the Soviet state and its collapse) are involved in the process and what sequence they follow (Checkel, 2008b).

In particular, I theorize and demonstrate each part of the causal mechanism of mobilization I entitle the latent normative framework activation. Rather than providing a narrative of the Abkhaz case, each chapter looks at the corresponding phase of this mechanism (Beach and Pedersen, 2013: 5). After the discussion of theoretical underpinnings of the mechanism and alternative explanations of civil war mobilization as they stand in the case of Abkhazia in Chapter 2, the substantive chapters trace the two phases of the mechanism, showing how the social norms and shared understandings of history and identity evolved in the process of mobilization and how they affected mobilization at the stage of civil war onset. Chapters 3 and 4 theorize and assess if the first phase—formation and transformation of the latent normative framework for action in the pre-war period—is present in the case. I examine formation of the relevant norms and emergent understandings and demonstrate the transformative effects of violent events and external factors, including counter-mobilization, on the LNF. Having established this first phase of the mechanism, Chapter 5 moves to its second phase—activation of the LNF at the stage of civil war onset. I specify the process of threat framing at the micro, meso, and macro levels of the social structure and trace the relationship between the ensuing threat perception in potential mobilizers and their adoption of various mobilization roles. Chapters 6 and 7 then analyze in detail further war and post-war mobilization respectively and point out the continued importance of the LNF for legitimizing these processes and motivating fighters.

To trace these interactions and sequences of mobilization, I seek observable implications or indicators at each phase of the mechanism (pp. 37-38). To do so, I develop a systematic strategy of chronologizing through time and mapping in space the events of violent mobilization at the three stages of conflict. Triangulating among a wide variety of data sources (see Data Collection section below), I construct the mobilization chronology that spans the pre- to post-war periods in Abkhazia to isolate precisely when and under what conditions mobilization patterns changed. These changes mark the onset of a new mobilization cycle. I map the mobilization events of each cycle to the finest level of detail. This strategy allows me to look at hour-to-hour developments involving various sets of actors and taking place in different locations at the same time. It helps gain a deep understanding of the mobilization process while accounting for its “broader structural-discursive-ethical context” (Checkel, 2008b: 126). It as well helps move between inductive and deductive theorizing and theory demonstration as I utilize theoretical and case knowledge to develop my explanation and am able to generate new evidence to illustrate each additional argument (Bennett, 2008).

Overall, my approach is compatible with the best practices of process tracing advanced by Bennett and Checkel (2014). It is “grounded in a philosophical base that is ontologically consistent with mechanism-based understandings of social reality” (27). The mechanism of latent normative framework activation is an intervening process between norms and action, demonstrated through observable implications that I “reconstruct carefully [while] keep[ing] sight of broader structural-discursive contexts” (27). While I do not focus on alternative explanations offered in the literature in the substantive Chapters 3-7, I begin my discussion of civil war mobilization by “consider[ing] the alternative causal pathways through which the outcome of interest might have occurred” and proceed from an understanding that existing theories fall short in the Abkhaz case and an alternative explanation is needed (27).

#### 1.4.4 Data Collection

The process-tracing method outlined above and utilized in this dissertation requires a vast amount of diverse data and correspondingly time (Checkel, 2008b). Hence, I carried out long-term, in-depth fieldwork in the region of study over 2010-2013. My research was primarily undertaken in Abkhazia (2010, 2011). I focused on collecting interview data in Abkhazia to capture the realities and perceptions on mobilization, civil war, and violence among different groups in this breakaway territory. In order to check for biases among the Abkhaz, I gathered a range of additional primary and secondary materials and carried out fieldwork in Georgia (2013) and Russia (2013)—two key actors involved in the conflict.

In the course of my field research in Abkhazia I carried out 150 semi-structured in-depth interviews in four sub-national locales selected according to their position on the map of war-time territorial control (see Figure 4 below).<sup>19</sup> A center in western Abkhazia, Gagra was occupied by the Georgian forces from the onset of the war of 1992-1993, but was taken by the Abkhaz later in its course. Sukhum/i, the capital of Abkhazia located in its eastern part, was as well immediately taken and held until the end of the war by the Georgian side. Finally, Pitsunda and Gudauta in central Abkhazia remained under Abkhaz control in the course of the war. Two cities from the area were selected in order to capture the effects of strategic importance of a locale: While Gudauta served as the headquarters of the Abkhaz political and military leadership during the war, Pitsunda did not occupy a similar strategic position. Along with these four locales, I chose Tqvarchel/i and Gal/i—my secondary field sites in the east—as deviant test cases, the former a blockaded territory, the latter a territory populated primarily by Georgians. I did not conduct fieldwork there, but collected secondary materials on these areas.

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<sup>19</sup> Territorial control is established in the civil war literature to be key for civilian collaboration—in this case, mobilization,—one of the propositions I look at in the dissertation (Kalyvas, 2006). Differences in territorial control, therefore, had to be accounted for to avoid biases in my conclusions on civil war mobilization.

Figure 4. Sub-National Case Selection



Source: Based on UN map of Georgia, August 2004

Table 2 (below) provides a detailed summary of my interviews in Abkhazia. 142 individuals participated in 150 interviews. In each of the four selected sub-national locales I sought two general types of respondent categories—participants and non-participants in mobilization across the pre-, civil war, and post-war stages of conflict. Interviewed individuals were relatively balanced in terms of these categories. The ratio of participants to non-participants is 62% to 38% at the pre-war stage, 51% to 49% at the civil war stage, and 42% to 58% at the post-war stage. Within the category of participants, I sought individuals whose mobilization was organized and those who spontaneously mobilized. The ratio of organized to spontaneous mobilization within the category of participants is 51% to 49% and 19% to 81% at the pre-war and civil war stages respectively. The post-war stage differed in that most mobilization was organized, but the categories of police and reservist border guards had to be identified (25% to 75%).



Table 2. Summary of Interview Data: Abkhazia<sup>20</sup>

			Total*	Percentage (rounded)	
General information	Gender	Male	99	70%	
		Female	43	30%	
	Self-identified	Abkhaz	127	90%	
		Other	15	10%	
	Age**	<50	72	51%	
		>50	70	49%	
	Location	Gagra	40	27%	
		Pitsunda	36	26%	
		Gudauta	19	14%	
		Sukhum/i	45	32%	
Other		2	1%		
Pre-war	Occupation	State***	29	20%	
		Non-state	113	80%	
	Mobilization	Organized	45	32%	
		Spontaneous	43	30%	
		Other****	54	38%	
War <sup>21</sup>	Mobilization	Fighters	Organized	14	10%
			Spontaneous	58	41%
		Other*****		70	49%
Post-war	Occupation	State***	42	30%	
		Non-state	100	70%	
	Mobilization	Border Guard	Police	15	11%
			Reservist	44	31%
		Other*****		83	58%

Notes:

\* Calculated based on 142 participants in 150 interviews

\*\* The interview data is listed per 2011 when it was collected. Note that respondents were 19 years younger at the outset of the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-1993

\*\*\* This category includes individuals in leading positions in state institutions (e.g. heads of state departments, administrations, law enforcement agencies, etc.)

\*\*\*\* This category includes individuals who did not mobilize (e.g. high-level officials, police, individuals with household responsibilities, etc.)

\*\*\*\*\* This category includes individuals who escaped fighting in Abkhazia, fled outside of Abkhazia, and were involved in the war effort not as fighters (e.g. medical and provision units, war journalists, performers, etc.)

\*\*\*\*\* This category includes individuals who did not participate in the Abkhaz-Georgian border guard

<sup>20</sup> This summary includes the interviews conducted in Abkhazia (see Appendix A). It does not incorporate additional interview data conducted in Georgia and Russia (see Appendix B).<sup>21</sup> The organized and spontaneous categories of fighters are recorded for the period of the war onset (see Chapter 5).

It is important to note that the interviews across the selected locales were relatively balanced in terms of the number of respondents and representation of the respondent categories. 27% of the respondents were interviewed in Gagra in western Abkhazia, where the war-time territorial control shifted from the Georgian to Abkhaz forces during the war. 40% were interviewed in Pitsunda and Gudauta in central Abkhazia and 32% in the capital Sukhum/i, controlled for the duration of the war by the Abkhaz and Georgian sides respectively.

The most critical attainment in terms of the representativeness of key respondent categories is the relatively balanced distribution of participants to non-participants at the civil war stage as this stage in the conflict cycle constitutes the core of the dissertation. The differences in the distribution of participants and non-participants in the pre- and post-war stages can be attributed to the different conditions of mobilization. Whereas mobilization in pre-war Abkhazia is best described as popular mobilization, which in general did not involve large-scale violence or require what Tilly (2003: 34-36) describes as “violent specialists,” post-war mobilization involved systematic violence and was organized by the Abkhaz security and defence structures. Thus a greater percentage of respondents mobilized in the pre- as opposed to post-war stage.

The differences in organized and spontaneous mobilization of participants as well relate to these different conditions. The *de facto* Abkhaz state organized most post-war mobilization. On the other hand, pre-war mobilization, while widespread, was in part organized by the Abkhaz national movement and in part spontaneous, as reflected by the nearly 1:1 ratio of the two sub-categories. Organizational affiliation increased gradually. Most state staff avoided affiliation with the Abkhaz movement to secure their positions. Overrepresentation of spontaneous civil war mobilizers in the sample has similar reasons: Organized fighters were those of the Abkhaz Guard, largely mobilized by the Abkhaz movement. I remedy this with alternative interview archives (see below).

To contextualize the interview data, I collected additional information on the respondents, including their gender, age, self-identification, and pre- and post-war occupation. Men constituted the majority of civil war fighters in the Abkhaz case. The male to female ratio of respondents (70% to 30%) reflects this as do differences in the interviews between these categories. Most interviewed women escaped the fighting, either in or outside of Abkhazia, or engaged in the support or logistical work during the war.<sup>22</sup> Most had close relatives who fought. Thus while men spoke of their fighter roles, women's accounts in general emphasized their roles as fighters' wives, mothers, daughters, or sisters; their narratives were on behalf of fighters.

Age is another important background data. Table 2 reflects the respondents' age at the time of the interview in 2011. This means that the respondents were 19 years younger at the war onset in 1992. The mark of 50 years old used to separate the respondents is dictated by this time difference. It is intended to distinguish young adults under the age of 30 from the more established individuals over 30 years old who likely had families and stable jobs at the outset of the war.<sup>23</sup> It is the former who in general joined the Abkhaz Guard and were organized in their mobilization at the civil war onset stage.<sup>24</sup> The 1:1 ratio was achieved in the sample with regard to this background category.

This study concerns mobilization by the Abkhaz. Most respondents self-identified as such. Respondents in state and non-state occupations in the pre- and post-war period were interviewed. Within the state category, I interviewed officials in the security sector, above all the police and the army, the foreign affairs department, and mayors of cities and towns I worked in. In the non-state category, I interviewed representatives of non-governmental organizations and the media, societal leaders, such as the elders, and regular men and women.

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<sup>22</sup> This aspect of mobilization is not explored in this dissertation. See Parkinson (2013a, 2013b).

<sup>23</sup> Young males are often found to be the primary category of civil war fighters. See, for example, Collier and Hoeffler (2004); Fearon and Laitin (2003).

<sup>24</sup> The difference between the spontaneous and organized categories faded in the course of the war with the formation of the Abkhaz army and incorporation of almost all fighters into this organized structure.

I employed a mixed strategy of locating respondents for the interviews and building contact networks in Abkhazia. First, I established a small number of government and non-governmental contacts in my preliminary field trip to Abkhazia in 2010 (see Appendix A). I used these contacts to test my initial assumptions about the case and assess the feasibility of research in Abkhazia. I then broadened my network of contacts during the core field trip of 2011. I used the method of “private snowball sampling,” whereby I selected those contacts for the interviews from the private network referrals who *fit* my research purposes (Cohen and Arieli, 2011). When the private referrals did not offer the necessary respondent categories, I made appointments or approached respondents in these categories, depending on whether it was acceptable, at their location of employment. This refers particularly to the government officials, including mayors of cities and towns of research, police (*militsija*) officers whose accounts of post-war mobilization were necessary, and representatives of non-governmental organizations. This second strategy of accessing respondents was indispensable for my research. Most respondents were approached this way rather than through the snowball (see Appendix A). By utilizing this mixed strategy, I was able to access all the categories of participants and non-participants in violent events across the pre-war, civil war, and post-war conflict stages in Abkhazia necessary for an analysis of mobilization and achieved as representative a sample of the population of interest as possible in this challenging setting for research (see Appendix D).

One issue of the process-tracing method I use in the dissertation was deciding when to stop collecting data. As advised in the literature on process tracing (Checkel, 2008a) and implemented by researchers of civil war (Wood, 2003), I stopped interviewing when new respondents repeated the information that I had received before and added no further evidence. This is akin to a strategy in the field of hermeneutics: When all the new information confirms already attained accounts, the hermeneutical circle closes and data collection can end (Reiter, 2006).

While an overarching story emerged from my interviews in Abkhazia, repeated by a variety of actors involved in my interviews whose roles and contexts differed, I could not be certain in the unbiasedness of this story and data quality remained an issue. An innovative aspect of my research lies in the ways in which I dealt with this problem. I noted a part of my approach in discussing my mixed strategy of building the research base. With this strategy, I ensured that my interviews were conducted with a wide variety of relevant respondents, accommodating diverse perspectives on the questions of mobilization. The most important element was the triangulation techniques I adopted in my research (see Appendix B and C for additional data sources). In particular, I cross-referenced interview data with other primary sources and published materials, using the latter, especially open sources, with caution (Dunning, 2007). I gained access to comparable interviews collected by other researchers during the war and mid-way between the end of the war and my research.<sup>25</sup> This source served to close gaps in my interviews and as a check to issues of memory, lies, and withholding of information (discussed in Appendix D). I comprehensively reviewed local studies, documents, and media sources. Finally, I used alternative data sources, including video and photo materials.<sup>26</sup> With each of these sources, I thought carefully of the data generation process (Herrera and Kapur, 2007).

Hence, along with the interviews, I gained access to and surveyed five archives in Abkhazia critical to my research. The archive of Abkhazia's government-funded media agency, Apsnypress, made available in full for the first time, proved to be a key source on the post-war developments. I reviewed archives of two privately owned newspapers to check for bias of the state-funded agency. Moreover, I gained access to over 100 hours of video materials from the archives of the Gagra and Sukhum/i TV channels. Finally, I accessed two major libraries of Abkhazia in Gagra and Sukhum/i and the Gudauta war museum, where I collected over 250 relevant local books and articles.

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<sup>25</sup> See Scott (1985) on the importance of alternative interview archives collected earlier by other researchers.

<sup>26</sup> I will explore these sources further in future research.

To cross-check the materials collected in Abkhazia, I gathered primary and secondary data in Georgia and Russia, as both states have played key roles in the conflict in Abkhazia. My research was in the capitals of these two countries where a concentration of government, non-governmental, and academic strictures facilitated access to interviews with officials and expert opinion (Checkel, 2008b). I conducted 23 interviews with state and non-governmental representatives and experts in Tbilisi and Moscow (see Appendix B). I organized a focus group with former residents of Abkhazia who fled at the end of the war and/or after the repeated episodes of violence in the post-war period. The focus group was critical in cross-checking the Abkhaz responses to the questions on aspects of pre-war mobilization and, particularly, post-war developments. Furthermore, I obtained an archive of all official documents related to the Georgian-Abkhaz war. Lastly, I gained access to the national libraries in Georgia and Russia and gathered the academic literature and media data comparable to that collected in Abkhazia. I used international academic and media sources to complement these materials (see Appendix C).

Overall, the multi-faceted field research provided me with primary and secondary materials on the pre-war, civil war, and post-war conflict stages in the case of Abkhazia, essential for a deep understanding of the processes of mobilization in particular and civil war more generally. It formed the basis for a nuanced and informed view of violent mobilization by individuals and small groups in the broader context of conflict. It, moreover, provided the necessary data for process tracing. As I noted above, the method requires a vast amount of data. Due to the combination of inductive and deductive theorizing additional data has to be generated to support each new argument made on the basis of the prior case and theoretical knowledge. While verification in a positivist sense is not my goal, having this variety of data at hand made it possible to demonstrate my theoretical arguments in the case over the long span of the conflict (1921-2008) and the geographical span of Abkhazia.

## 1.5 Contributions

This study contributes to the literature on civil war in general and mobilization in particular, the research on the understudied case of Abkhazia, and methods of research in conflict settings (see Chapter 8 for further discussion). First, studying individual and small group mobilization across the pre-, civil war, and post-war conflict stages, as this dissertation does, can inform our understanding of civil war. This approach broadens the dichotomous view of civil war as present or absent, *on* or *off* and privileges a historical understanding of the overall civil war process, of which the pre-, civil war, and post-war stages are part and which is grounded in the normative and social basis.

Fine-grained, grounded research on individual and group participation in and organization of violence demonstrates that mobilization in this overall process serves to link the different stages of conflict and uncovers normative and social processes involved in it. Each subsequent episode of mobilization is informed by the preceding mobilization cycles and the corresponding development of social meanings and norms in a conflict, reinforced by a variety of social structures at the micro, meso, and macro levels. Understanding mobilization and related processes at the stage of civil war is difficult without an informed understanding of pre-war mobilization, just as the pre-war and war processes need to be considered in analyzing post-war mobilization.

Research on mobilization across the conflict cycle moves the literature on civil war beyond its focus on civil war violence to a recognition of the broader spectrum of violence relevant to the study of civil war. Different forms of violent mobilization leading up to civil war and following it are in important ways related to civil war. Thus understanding violence beyond the period of large-scale fighting is essential for our understanding of civil war. Nevertheless, we still know little about the escalation of violence prior to civil war and the persistence of patterns of violence after it. This dissertation contributes to the study of civil war by analyzing these processes.

A focus in the civil war literature on civil war violence, moreover, obscures the importance of other central processes of civil war, such as conflict-related social interactions and co-production of meaning, particularly collective history. This dissertation demonstrates that these normative and social processes greatly impact individual and small group decisions to participate in pre-war, civil war, and post-war collective action, including violent action, and thus affect civil war in general.

An understanding of these normative and social processes shows that a broader spectrum of actors and social structures are involved in civil war and that decisions to participate in high-risk, violent collective action do not lie solely in the rationalist logic. There is more to risky mobilization decisions than rebels' use of incentives to recruit fighters—a focus of much literature on civil war mobilization. This dissertation contributes to the study of these decisions by specifying the process of development and activation of ideational structures that enable civil war mobilization.

This dissertation contributes not only to the literature on civil war, but also the research on the Georgian-Abkhaz relations and post-Soviet contexts more generally. Hence, the second set of contributions is case-specific. It is the first comprehensive analysis of mobilization across the pre-, civil war, and post-war stages in Abkhazia. The analysis differs from other studies of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict by looking at the conflict from within Abkhazia—a highly understudied area.

The final set of contributions is methodological. The study can contribute to future research on *de facto* unrecognized territories and other difficult post-war settings. It stresses the importance of grounded research and triangulation in the study of civil war and discusses the difficulties of the data collection process in the post-war contexts (see Appendix D). It advances the process tracing method by developing a systematic strategy of using extensive data to temporally chronologize and spatially map mobilization across sub-national units over a conflict cycle. Overall, I show that it is only through in-depth fieldwork that we can realize the impact of normative and social structures—core aspects of mobilization—on individual and group decisions.



## **1.6 Chapter Organization**

In line with the objectives of the dissertation its structure closely follows the four puzzles of mobilization and the mechanism of the latent normative framework activation at the civil war onset. After the theoretical chapter each substantive chapter looks at the relevant phase of the mechanism. I begin by problematizing the assumptions made in the civil war studies with regard to each puzzle, discuss whether these assumptions hold in the Abkhaz case, and advance my theoretical argument.

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework of the study. I address the exclusion from civil war research of the pre- and post-war processes, offer a normative, socially-embedded approach to mobilization in civil war, which includes processes across the pre- to post-war stages, and discuss the standing of alternative explanations for civil war mobilization in the case of Abkhazia.

Chapters 3 and 4 look at the first phase of the mechanism—formation and transformation of the latent normative framework. I establish the normative and social background and trace pre-war mobilization in Chapter 3. I address the first puzzle of pre-war mobilization and examine the shift from non-violent to violent mobilization in Chapter 4. If my mechanism holds, I should observe the practices at the familial (micro), communal (meso), and state (macro) levels that introduce potential mobilizers into relevant norms. I should observe emergence of shared understandings of history and identity in mobilization repertoires. These norms and understandings should evolve. For example, inter-group norms of friendship and peace should weaken after inter-group violence, indicated by a split in societal organizations and formation of armed groups on the two sides in the conflict. These chapters demonstrate that these observable implications indeed hold in the case of Abkhazia.

Chapter 5 looks at the second phase of the mechanism—normative framework activation at the war onset—in the puzzle of immediate mass mobilization for war. I trace the process of Abkhaz spontaneous and organized mobilization in response to the advance from Abkhazia's east and west of the disproportionately stronger Georgian forces. If my mechanism holds, the following sequence

should be observed. Actors at the micro, meso, and macro levels of society should address potential mobilizers in private and public in an attempt to frame Georgia's advance as a threat to the Abkhaz. Respondents should reference this framing in their explanation of how they perceived the advance. Respondents who refer to collectivity-oriented threat and relevant norms and understandings in the decisions to mobilize in response to this threat should be observed to have mobilized to fight. These observable implications are supported. I thus argue that the latent normative framework shaped in pre-war mobilization was key to the ways in which the Abkhaz responded to the war onset in 1992. Its activation largely accounts for immediate mass Abkhaz mobilization at this stage of the conflict.

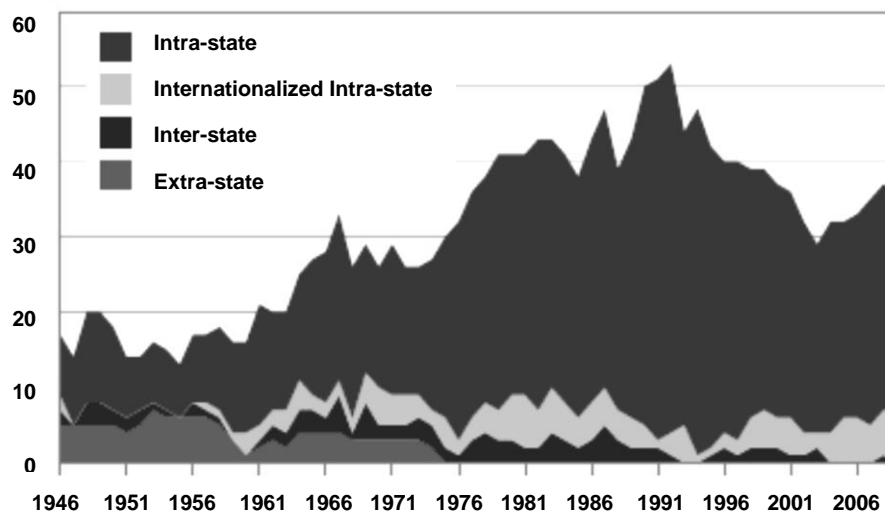
Chapters 6 and 7 explore the continued impact of the normative framework on mobilization after the war. Chapter 6 looks at the puzzle of fighter retention and Abkhaz victory. Chapter 7 looks at post-war mobilization and protracted violence. This discussion goes beyond the latent normative framework activation mechanism at the stage of war onset, but falls within the normative, socially-embedded approach to mobilization across the conflict cycle that I advance. If my argument holds, respondents should reference relevant norms and understandings in explaining macro-level efforts to win the war and build the Abkhaz state after it and micro- and meso-level motivations to continue to fight for Abkhazia. I find that the latent normative framework was indeed critical for legitimizing the transformation of the Abkhaz force into a cohesive army that altered the nature of mobilization and achieved a conventional victory for the Abkhaz. Continued post-war mobilization was a way to justify and defend this victory and emergent *de facto* state built on a perception of Abkhazia as the Abkhaz land: Abkhaz mobilization largely ended once the historical Abkhaz territory was secured.

Chapter 8 reviews the normative, socially-embedded theory of mobilization based on the findings of the preceding chapters on pre-war, civil war, and post-war mobilization by the Abkhaz. I discuss the implications of this research for other cases of civil war and for our understanding of mobilization in particular and civil war in general. Finally, I outline avenues for future research.

## Chapter 2: The Concept and Theories of Mobilization

Academic attention in the field of conflict and security studies has, since the end of the Cold War, increasingly turned to internal aspects of conflict and security. This shift has been motivated and accompanied by a number of changes in the post-Cold War conflict and security environment. We have seen a dramatic decline in inter-state warfare throughout the decades of the Cold War and thereafter. On the other hand, intra-state, or civil war, has accounted for the vast majority of armed conflict in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (see Figure 5 below).<sup>27</sup> The post-Cold War armed conflict landscape has, furthermore, been marked by recidivism.<sup>28</sup> Multiple, overlapping forms of organized political violence have emerged in the majority of countries with previous experience of civil war.<sup>29</sup>

Figure 5. Conflict Trends by Number of Conflicts and Year (1946-2009)



Source: Based on HSR (2012) and UCDP (2010)

<sup>27</sup> HSR (2005, 2012). See also Lacina (2004); Crocker et al. (2001, 2007). On casualties in civil war, see Lacina and Gleditsch (2005); Lacina (2006); Fearon and Laitin (2003); Regan (2009).

<sup>28</sup> The rate of conflict recurrence has increased since the 1960s and “every civil war that began since 2003 was in a country that had a previous civil war” (WDR, 2011: 3).

<sup>29</sup> Among others, these include “state actions against other states or against civilians, civil wars, electoral violence..., communal conflicts..., gang-based violence and organized crime, and international, non-state, armed movements with ideological aims” (WDR 2011: 39, fn. 14).

The changes in the post-Cold War armed conflict environment shifted academic attention from traditional, state-based to human security concerns.<sup>30</sup> More importantly for us, these changes prompted scholars to distinguish between the “old” wars of the pre-Cold War and Cold War eras and the “new” wars of the post-Cold War period. While the former, inter-state wars were argued to be fought by state-organized and financed militaries and driven by geopolitics and ideology, the “new,” civil wars were described as uncontrolled, financed by informal economy, and driven by “illegitimate” actors with “illegitimate” concerns.<sup>31</sup> As a result, the field of civil war studies became dominated by the “greed” versus “grievance” and subsequently the “individual motivations” versus “feasibility” debates.<sup>32</sup> However, these dichotomous views came under severe criticism to give way to a new research programme on the dynamics of civil war.<sup>33</sup> This dissertation is positioned within this research programme, particularly the normative and social aspects of the civil war dynamics.

Recent advances in civil war studies associated with this research programme have greatly deepened our understanding of the processes of civil war. Yet, by focusing on the processes *during* civil war, often defined dichotomously, as isolated from other stages in the conflict cycle, existing scholarship has overlooked a significant aspect of the civil war dynamics—the pre-war patterns of mobilization. As this dissertation will demonstrate, these patterns are critical for our understanding of civil war as well as violent post-war developments. Furthermore, while the civil war dynamics programme has made advances in this regard, non-material, above all normative and social, aspects of civil war have not received due attention in civil war studies. I argue that a systematic analysis of these aspects is indispensable for our understanding of mobilization across the conflict cycle.

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<sup>30</sup> Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy (2012); Liotta (2002); Job (1992); Hampson and Daudelin (2002); Owen (2004).

<sup>31</sup> See Holsti (1996); Kaldor (2006). For a critique, see Kalyvas (2001); Duffield (2001).

<sup>32</sup> On the “greed” v. “grievance” debate, see Gurr (1970); Horowitz (1985); Collier and Hoeffler (2004); Fearon and Laitin (2003). On the “motivations” v. “feasibility,” see Collier et al. (2003); Collier, Hoeffler, and Rohner (2009); Humphreys and Weinstein (2008). For a discussion, see Berdal and Malone (2000); Ballentine and Sherman (2003); Toft (2004); Berdal (2005); Hoeffler (2011).

<sup>33</sup> See Kalyvas (2003, 2006); Humphreys and Weinstein (2008). For a review, see Blattman and Miguel (2010).

I view mobilization as a process that connects the pre-war, civil war, and post-war stages in the conflict cycle. I draw on Wood's (2003) account of mobilization in arguing that norms and identity matter in civil war. I advance a normative and socially-embedded understanding of pre- to post-war mobilization. I argue that a *latent normative framework* forms in the pre-war period, to be activated at the outset of the civil war. The framework transforms with subsequent mobilization stages and is reinforced by individual and collective actors at the different levels of society, which, in turn, serve as triggers for the existing mobilization potential to turn into collective action.

The first part of this chapter positions this dissertation in the civil war literature. I argue for the importance of analyzing the mobilization patterns across the pre- to post-war conflict cycle and problematize the omission of the pre- and post-war processes from the current civil war research. I, furthermore, outline the relational approach to norms I adopt in the dissertation and problematize an understanding of norms in most civil war literature as merely constraining individual behavior.

The second part discusses the concept of mobilization in civil war. I build on the literatures on social movements and civil war to advance my concept of mobilization. These literatures define mobilization in civil war narrowly, as participation or recruitment, and vaguely—it is unclear what aspects it involves and how it relates to collective action or other outcomes, such as civil war onset. I offer a more comprehensive conception of mobilization to overcome these problems.

The third part of the chapter formulates my normative, socially-embedded approach to civil war mobilization. I use two sets of explanations from the research on collective action and strategic interaction in civil war to build my approach. I outline its logic and the *latent normative framework activation mechanism* I introduce. I then turn to alternative explanations of civil war mobilization, relate these explanations to the case of Abkhaz mobilization (1921-2008), and identify aspects of these explanations that are most useful for our understanding of mobilization in civil war.

## 2.1 Mobilization in Civil War Research

Few studies in the civil war literature have looked specifically at mobilization in civil war.<sup>34</sup> Most have focused on the related, but distinct questions of civil war onset,<sup>35</sup> individual motivations for participation in civil war,<sup>36</sup> and recruitment strategies used by rebel organizations to motivate participation.<sup>37</sup> Mobilization has, thus, been inferred from an understanding of why some countries experience war, while others do not. Studies of individual motivations have equated mobilization with individual decisions to engage in violence, whereas research on rebel recruitment has focused on rebel group recruitment strategies, without looking closely at individual and group motivations for joining rebellion. Mobilization, as a result, has not been treated as a process. Rather, it has been seen as a phenomenon that sets off at civil war onset and related to a set of shifting variables, such as ethnicity, ideology, regime type, and military capacity, individual motivations, predominantly grievances, and selective incentives used by rebel organizations to manipulate these motivations. Blattman and Miguel (2010: 21) thus argue, “theories just scratch... the surface of the recruitment of fighters and organization of civil warfare [and t]his area remains one of the most promising and understudied areas in the literature.” The approach to mobilization across the conflict cycle I offer begins to uncover key aspects of this area by theorizing and demonstrating the interaction between normative and social factors in producing high-risk action. Core features of my approach—pre- and post-war processes and non-material aspects—have not been given due attention in the literature.

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<sup>34</sup> Notable exceptions include Petersen (2001); Wood (2003); Viterba (2006); Parkinson (2013b).

<sup>35</sup> This applies specifically to the literature on rebellion and revolution (see Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008: 440).

<sup>36</sup> Gurr (1970, 1993); Humphreys and Weinstein (2008); Viterba (2006); Eck (2009, 2010); Guichaoua (2012); Kubota (2012). See also Wickham-Crowley (1992). On emotive and normative aspects of participation, see Wood (2003, 2008); Petersen (2001, 2002); Lynch (2013); Pearlman (2013). On social networks and mobilization, see Parkinson (2013a, 2013b). See also Varshney (2002). On horizontal inequalities, see Stewart (2008); Østby (2008, 2013). On related subject of nationalist mobilization, see Beissinger (2002); Giuliano (2011).

<sup>37</sup> Weinstein (2007); Gates (2002); Eck (2010); Blattman (2007); Kalyvas and Arjona (2007); Baas (2012, 2013). On elite-based explanations, see Mansfield and Snyder (2005); Kaufman (2001); Gagnon (2004); Fujii (2004, 2009); Lemarchand (2009). Note that most of these explanations emphasize the aspect of ethnic myth-making. On ethnicity specifically, see Horowitz (1985); Cederman et al. (2010, 2013); Sambanis (2001); Habyarimana et al. (2009); Brubaker and Laitin (1998); Fearon and Laitin (2003); Fearon (2008); Eck (2009). On civilian collaboration, see Kalyvas (2006, 2008a); Kalyvas and Kocher (2007); Petersen (2001); Lyall et al. (2013). See also Kasfir (2005, 2009).

### 2.1.1 Pre- and Post-War Processes in Civil War Research

Research on civil war has greatly enhanced our understanding of the processes of civil war over the last two decades. Cross-national, primarily quantitative work of the late 1990s and early 2000s produced a set of significant correlates of civil war, stressing the importance of feasibility factors for civil war onset, duration, and outcomes.<sup>38</sup> More recent, micro-level studies with a strong qualitative component shifted the focus of analysis to the individual and, critically, social dynamics of civil war.<sup>39,40</sup> Scholars have looked at the individual motivations for participation in collective violence;<sup>41</sup> rebel group organization, including recruitment, inter- and intra-group fragmentation, alliance formation, and adaptation;<sup>42</sup> patterns of violence;<sup>43</sup> and rebel-civilian interaction beyond violence, particularly rebel governance,<sup>44</sup> often in the context of unrecognized and failed states.<sup>45</sup> As a result, recent scholarship on civil war began to unpack a number of “black boxes” in the study of civil war, specifically the dynamics inside insurgencies, among insurgency groups, and between these groups and civilian populations. Yet, studies have focused on the processes taking place *at the time* of civil war and have not systematically addressed the pre- and post-war dynamics of conflict.

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<sup>38</sup> This work reacted to studies that stressed the importance of grievances to civil war (Gurr, 1970; Horowitz, 1985), and worked to establish that greed, rather than grievance drives civil war. On the greed versus grievance debate, see fn. 32. Seminal quantitative studies include Collier and Hoeffler (2004) and Fearon and Laitin (2003). According to these studies, war will occur where it is materially feasible (the feasibility hypothesis). For testing of the statistical findings of these earlier studies using in-depth case study research, see Collier and Sambanis (2005).

<sup>39</sup> See Checkel (2011); Wood (2008). For a review of the field, see Blattman and Miguel (2010) and Kalyvas (2007). See also Tarrow (2007). For a critique of the “micro-foundations” literature, see Kalyvas (2008).

<sup>40</sup> This is not to say that studies of civil war in the quantitative tradition have been on the wane. On a contrary, highly sophisticated quantitative, including experimental, work has recently been advanced. For a review, see Blattman and Miguel (2010).

<sup>41</sup> See Wood (2003); Fujii (2009); Kasfir (2005); Metelits (2010); Beissinger (2002); Varshney (2002); Petersen (2001); King (2004). See Barter (2011, 2014); Baines and Paddon (2012); Harpviken (2009) on civilian agency in civil wars.

<sup>42</sup> See Weinstein (2007) (for a review, see Kalyvas (2007)); Staniland (2010, 2012b); Eck (2010); Sageman (2004). On fragmentation, see, for example, Pearlman (2007); Pearlman and Cunningham (2012); McLauchlin and Pearlman (2012); Bakke et al. (2012); Cunningham et al. (2012); Staniland (2012a); Kenny (2010). On alliance formation, see Christia (2012). On rebel group adaptation, see Parkinson (2013b).

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, Kalyvas (2003); Weinstein (2007); Metelits (2010). On repertoires of violence, see Hoover Green (2011). On sexual violence, see Wood (2006b, 2009a); Cohen (2010, 2013).

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Reno (1998, 2007, 2011); Kasfir (2004, 2005, 2009); Mampilly (2007, 2009, 2011, 2012); Staniland (2012c); Ahram (2011); Barter (2014); Arjona (2010); Davis and Pereira (2003). Note also the seminal studies of Wickham-Crowley (1991, 1992) and Sidel (1997, 1989), among others.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Reno (2002, 2005, 2009) and Beissinger and Young (2002).

I argue that this oversight is a product of the ways in which civil war is conceptualized and analyzed. Most studies, particularly in the quantitative tradition, adopt the dichotomous, threshold-based definition of civil war as either *on* or *off*.<sup>46</sup> According to this definition, civil war is assumed to be temporally bounded, or present only when the level of confrontation and damage incurred by the parties involved are at a particular threshold. Phenomena below this threshold are conceptually isolated from civil war and, as a result, are not considered within the realm of research on civil war.

Hence, Collier and Hoeffler's (2004) seminal study defined civil war following the Singer and Small 1,000 battle-deaths threshold and analyzed situations considered to be *on* according to it, excluding the violence dynamics outside this allegedly bounded period. A result was an ahistorical treatment of civil war, which pitted historical grievances against greed-based explanations.<sup>47</sup>

Since then, efforts have been made to disaggregate the datasets of violence and incorporate lower-level violence thresholds.<sup>48</sup> Yet, the interaction between the pre-war and war dynamics has, for the most part, not been considered. Research that has related the pre-war processes to civil war has focused on only one aspect—escalation of violence.<sup>49</sup> As a result, Tarrow (2007: 589) argues,

by hiving off civil wars from other forms of contention, quantitative scholars of civil wars risked reifying the category of civil war and downplaying the relationship between insurgencies and “lesser” forms of contention. Escalation to civil war from nonviolent contention or from less lethal forms of violence; transitions from civil wars to post-civil war conflict; co-occurrence between core conflicts in civil wars and the peripheral violence they trigger—none of these was exhaustively examined in these studies.

However, conflict—and often violence—are present across the pre-war, civil war, and post-war stages, with certain processes intricately connected to one another throughout the conflict cycle.

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<sup>46</sup> The widely used Singer and Small Correlates of War Project (COW, 1994) defines civil war as internal conflict with over 1,000 combat-related deaths, identifiable rebel organization(s), and government forces suffering at least 5% of the casualties. A more recent, disaggregated Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP, 2013) defines civil war by proxy to 25 battle deaths in a calendar year and the use of armed force by the government and formally organized rebel group(s). Different thresholds, rather than a broader conception of violence, thus mark definitions of civil war (Sambanis, 2004).

<sup>47</sup> See Blattman and Miguel (2010) for a review of studies influenced by the Collier and Hoeffler's (2004) model. The model was thereafter tested in case studies. See Collier and Sambanis (2005).

<sup>48</sup> For example, Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP). For a review, see Blattman and Miguel (2010).

<sup>49</sup> Sambanis and Zinn (2005); Lichbach et al. (2004); Davenport et al. (2008).



One explanation for this neglect is that capturing micro-level mobilization dynamics before larger-scale violence between state and insurgent forces erupts is difficult with quantitative, cross-national analysis. Cross-country studies help understand whether and to what extent certain factors affect civil war, but not how and why it occurs.<sup>50</sup> In other words, they do not get at the process of civil war. Understanding the relevant pre-war dynamics, on the other hand, requires an in-depth analysis of individual or comparative cases, for example, by use of process tracing.<sup>51</sup> However, a similar pattern of omission has characterized scholarship on civil war drawing on case studies.

For instance, in one of the key texts on civil war, Kalyvas (2006) discounts the importance of looking at the pre-war patterns of non-violent and violent contention for the analysis of civil war and justifies this choice by arguing that “war and peace are radically different contexts that induce and constrain violence in very different ways” (22). He defines civil war as “*armed combat within the boundaries of a recognized sovereign entity between parties subject to a common authority at the outset of the hostilities*” (5, emphasis in original).<sup>52</sup> Sovereignty, understood in Weberian terms, as a common authority with monopoly on violence in the context of territorially delimited states, is critical to Kalyvas’ conception of civil war. While mechanisms of violence overlap, Kalyvas finds,

Contentious action represents a challenge to the government in place in a context characterized by an undeniable monopoly of violence by the state. In contrast, the defining characteristic of civil war is the absence of such monopoly (23).

Civil war implies “the effective breakdown of the monopoly of violence by way of armed internal challenge” (17-18). As territorial division is a key feature of civil war and civilian support for the parties is a key feature of civil war victory, for Kalyvas violence against civilians is a function of territorial control and civilian collaboration, where control produces collaboration independent of the pre-war patterns of support (118). This is the core of Kalyvas’ theory of irregular war.

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<sup>50</sup> On trade-offs between cross-national and case study research, see George and Bennett (2005).

<sup>51</sup> On process tracing in civil war studies, see Lyall (2014). See also George and Bennett (2005), Checkel (2013).

<sup>52</sup> I return to the discussion of Kalyvas’ definition of civil war when considering the Georgian-Abkhaz war.

Kalyvas' goal is to explain the patterns of violence against civilians in irregular civil wars. He rightly suggests that civil war should, for this purpose, be analytically distinguished from other types of violence, such as riots.<sup>53</sup> "Unlike civil wars," Kalyvas argues,

riots tend to be a predominantly urban phenomenon (Varshney 2002: 10; C. Friedrich 1972: 70), lacking significant retaliation (Horowitz 2001: 224), heavily influenced by institutional (often electoral) incentives (Wilkinson 2004), and facilitated by crowd anonymity; the ratio of perpetrators to victims tends to be inverse in riots (23).

However, analytically distinguishing different types of violence should not preclude the realization that pre-war dynamics matter for civil war. Some scholars find that these dynamics are significant because similar mechanisms characterize civil wars and other forms of contentious politics.<sup>54</sup> Their goal is to identify these overlapping mechanisms. Tilly and Tarrow (2007: 36) argue, for example, that "[b]y comparing different types of contention—such as social movements and civil wars—we can pinpoint which mechanisms are key to the transition from one to the other."

I, on the other hand, find that the importance of looking at the pre-war processes lies not in the application of similar mechanisms of violence from contentious politics to civil war and vice versa or the comparison of mechanisms across the distinct types of violence, such as civil wars and riots. I argue that the pre- and post-war processes, including mobilization, are intricately related to civil war and can help understand how civil wars begin and develop and how the pre-war and war processes affect violent post-war developments. What accounts for the transition from non-violent contention to first episodes of violence? How to account for spontaneous mass mobilization in the face of disproportionate aggression in civil war? What explains post-war continuation of violence? Studies that define civil war dichotomously, I argue, are unable to respond to these questions. What they are missing is "the [social] dynamics of civil war: what kinds of noncivil war contention they come from and how they evolve internally" (Tarrow, 2007: 592).

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<sup>53</sup> See, for example, Varshney (2002), Horowitz (2001), Wilkinson (2004); Scacco (2010).

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, Tarrow (2007: 592).

### 2.1.1.1 The Concept of Conflict Cycle

I view the pre-war patterns of mobilization and the post-war persistence of violence as part of the broader civil war process I refer to as the *conflict cycle*. These aspects of the civil war process are at least intuitively important. As Davenport et al. (2008: 3) argue,

no insight has been as significant as the acknowledgement that large-scale conflict grows out of lower-level... interactions and that the key to understanding civil war onset lies in identifying the escalatory process that leads from one form of contention to another.

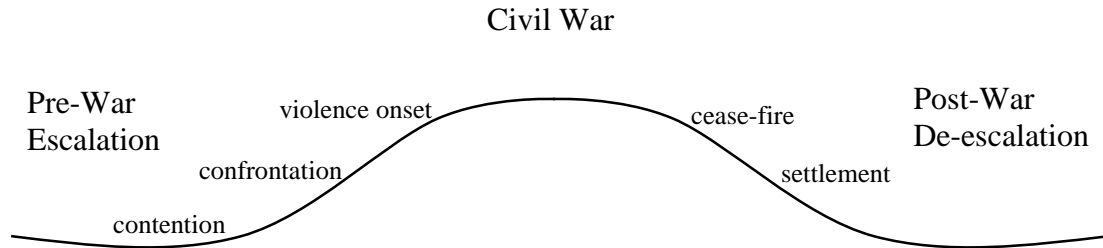
The concept of the “life cycle” of a conflict is widely used in the literature on international conflict management, related to conflict management strategies at each stage in the cycle.<sup>55</sup> It involves the dynamics of pre-war escalation defined by the rising level of tension between the parties involved, open and public confrontation, and outbreak of violence, followed by the civil war and subsequent post-war de-escalation characterized by a cease-fire and a political settlement (see Figure 6 below).

The concept reflects a stylized, temporal understanding of conflict, with conflict stages not simply flowing from each other, but also causally connected to one another. This understanding of conflict has its trade-offs. On the one hand, it makes conflict seem linear, with the different stages smoothly following each other. Yet, as Lund et al. (1997: 10) suggest, “conflicts exhibit different trajectories, thresholds, jumps or discontinuities, and conflicts that have ceased can re-ignite.” In short, conflict is a non-linear phenomenon. A pattern of the escalation of violence does not always account for civil war onset. If there is no escalation, it does not mean that a war will not take place. For instance, an act of aggression or an attack without the immediately preceding escalation pattern may account for civil war onset, as Chapter 4 of this dissertation demonstrates. Pre-war contention, moreover, can be present or not. It can be violent or non-violent. Each of these alternatives can be followed by larger-scale armed confrontation we know as civil war or not. If a civil war erupts, the

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<sup>55</sup> The concept is embedded in the United Nations Charter (Chapters VI; VII) and was analytically developed by Lund (1996, 1997) and further updated by Crocker et al. (2001). See also Kriesberg et al. (2012); Ramsbotham et al. (2011).

Figure 6. Conflict Cycle



Source: Based on the concept developed by Lund (1996; 1997) and Crocker et al. (2001)

patterns of pre-war contention will not necessarily be causally related to it. That is, the underlying sources of pre-war contention and the war itself may be different. In my case, as Chapters 5 and 6 show, pre-war contention was deeply related to the sources of the war and its mobilization process. Finally, civil wars can formally end with a cease-fire or a settlement, but protract locally and at a lower level of violence. As Chapter 7 discusses, even if a cease-fire or a settlement is reached, civil wars can recur—driven by similar causes or a new set of underlying sources of conflict.

Hence, the notion of the conflict cycle is best understood not as a rigid pattern of conflict, but a “potential sequence of stages” or a typical model of conflict (Kriesberg and Dayton, 2012: 8). It applies specifically to conflicts that reach the stage of civil war. As Lund et al. (1997: 10) argue, “most violent conflicts exhibit periods of initial growth, full-blown antagonism, and abatement from high points of hostility.” However, these stages may take place in non-linear ways and repeat.

The utility of the model, I find, lies in the appreciation of the historical trajectory of conflict embedded in it. It achieves what the dichotomous definitions of civil war cannot. Whereas these definitions separate the pre-war, civil war, and post-war stages of conflict and, as a result, fail to account for the internal development of conflicts, the conflict cycle model allows us to analytically relate and examine the causal connections between these stages. By doing so, we can get a better sense of perceptions that evolve over time and are expressed in pre-war contention and trace how non-violent contention turns violent and how this process is related to civil war and its outcomes.

The basic theoretical argument of this dissertation is deeply linked to the conception of civil war as embedded in the broader conflict cycle, with the conflict processes unfolding in the pre- and post-war stages causally related to civil war. In short, I argue that the pre-war evolution of social norms and understandings of history and identity in the process of contention, especially as it turns violent, prepares the concerned population for a possibility of the civil war. It builds the normative basis for action, or mobilization potential, which is supported across society and is activated when the civil war starts. As the war comes to an end, it affects the ways in which its outcomes are treated and acted upon. The following section positions this normative argument in the civil war literature. I discuss the general inattention to non-material aspects of civil war. I problematize the emphasis in the literature on the constraining effects of norms and clarify the position taken in this dissertation.

### **2.1.2 Norms in Civil War Research**

Non-material, especially normative and social, factors have not been sufficiently explored in studies of civil war. As Wood (2008: 539) argues, “[l]ittle attention has been paid to the social processes of civil war—the transformation of social actors, structures, norms, and practices—that sometimes leave enduring legacies.” Underlying the neglect of such processes are the ontological and methodological positions and choices made by researchers. Based on rationalist foundations, much research on civil war adopts an ontology privileging material over ideational explanations.<sup>56</sup> This is true of theories drawn from the macro, structural and micro, individual levels of analysis. An individualist ontology is adopted in favor of the view of social reality as inherently relational. Exclusion of normative and social factors in explanations of civil war is justified by the difficulty in measuring such factors.<sup>57</sup> Consequentialist, cost-benefit mechanisms are utilized instead.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> This parallels the discussion in International Relations on the differences between rationalism and constructivism. See Wendt (1992, 1999); Fearon and Wendt (2002); Checkel (1997, 2001); Zürn and Checkel (2005).

<sup>57</sup> For a discussion, see Checkel (2013: 7).

<sup>58</sup> Notable exceptions exist in the programme on the social dynamics of civil war. See, for example, Wood (2003); Petersen (2001, 2002); Parkinson (2013a, 2013b). See Checkel (2011) for a review. See Kalyvas (2008b) for a critique.

Where non-material factors, particularly norms, are incorporated into the analysis, they are often either viewed as secondary to the explanation or placed within the cost-benefit framework.

Hence, concluding his analysis of civil war violence, Kalyvas (2006: 302) acknowledges that

although a significant part of the violence can be accounted for by a theory with rationalist foundations, two types of noninstrumental mechanisms that are explicitly excluded from the theory may play a residual but nevertheless important role, namely norms and emotions.

Normative and emotive mechanisms, according to this view, play a secondary role of filling gaps in the core rationalist theory. In another key study of rebellion and violence, Weinstein (2007: 134) describes “norms and expectations, forged among networks that predate the conflict, [as]... critical in overcoming the constraints on individual participation, which makes them fundamental to the operation of activist rebellions.” Here norms and expectations are given a primary role. Yet, their significance stems from their strategic use, or, in Weinstein’s words, “activation” by rebel leaders and subsequent ability to “lower transaction costs and facilitate cooperation” (49). This takes place as “group members take responsibility for imposing costs on nonparticipants” in the recruitment process and “the sanctioning of defectors within the group” in the course of the civil war (99, 139).

This emphasis on norms as constraining individual behavior in the conditions of civil war is echoed in much of the literature on civil war. Drawing on Taylor’s (1988) foundational work on *Rationality and Revolution*, scholars find that normative sanctions available in strong communities impact participation in rebellion by generating pressure on community members to participate and increasing costs of non-participation, thus reducing risk acceptance (Petersen, 2001). Given shared norms in close-knit communities, “participants impose sufficiently high costs on nonparticipants to ensure widespread participation” (Taylor 1988 in Wood, 2003: 13-14). In other words, norms *act* in a negative way. They “reduce the local collective action problem inherent in mobilizing armed groups by lowering the cost of sanctioning free riders” (Blattman and Miguel, 2010: 18).

The importance of norms for our understanding of civil war, however, lies not only in the negative, *constraining* effects of such mechanisms as sanctions and rewards for following norms in strong communities. In addition, norms positively affect individual and group behavior in civil war by *constituting* identities, or “relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about self” (Wendt, 1992: 398). As Jepperson et al. (1996: 54) argue,

norms either define (“constitute”) identities in the first place (generating expectations about the proper portfolio of identities for a given context) or prescribe or proscribe (“regulate”) behaviors for already constituted identities (generating expectations about how those identities will shape behavior in varying circumstances).

This is akin to the distinction Petersen (2001: 54, 55) draws between “moral and rational aspects of norms... [as] individuals might respond either from some sense of moral duty or simply the wish to avoid retaliation.” The former reflects internal processes of norm acceptance, the latter external pressure to follow norms. The difference can be exemplified with Elster’s (1990: 116 in Petersen, 2001: 54, fn. 21) discussion of codes of honor:

On the positive side, they tell people to act courageously, to return favours, to honor commitments and to tell the truth, [and thus define their self-concept]. On the negative side, they enjoin people to insult others, to carry out any threats that they might have made and to retaliate if others try to take advantage of them, [and thus constrain their behavior].

The literature on socialization in International Relations treats the distinction theoretically. Viewed as “the process of inducting new members into the norms and rules of a given community,” socialization leads to varying degrees of norm internalization by individuals and groups (Checkel 2011: 12). Checkel (2007) differentiates between type I and II socialization. The former implies norm compliance irrespective of its true acceptance, where cost-benefit calculation mechanisms are paramount, the latter internalization to the extent of “taken-for-grantedness,” where following norms becomes part of one’s identity (Checkel, 2005: 804). The process reflects the shift from the logic of consequences to that of appropriateness, sustained in preferences and behavior over time.

Table 3 (below) systematizes the discussion by placing constraining and constitutive effects of norms within the rationalist-constructivist framework. From the rationalist point of view, norms have constraining, or negative, effects on behavior. The logic of consequences drives individuals to follow norms. Individuals self-impose norms to increase rewards and avoid sanctions available in their communities. From the constructivist position, on the other hand, norms function positively: they “constitute actor identities and interests and do not simply regulate behavior” (Checkel, 1998: 328). Individuals adopt the logic of appropriateness in following norms and take norms for granted. Their interests are defined by identity, which, in turn, is constituted by norms (Wendt, 1992: 398).

Table 3. Norms in the Rationalist-Constructivist Framework

	<b>Rationalist</b>	<b>Constructivist</b>
<b>Norms</b>	Constrain behavior (negative effects)	Constitute identity (positive effects)
<b>Logic of</b>	Consequences	Appropriateness
<b>Internal Mechanisms</b>	Self-imposed to increase status rewards and avoid sanctions	Taken-for-granted
<b>External Mechanisms</b>	Other-imposed via status rewards and threat/actual sanctions	Define interests

With this distinction in mind, I find that norms have a range of constraining and constitutive effects on individual and group behavior.<sup>59</sup> I adopt a view of the social world as inherently relational, with the normative framework that guides action embedded in social relationships at the different levels of the social structure. As norms shape identities and interests, I argue, individuals and groups form and transform norms through social practice.<sup>60</sup> In short, I see the relationship between structure and agents as that of mutual constitution (Wendt, 1987). In this dissertation, I apply this relational view of the normative and social process to mobilization in civil war. Next sections define and explain it.

<sup>59</sup> For further discussion, see foundational texts of Coleman (1986, 1987, 1990b), Hechter (1987), and Hardin (1995).

<sup>60</sup> Norms are closely related to identities and can be seen as “collective perceptions or beliefs about what actions or attributes will cause other to validate a particular identity” (Cancian, 1975: 137). Norms are “a property of a social system, not of an actor within it,” while identities, including collective identities, are a property of actors (Coleman, 1990a: 35). Thus, in the process of transformation of norms, both agent- and structure-based elements change.



## 2.2 Defining Mobilization in Civil War

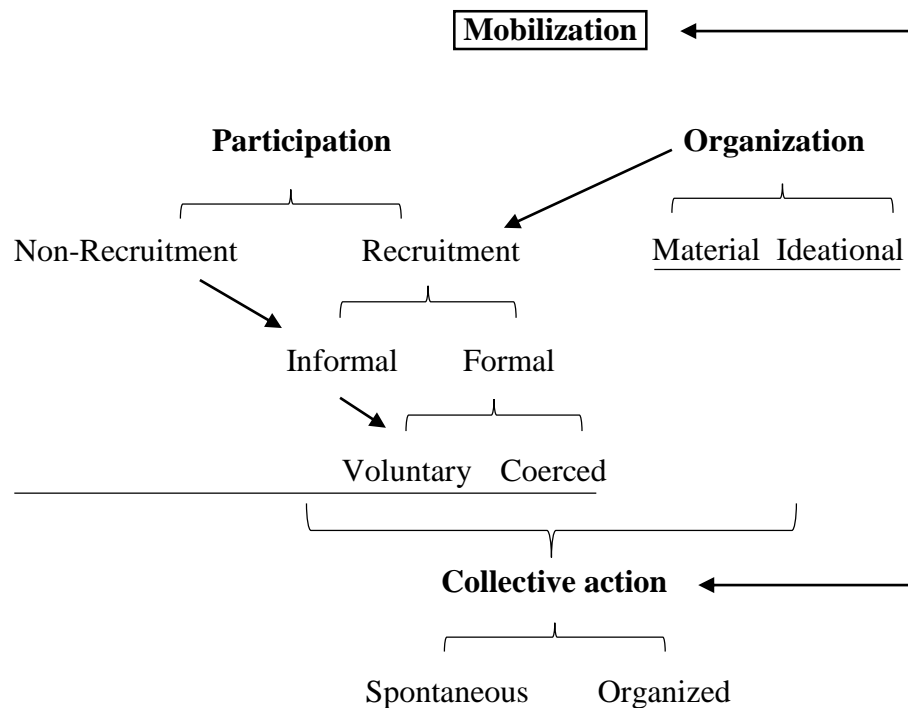
I draw on the civil war and social movements literatures and use Goertz's (2006) concept construction strategy to define mobilization.<sup>61</sup> I find that due to the insufficient attention paid to the subject of mobilization dynamics and analytical confusion between the related issues of war onset, individual motivations, and recruitment, mobilization in civil war has been poorly conceptualized. It has been defined in terms of individual decisions to participate or recruitment. The relationship between mobilization and other associated notions of organization, collective action, and war onset has not been clarified, in part because the relevant literatures on civil war and social movements have not been related to one another given the rigid separation between the types of violence they address and between the pre-war and civil war periods that has been made in the civil war studies.

At the most basic level, I argue, mobilization process is about people getting together to act upon their common interests. In the words of Tilly and Tarrow (2007: 35), mobilization entails the ways in which "people who at a given point in time are not making contentious claims start to do so." In short, it relates to "how [actors] move between action and inaction" (McAdam et al., 2001: 35). This definition, however, is very broad and difficult to operationalize. I take this definition as a base-line and further specify the concept. I define mobilization as *an ongoing process involving participation and organization, of which collective action is an outcome*. Importantly, *the process is associated with and parallels the evolution of norms and understandings of history and identity*. By defining mobilization in this way, I add a critical dimension of organization to the concept and causally relate mobilization to collective action. Figure 7 (below) represents my conception.

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<sup>61</sup> Goertz (2006) follows a realist, ontological, and causal logic. A concept is constructed with an assumption that there is a real thing out there that is being defined and that we need to focus on what constitutes it and identify the attributes that play the central roles in our causal story about it. The concept is then structured in a multilevel fashion with the cognitively central basic level providing the most general, foundational characteristic of the concept, the secondary level specifying the constitutive dimensions of the basic-level concept, and the indicator level categorizing on a chosen scale if a specific phenomenon falls under the concept, or operationalizing the concept (Goertz, 2006: 6).

Figure 7. The Concept of Mobilization



As Eck (2010) suggests, mobilization is a two-way process. On the one hand, it involves individual decisions to mobilize or not. On the other hand, recruitment strategies utilized by rebel organizations impact mobilization. “Rebellion,” Eck argues, “requires the raising of rebel forces. There are two facets to understanding this phenomenon. The first facet deals with why individuals decide to participate... The second facet concerns how rebel groups’ recruitment strategies can affect this decision” (9). Eck differentiates between participation and recruitment as constitutive parts of mobilization. I find that the notion of participation encompasses both individual and group decisions to mobilize and recruitment strategies used to motivate mobilization. Thus, participation is the first dimension of my concept of mobilization.

Participation, as Eck finds, can be affected by recruitment. Namely, individuals and groups can participate in collective action as recruits. It can as well take place without active recruitment attempts on the part of rebel or other organizations. That is, individuals can join collective action without being sought and motivated by these organizations. Moreover, recruitment can be formal

and informal. It can also be voluntary or coerced. Non-recruited participation is closely related to the informal, voluntary aspect of mobilization. Individuals and groups can participate in everyday forms of resistance (Scott, 1985), which require no active recruitment attempts on the part of rebel or other organizations (see Table 4 below). The use of jokes and language unfamiliar to the target group, the bending of social customs and norms, and small-scale brawls are examples of everyday forms of resistance. This type of mobilization takes place at the micro-level of the social structure and primarily involves quotidian family and friendship networks. On the continua of organization and collective action (Table 4a, b), it is closer to spontaneous and private expressions of contention.

Table 4. Mobilization Typology

<b>Type of mobilization</b>	Everyday resistance		Political Contention		Violent Opposition*
<b>Mobilization repertoires</b>	Language use, social customs, jokes, brawls		Written protest, public gatherings, demonstrations, strikes		Confrontation, armed clashes
<b>Level of analysis</b>	Micro		Meso		Macro
<b>Actor</b>	Family	Friendship Networks	Elite	Public (includes family, friendship networks)	Organizations (include elite, public)

\*Violent opposition can be present across, but differs in scale and kind in the pre-war, civil war, and post-war periods.

Table 4a. Organization Continuum

Spontaneous (informal) participation —————→ Organized (informal and formal) participation
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Table 4b. Collective Action Continuum

Private —————→ Public
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Non-recruited participation in the more public events of political contention, such as public gatherings or demonstrations, can, furthermore, take place by way of informal information spread. Individuals and groups can gain information about the collective action event and mobilize for it through their engagement with the micro-level networks of family and friends who are not part of rebel or other relevant organizations. In this case, their mobilization falls under the dimension of non-recruited informal participation. On the other hand, if family members and friends are active members of these organizations and promote participation among their micro-level networks, this falls in the category of informal recruitment.<sup>62</sup> The members of organizations who thus recruit new participants among their family and friends become the meso-level link between their micro-level private networks and macro-level public organizations.<sup>63</sup> The resulting mobilization is typically voluntary. On the organization and collective action continua, it lies closer to public and organized expressions of contention. Importantly, it reflects a truly bottom-up process of mobilization.

In contrast, formal recruitment, or active strategies pursued by rebel or other organizations to motivate mobilization among the public, reflects the top-down process of mobilization. It can be voluntary or coerced. Namely, recruits can participate voluntarily, without being physically forced to join these organization, or be forced. The latter is particularly relevant in the course of civil war (Gates, 2002). Abduction of children and adults to fight is an extreme example of this recruitment strategy.<sup>64</sup> When a civil war starts, especially unexpectedly, forced recruitment only partially plays a role, with a greater role played by pre-war recruitment patterns. Formally recruited participation is associated with political contention and violent opposition. These types of mobilization include demonstrations, strikes, confrontation, and armed clashes. They are more public and organized.

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<sup>62</sup> The significance of networks has long been a subject of research on social movements. Seminal works include Oberschall (1973, 1994); Snow et al. (1980); Gould (1991, 1993); Scott (2000, 2012). On the importance of “weak ties,” see Granovetter (1973). For a review, see Diani and McAdam (2003).

<sup>63</sup> On meso-level linkages in mobilization, see, for example, Hedström et al. (2000).

<sup>64</sup> On child soldiering, see, for example, Blattman (2007, 2012); Blattman and Annan (2010).

Figure 8. Spectrum of Mobilization Roles\*

Neutrality ↔ Indirect support ↔ Unarmed opposition ↔ Direct support ↔ Membership

\*These roles are not fixed: an individual can shift between these roles across the mobilization spectrum at any point.

The dimension of participation can be differentiated based on the level of engagement by individuals and groups. Petersen (2001: 8-9) distinguishes between neutrality, unarmed opposition to the state, direct support for the rebels, for instance, through financial assistance, and membership in a rebel group, particularly through fighting. On the flip side is varied support for the state forces. I adopt Petersen's roles spectrum, but add indirect support (see Figure 8). It involves behind-the-lines supply, financial, and information networks (Parkinson, 2013a) and symbolic support for the cause expressed in social interactions and sanction, such as parents blessing participation of the children. In this dissertation, I focus on rebel group membership, while bearing in mind other roles.

Along with participation, the process of mobilization involves organization. Organization is carried out by collective entities, such as social movements and rebel groups, in preparation for collective action. Organization by these collective entities can be material. That is, particular types of resources can be obtained in preparation for collective action (Weinstein, 2007).<sup>65</sup> In the context of civil war, attainment of arms is a key example. Organization can as well be ideational. Namely, in the process of organization, such entities as social movements and rebel groups construct shared understandings of history and identity among targeted populations and prepare the normative basis for how to act upon these understandings. In the literature on social movements this is commonly understood as "framing."<sup>66</sup> Organization in this ideational sense can be characterized as "the extent of common identity and unifying structure among the individuals in the population" (Tilly, 1978: 3-5). An increase in organization in this sense implies an increase in these conditions.

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<sup>65</sup> This is a domain of vast literature on resource mobilization. Seminal works include McCarthy and Zald (1973, 1977). For a review, see Weinstein (2007); Jenkins (1983).

<sup>66</sup> See McAdam et al. (1996, 2001).

Importantly, mobilization, including its bottom-up and top-down processes, and collective action interrelate. Mobilization shapes collective action—its extent, repertoires, and outcomes. In turn, each episode of collective action affects subsequent mobilization and shapes the mobilization potential, or capacity to act collectively, of a given population. As McAdam et al. (2001: 13) find,

mobilization is not an isolated process: It intersects with other mechanisms and processes – such as creation and transformation of actors, their certification or decertification, repression, radicalization, and the diffusion of contention to new sites and actors in complex trajectories of contention.

Hence, they view different, subsequent events of mobilization in a given context

not as linear sequences of contention in which the same actors go through the repeated motions of expressing preestablished claims in lock-step, but as iterative sites of interaction in which different streams of mobilization and demobilization intersect, identities form and evolve, and new forms of action are invented, honed, and rejected as actors interact with one another and with opponents and third parties (30).

## **2.3 Explaining Mobilization in Civil War**

When we study mobilization, we need to explain “how people who at a given point in time are not making contentious claims start doing so—and, for that matter, how people who are making claims stop doing so” (McAdam et al., 2001: 34). I argue that the normative and socially-embedded approach to mobilization can greatly inform our understanding of this process across the pre-, civil war, and post-war stages of the conflict cycle. I begin this section by discussing my normative and socially-embedded theory of mobilization in depth, focusing on the mechanism of latent normative framework activation I propose to explain mobilization at the stage of civil war onset. Importantly, this normative and socially-embedded theory is not mutually exclusive with rationalist approaches. In fact, the latent normative framework activation mechanism specifies the conditions under which cost-benefit calculation underlying rational choice may override normative and social motivations for mobilization. Yet, rationalist explanations, on their own, cannot fully account for mobilization. I discuss these explanations and apply them to the case of Abkhazia in the second part of the section.

### **2.3.1 Normative and Socially-Embedded Theory of Mobilization**

The approach to mobilization I adopt in the dissertation emphasizes enduring and emergent social norms and relations that inform mobilization by individuals and groups in civil war contexts. In developing my normative and socially-embedded theory of mobilization I draw on Wood (2003) and Petersen (2001), among others, and react to Kalyvas' (2006) and Weinstein's (2007) theories based on strategic calculation on the part of the mobilizers and mobilized. In this, I do not depart from the view of agents as rational. However, I adopt an understanding of rationality as bounded by the limitations of knowledge and embeddedness in a specific social context.<sup>67</sup> I extend Wood's normative account of mobilization by specifying the process of the evolving normative framework of mobilization and the social structure underlying this process. I extend Petersen's notion of social structure by specifying the different mechanisms at the micro, meso, and macro levels of society.

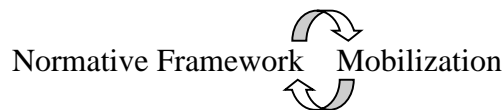
Wood (2003) explores similar questions to those posed in this dissertation. She asks why, under high risk conditions, only few Salvadorians engaged in collective action, that is, collaborated with the insurgency, in the 1970s, while more joined following brutal repression by the state. Wood explains high-risk mobilization through what she labels as the emergent insurgent political culture. It was not due to class struggle, selective incentives, increased political opportunity, or preexisting social networks that insurgent participation increased, Wood argues. Instead, peasants came to see the insurgency as justified on account of growing repression of deeply felt grievances of property expropriation. These grievances related to the outcomes of participation through the value peasants put into participation itself along with defiance of authority, pleasure of agency, and authorship of action and the local patterns of violence and proximity to the insurgent forces. The cost of rebellion was, thus, seen as a meaningful sacrifice, while the insurgent networks provided the mobilization channels for protest to turn into collective action among peasants.

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<sup>67</sup> On bounded rationality, see Allison and Zelikow (1999). On embeddedness, see Granovetter (1985).

Wood’s account captures the aspects of “moral commitments and emotional engagements” often disregarded in explanations of mobilization in civil war (18). She traces the process by which the insurgent political culture emerged. However, this account is relatively linear, identifying a set of “the formative experiences of those who became insurgent supporters,” a sense of injustice, and the resultant emotions, such as pleasure of agency, but not fully accounting for how understandings of injustice and this overall culture continuously evolved (209). While Wood finds that “insurgent campesinos were motivated in part by the value they put on being part of the making of history,” I maintain that the ways in which history is constructed and constantly reinterpreted as part of the normative framework for action at the different stages of conflict greatly impact mobilization (19). Mobilization in turn affects the ways in which history is presented and norms for action are shaped in the subsequent cycles of mobilization. Figure 9 captures the basic relationship between the two.

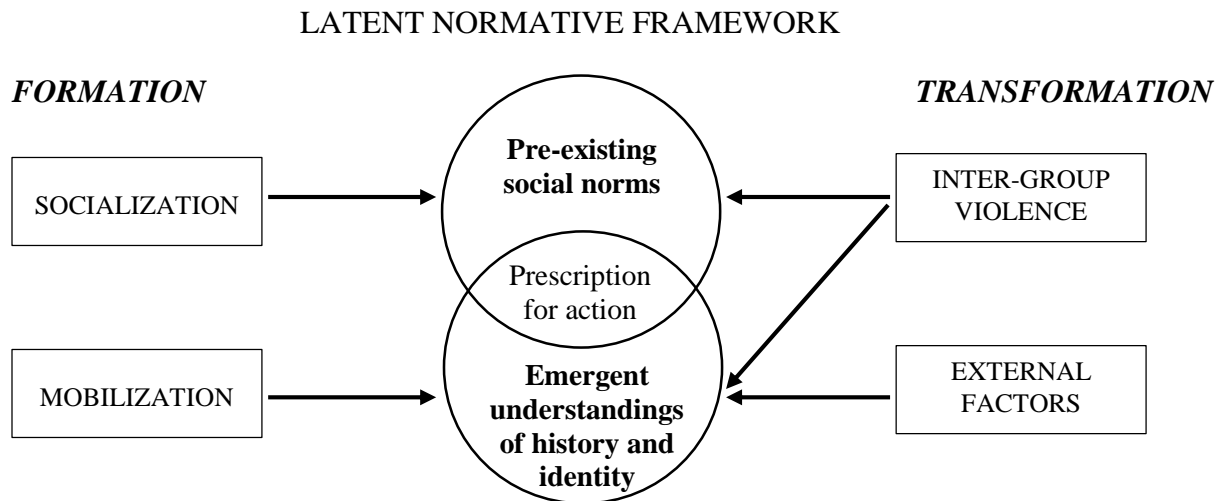
Figure 9. Mobilization-Normative Framework Interaction



Formation in the pre-war period and continuing transformation of the normative framework for action in the process of mobilization is a key aspect of my explanation of civil war mobilization. It constitutes the first phase of the latent normative framework activation mechanism I introduce to explain mobilization at the civil war onset stage. I understand the normative framework for action as a product of historical construction. It is *latent*, or present but needing particular conditions to be activated (discussed below). It includes two core dimensions, that is, pre-existing social norms and emergent understandings of history and identity that together form the third element—prescription for mobilization action. Figure 10 (below) reflects this first phase, formation and transformation of the latent normative framework. I discuss this phase of the mechanism in detail in Chapters 3 and 4.



Figure 10. Normative Framework Formation and Transformation



The first dimension—pre-existing social norms—captures the fundamental norms of social relations, or long-standing codes of conduct and rules of social interaction. I follow Checkel (1999: 83) in defining norms as “shared expectations about appropriate behavior held by a collectivity of actors.”<sup>68</sup> They prescribe socially acceptable forms of behavior and proscribe those deemed wrong, or unacceptable (Coleman, 1990a: 39). Importantly, shared expectations are about both “one’s own [behavior and] that of others” (Coleman, 1987: 135). Particularly significant in the context of civil war mobilization are the ways in which individuals understand their and others’ obligations toward their collectivity, such as the nation or ethnic group, and the forms of action they see as appropriate: Is it right to flee or fight in civil war? Examples of the dimension include norms of reciprocity, or “solidary norms” for Gates (2002: 115), duties toward the society as a whole and its other members, and patriotism. The dimension is akin to Petersen’s (2001: 53-55) unconditional norms (A norms), norms of honor (B norms), and norms of conformity (C norms) combined.

This first dimension of the normative framework for action is stable and does not easily or quickly transform. It reflects the basic functioning of a society, whose underlying norms are passed to its members via socialization—“the process of inducting new members into the norms and rules

<sup>68</sup> See Chapter 3 for a discussion of norms in civil war studies and the position I adopt regarding their nature and effects.

of a given community” (Checkel, 2011: 12). Through formal and informal socialization individuals come to understand their roles in and relationship to a society, which persist over time.<sup>69</sup> However, certain societal shocks have an ability to transform even the most basic norms of social interaction. In particular, violence has been shown to produce dramatic changes in the structure of norms.<sup>70</sup> As Wood (2008: 545) suggests, “[w]here violence is intense..., the social implications are likely to be severe for ordinary residents.” For example, “participation in and witnessing of violence in the South Africa case appear to have contributed to the undermining of traditional norms restraining sexual violence” (Wood, 2008: 547). Inter-group violence events are of particular importance for norm transformation in the context of civil war mobilization (see Figure 10). They weaken norms of non-violence and undermine pre-existing norms of inter-ethnic peace (Fearon and Laitin, 1996).

While pre-existing social norms are sticky and transform rarely, under the influence of such shocks to a society as inter-group violence, the second dimension of the normative framework for action—emergent understandings of history and identity—is defined by change. It is the variable dimension of the normative framework. It is akin to the notion of “collective action frames” in the social movement literature (Snow and Benford, 1992: 135). In this sense, understandings of history and identity that evolve in the process of mobilization are similar to

emergent action-oriented sets of beliefs and meaning that inspire and legitimate social movement activities and campaigns. They perform this mobilizing function by identifying a problematic condition and defining it as unjust, intolerable, and deserving of corrective action (Snow and Oliver, 1993: 587).

Emergent understandings are found at the lower level of abstraction than pre-existing social norms and draw on the perception of one’s cause as right or just based on a specific interpretation of past experiences and associated historical grievances, which can change under different circumstances.

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<sup>69</sup> Note that it is not my intention in this dissertation to trace the process of socialization of individuals and groups into the basic norms of society. Rather, I aim to identify the norms that are critical to the process of mobilization.

<sup>70</sup> See, for example, Nordstrom (1997); Lubkemann (2008); Wood (2008); Parkinson (2013b).

As Figure 10 shows, this dimension forms in the course of mobilization as movement leaders define and redefine collective history and identity. Just as pre-existing social norms, it transforms under the influence of inter-group violence, which sharpens collective understandings of a group's history and identity. In contrast to pre-existing social norms, this dimension undergoes continuous transformation throughout mobilization. Akin to Wood's (2003: 19) emergent insurgent culture, it "evolve[s] in response to the experiences of the conflict itself, namely, previous rebellious actions, repression, and the ongoing interpretation of events by the participants themselves." As a result of the interaction with exogenous processes at the different stages of conflict, movement leaders add, subtract, and variously emphasize aspects of collective history and identity. Counter-mobilization and openings in the political opportunity structure play decisive roles in continuous transformation of this dimension as they identify opportunities and threats associated with further mobilization.<sup>71</sup>

Where the two core dimensions—pre-existing social norms and emergent understandings of history and identity—overlap is in the prescription for mobilization action. As I argued earlier, pre-existing social norms contain a prescriptive aspect. An especially important prescriptive norm embodied in this dimension is "the norm that one should forgo self-interest and act in the interests of the collectivity," or reciprocate actions of its other members taken for its sake (Coleman, 1988: 104; Petersen, 2001). This norm, however, is too broad to fill the content of *what* the interests of the collectivity are and *how* to act in support of these interests. These aspects of the prescription for action are constructed in the process of shaping emergent understandings of history and identity, which define the collectivity's interests and appropriate action in situations where these interests—and the collectivity itself—may be threatened, that is, in situations of crisis. The crisis situation that I address in this dissertation is civil war onset. It may pose a set of actual or perceived threats, from the reduction in political status to physical displacement to overall elimination of the collectivity.

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<sup>71</sup> See Tilly (1978); McAdam (1982); Tarrow (1996). For a review, see Davenport et al. (2005); Della Porta (2008).

As pre-existing social norms and emergent understandings of history and identity transform under the influence of inter-group violence and external factors, so does the prescriptive aspect of the normative framework for action. Events of inter-group violence and exogenous processes, such as counter-mobilization and changes in the political opportunity structure, alter as well as limit the way in which the interests of the collectivity and appropriate action are defined at a particular point in conflict. Furthermore, they affect the perception of the nature and the extent of risks, present or potential, that the collectivity may face. In other words, the process of interaction among the groups engaged in the conflict and between these groups and the broader political structure influence the expectations about the opportunities and threats involved in promoting certain interests and forms of action. Previous, especially violent, interaction with a rival group signals one's relative strength vis-à-vis that group and its potential in future violent events. Previous interaction with the broader political structure, including state coercive agencies, shapes the sense of potential repercussions of defining one's interests in a particular way and pursuing certain forms of action in the future.

In order to understand the normative foundation of mobilization in civil war, therefore, the formation and transformation of these three aspects of the normative framework for action—pre-existing social norms, emergent understandings of history and identity, and the prescriptive results that they yield—need to be taken in account. The three aspects are profoundly interconnected and together are necessary to mobilize action in crisis situations—in this dissertation, civil war onset.

By specifying the different aspects of the normative framework for action and theoretically developing the process of its formation and continued transformation in the course of mobilization, this argument extends Wood's (2003) explanation of mobilization in civil war based on moral and emotive mechanisms. I depart from Wood's account in arguing that developing moral and emotive dispositions, on its own, is insufficient to mobilize action. Mechanisms of social reinforcement are necessary as well. In particular, I find that at each stage of the conflict the interactive processes of

mobilization and formation, transformation, and activation (see discussion below) of the normative framework for action are supported and reinforced at the different levels of the social structure.

Petersen's (2001) study of high-risk, anti-regime resistance and rebellion in Lithuania and other Soviet cases specifies such mechanisms. Petersen examines "how different social structures tend to change strategic frames and trigger varying sets of causal mechanisms" of mobilization (1). He identifies a spectrum of individual roles in mobilization and argues that variation in community structure accounts for variation in the mobilization outcomes. The movement by individuals from neutrality to unorganized opposition and organized support for the rebellion is at each stage a result of a sequencing of various triggering and sustaining mechanisms. "Strong communities," Petersen suggests, "produce mechanisms that are able to drive individuals into... dangerous roles and keep them there despite the possible high costs" (15). Status considerations, shared norms of reciprocity, and threshold-based action are among these community-based triggering mechanisms.

Petersen looks at the unit of community, focusing on the overlap of ties among community subgroups to explain why some communities are able to sustain rebellion and others are not. I find, however, that mobilization is influenced by the mechanisms generated not only at the community level, but also at other levels of the social structure. I differentiate between micro, meso, and macro levels and argue that triggers at each of these levels are critical in producing high-risk mobilization. I follow Kalyvas (2006: 10) in defining the micro level as the realm of "intracommunity dynamics and individual behavior," but add small group behavior. The level comprises of quotidian networks of family and friends, encompassed in Petersen's concept of community (16-17; Parkinson, 2013a: 418). The macro level, on the other hand, is that of "elite, ideologies, and grand politics" (Kalyvas, 2006: 11). As a level of society, it includes national political and social leadership. The meso level is "institutional context within which interactions between political actors and civilians take place" (106). It incorporates individual authorities and collective bodies at the village, town, or city level.

Quotidian networks, local individual authorities and collective bodies, and national leaders at the micro, meso, and macro levels of the social structure can be viewed as agents of socialization of individuals and groups into the normative framework for action.<sup>72</sup> They are critical in supporting the dimensions of the normative framework. Pre-existing social norms are passed through informal micro and meso networks and induced formally through macro-level, national structures, such as educational institutions. Emergent understandings of history and identity are developed by national political and social elite, such as social movement leaders engaged in a conflict, and spread, along with the prescription for action, through macro-level channels, including the national media, meso-level institutions, such as village or town public gatherings, and micro-level informal relationships.

Notwithstanding the importance of the normative framework for action, its mere presence and reinforcement in the society are insufficient to motivate potential mobilizers to act upon norms. The social reinforcement provided at the micro, meso, and macro levels, particularly in territorially confined, dense communities able to impose norms, certainly impacts individual and group choices (Petersen, 2001). Those who choose not to mobilize in support of their community could be ousted from it later (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008). Therefore, individuals and small groups embedded in strong communities with norm enforcement capacity are better off following norms.<sup>73</sup>

Enforcement, however, does not ensure mobilization in situations where the interests of the collectivity and the collectivity itself can be seen as threatened. Threats may be viewed differently, while the normative framework for action is latent. That is, it is learned but not typically engaged in regular, day-to-day life. For it to generate mobilization, it has to be activated.<sup>74</sup> I argue that framing and subsequent perception of threat is the intervening mechanism that plays this role.

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<sup>72</sup> Checkel (2011: 14; see also 2005, 2007) finds that whether and to what extent the process of socialization reaches its endpoint, internalization, depends on the conditions under which it operates. The status of the socializing agent is an example of these conditions and is important here.

<sup>73</sup> See Chapter 3 for further discussion of negative enforcement of norms as contrasted with positive effects of norms.

<sup>74</sup> The concept of activation of the latent normative framework at the stage of civil war onset is my own.

The centrality of the concept of threat for mobilization is what I find lacking in both Wood's (2003) and Petersen's (2001) accounts. Yet, "[t]hreat perception is considered by most scholars as the single best predictor of hostile intergroup attitudes" (Canetti-Nisim et al., 2008: 90). As Cohen (1978: 93) notes, "[w]hen threat is not perceived, even in the face of objective evidence, there can be no mobilization of defensive resources."<sup>75</sup> In order for threat to be perceived in a particular way, it needs to be framed as such.<sup>76</sup> As Malet (2013: 55) finds, "recruiters frame conflicts as threats that require defensive mobilizations." The framing across the social structure and perception of threats to the collectivity as a whole or its part by potential mobilizers is the second part of the mechanism. The latent normative framework is activated at this phase by threat framing triggers at the micro, meso, and macro levels of the social structure to generate individual and small group mobilization. Chapter 5, the core of the dissertation, illustrates how these triggers work to generate mobilization. Figure 11 (below) captures the mechanism and the varying outcomes of mobilization it generates.

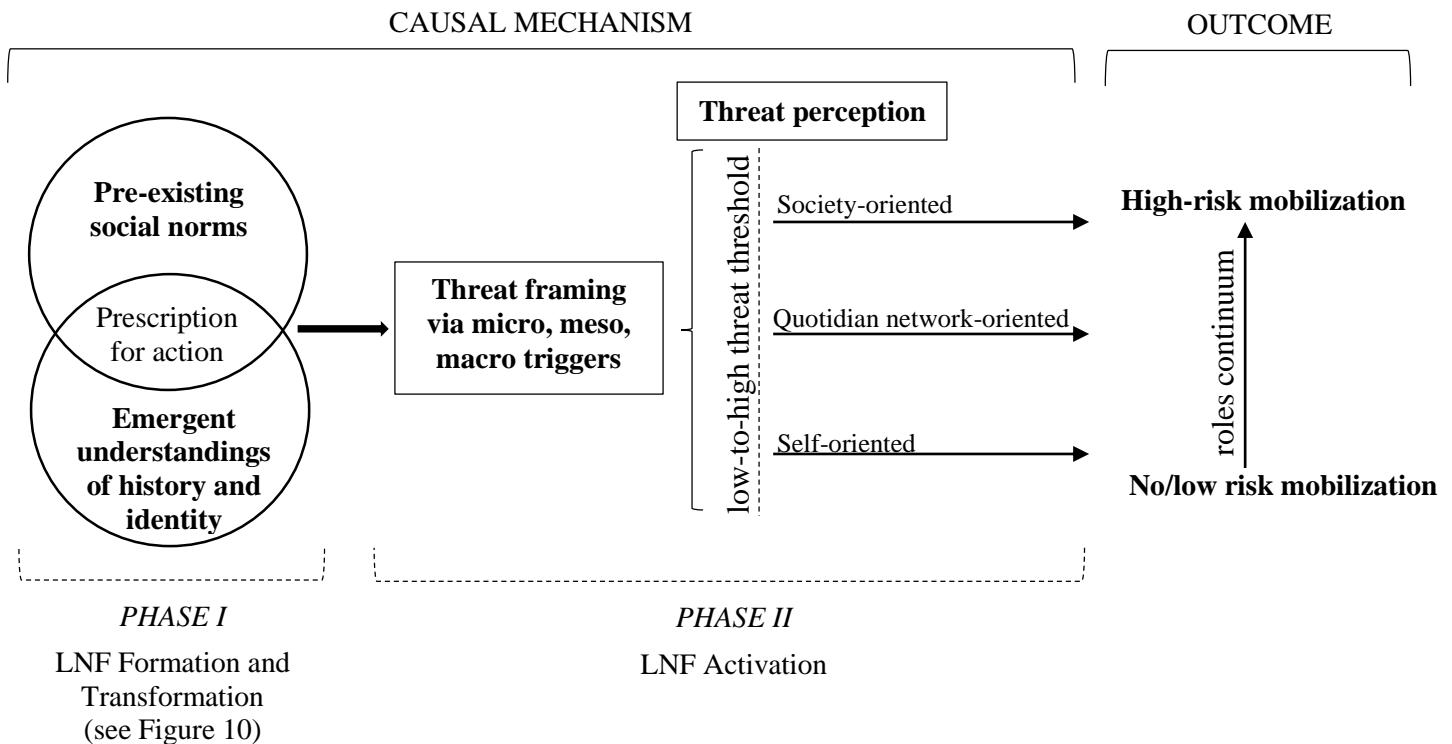
Individual and collective actors at the micro, meso, and macro levels of the social structure frame threats and trigger threat perception among potential mobilizers. An armed action by a rival, even if unrelated to the conflict, can be framed as a threat. By framing threats, national leaders thus induce threat perception in potential mobilizers and trigger mobilization at the macro level. Actors in lower social units, such as village elders or town and city heads, frame threats at the meso level. Individuals, by virtue of being positioned in the midst of a crisis situation, and authoritative figures in quotidian networks serve this role at the micro level. Potential mobilizers rely on the social threat framing triggers to identify threats at the civil war onset stage. Notably, embeddedness of potential mobilizers in relationships across the social structure affects both their normative background and decisions on whether and to what extent to mobilize for war (Granovetter, 1985; Parkinson, 2013b).

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<sup>75</sup> On threat perception and violent conflict, see Horowitz (1985); Posen (1993); Stern (1995); Kaufmann (1996); Roe (2002, 2004); Bar-Tal et al. (2007); Maoz and McCauley (2008, 2009). See Petersen (2002) for a review.

<sup>76</sup> On framing in social movements, see Benford and Snow (1992); on framing in general, see Goffman (1974).

Figure 11. Latent Normative Framework (LNF) Activation Mechanism



Once threats to the collectivity or its part are framed at the micro, meso, and macro levels, individuals and groups will act depending on their normative background, or their positioning with regard to the latent normative framework, and the way in which they perceive threats, from self- to quotidian network- to society-oriented threat perception. The presence among potential mobilizers and reinforcement in society of the latent normative framework is critical at this stage. The framing of threats and inducement of the perception in potential mobilizers that threats to the collectivity or its part indeed exist can be realized through persuasion. Yet, persuasion takes time and in situations where immediate decision-making is necessary, actors at the micro, meso, and macro levels of the social structure may be ineffective at persuading potential mobilizers of a threat absent pre-existing social norms, emergent understandings of history and identity, and resultant prescription for action. The triggering actor's status can play a role, but it requires the presence and social reinforcement of the latent normative framework to be successful.



*When the latent normative framework for action is present and supported at the different levels of the social structure, the variation in individual mobilization decisions and roles at civil war onset will depend on whether the perception of threat is directed toward the individual or the collectivity.* This is my central proposition. Individual-oriented threat perception is by definition found at the micro level. It captures the individual's fear for her own safety. Collectivity-oriented threat perception is found at other levels of the social structure. At the meso level threat perception toward the collectivity is reflected in the individual's fear for the safety of closest social networks, such as family and friends. Threat can also be perceived toward one's village, town, or city. Threat at the macro level is perceived toward the group as a whole, such as a nation.

The mechanism will not produce mobilization if self-regarding motives are paramount and the threat is perceived to be most salient toward the individual herself. It will produce mobilization in cases of other-regarding motives, when the collectivity as a whole or its meso-level subset, such as one's quotidian networks or village, are perceived to be threatened. Furthermore, the timing and extent of mobilization, or adoption of mobilization roles along the no/low-to-high risk continuum, will vary depending on the nature of threat perception. Mobilization can be immediate, individuals can join later in the course of war, or not join at all. If the collectivity is perceived to be threatened, and one understands herself as its integral part given the latent norms, immediate mobilization will follow where it is feasible. Individuals who initially do not believe in the actuality of a threat can be persuaded later. They will join the war if and when persuaded. However, even when persuaded, if the individual herself is perceived to be threatened, no high-risk mobilization will follow.

In general, where individuals perceive the threat to be directed solely against themselves, they are likely to not mobilize for the war or adopt low-risk mobilization roles. On the mobilization roles spectrum (see Figure 8 above), they will assume neutrality. If this option is unavailable, they

will provide indirect support to a group in conflict. On the other hand, individuals who perceive the threat to be directed against quotidian networks, especially family and friends, will adopt medium-risk mobilization roles. Unarmed opposition and direct support to a group in conflict are examples of these roles. Finally, if individuals perceive the threat to be directed against the collectivity as a whole, they will adopt high-risk mobilization roles by becoming fighters, or active members of a group in conflict. It is the latter category that I am primarily concerned with in this dissertation.

These general mobilization roles are associated with the armed activity that individuals are likely to undertake. Where personal safety is seen as paramount, individuals will hide or flee, often with family. If unable, they can join the side that will potentially provide security (Kalyvas, 2006). Yet, their commitment to fighting will be low. If they join their own group, this commitment level will differentiate them from those who mobilize motivated by the latent norms and concerns with the collectivity.<sup>77</sup> Those who flee or defect may view the threat to both the self and the group, but will not have the latent norms and sense of attachment necessary for the mechanism to work fully.

The extent and level of collective action, including armed activity, undertaken for the sake of the collectivity will vary depending on whether the group as a whole or its part are understood to be under threat. With quotidian network-oriented threat perception, individuals are expected to be committed to the group struggle, but will privilege the safety of their quotidian network members. They will attempt to remain together with their network throughout the struggle. On the other hand, individuals who perceive the threat as directed against the collectivity as a whole are likely to fight at the front lines. Importantly, even if they are embedded in quotidian networks and begin their war mobilization together with its other members, they will leave the network for more active front line roles. As Chapter 6 demonstrates, these individuals are key for the course and outcome of the war.

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<sup>77</sup> This is akin to Weinstein's (2007) two types of recruits—"consumers" and "investors." Alternatively to Weinstein, I find that both can be present in the same organization, such as an armed group.

### 2.3.2 Alternative Explanations

The normative and socially-embedded approach to civil war mobilization presented above stands in contrast to, but also draws on other theoretical arguments on mobilization offered in the civil war literature. Three theoretical schools—relative deprivation, collective action, and strategic interaction—address the question of civil war mobilization.<sup>78</sup> Neither on their own tackles the issue of mobilization across the conflict cycle or fully responds to the puzzles of mobilization in the case of Abkhazia. This section briefly discusses each theoretical school, including explanatory factors, observable implications (OIs), and case application (CA). Table 5 (below) summarizes the section.

#### 2.3.2.1 Relative Deprivation

The relative deprivation school concerns conditions of inequality present before the war. It stresses relative inequality between individuals (vertical) and groups (horizontal) and incorporates individual and group motivations for participation in violent collective action rooted in economic, ethnic, and political and cultural grievances.<sup>79</sup> The grievances, in turn, are shaped by the difference between the individual and group expectations of what they should attain and their actual levels of attainment. The genealogy of this line of argument can be traced to early studies of civil war that view grievances as the driving factor of individual participation in political violence (Gurr, 1970). Explanations associated with this theoretical school include:

*1: economic deprivation;*

*OIs:* If this theory is true, we should observe individuals and small groups mobilizing on the side that lacks access to economic opportunities, in particular employment, economically advantageous employment positions, and positions of economic power in a state.

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<sup>78</sup> Explanations drawn from these theoretical schools focus on different levels of analysis, from micro, individual to macro, structural factors, and distinct periods relative to civil war, from conditions present before the war to war onset and duration. Hence, they are not directly comparable and cannot be seen as mutually exclusive.

<sup>79</sup> For a review, see Østby (2013).

Table 5. Alternative Explanations of Mobilization in the Abkhaz Case

Theory	Deprivation				Collective action			Strategic interaction	
Individuals mobilize if	Economically deprived			Ethnically marginalized	Politically and culturally excluded	Materially incentivized	Socially sanctioned	Coerced	Perceive that their safety will increase
	Employment opportunities	Economically advantageous positions	Economic power positions						
Application	○	⦶	⦶	○	●	○	●	○	○
Justification	Soviet nationalities policies guarantee employment of all groups regardless of nationality	Georgian dominant position in Abkhazia		The Abkhaz were included and even overrepresented in certain state institutions. Other ethnic groups were part of Abkhaz mobilization	Political status and cultural changes key in Abkhaz mobilization	The Abkhaz movement did not offer material rewards for participation	Strong community and identity of the Abkhaz may have influenced mobilization	The Abkhaz were not physically coerced to mobilize	The Abkhaz was the weaker side. Joining it did not provide safety.

○ Does not hold

⊖ Partially holds

● Strongly holds

CA: In the case of Abkhazia, the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR)—an entity above the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia in the Soviet national hierarchy—had control over most of the economy of pre-war Abkhazia. Abkhazia's Council of Ministers held control over a minor fraction of the enterprises of the republic, with the rest being subordinated to Georgia or the Soviet center. Within Abkhazia, throughout most of the Soviet period economically advantageous positions, such as executive roles in the enterprises, and positions of economic power, namely, leading roles in the state apparatus, were predominantly held by Georgians, both from Georgia and Abkhazia, with the Abkhaz constituting a minority in such leadership positions. The Abkhaz who held these positions often received higher education in Georgia or Russia and were considered to be loyal to Georgia's policies in Abkhazia. However, this arrangement can be explained by the proportion of the Abkhaz (17% as of 1989) in the population of Abkhazia. Moreover, it did not affect access of the Abkhaz to regular employment opportunities. Due to overpopulation of the republic, the unemployment rate in Abkhazia was relatively higher than that in other republics of the Soviet Union, but the Soviet employment standards based on inclusion of all national groups applied. That is, the Abkhaz had the same level of access to the opportunities that were available in Abkhazia as other demographic groups. Furthermore, with the education and employment quotas favoring the Abkhaz, which were incorporated after the Abkhaz appeals to the Soviet center in the late 1970s and the opening of the State University of Abkhazia, the Abkhaz received guaranteed entry to higher education and better access to knowledge and skills needed for employment across the spectrum of economic positions. Abkhaz respondents in my interviews confirmed that various employment opportunities across this spectrum, including leadership positions, were available for the Abkhaz in the 1980s. Hence, in the period covered in this dissertation (1989-2008), the economic deprivation argument does not hold strongly in the case of Abkhazia, while two of its explanatory factors apply partially (see Table 5).

*2: ethnic marginalization;*

*OIs:* If this theory is true, we should observe individuals and small groups mobilizing on the side that is marginalized due to their belonging to a particular ethnic group.

*CA:* Exclusion from economic, political, and cultural activity on the basis of ethnicity—nationality in the Soviet terminology—was not an acceptable practice in the Soviet Union. The Communist ideology was based on the idea of the preservation of the rights of all national groups of the Soviet Union. Exclusion on the basis of ethnicity, therefore, was a taboo subject, seldom discussed in the Soviet Union and generally frowned upon. It was a major problem for the leadership of a republic where such exclusion was said to take place. In particular, it was punished by the dismissal from the current leadership positions or worse banning from the Communist Party. Exclusion was thus checked and prevented or countered where it occurred. Furthermore, the titular status afforded to *native* groups within the republics of the Union guaranteed them a certain level of representation in the economic, political, and cultural institutions of these republics. Whereas Georgians constituted the titular nation in the whole of the Georgian SSR, the Abkhaz were the titular nation in Abkhazia. The Abkhaz thus had guarantees of inclusion in the institutions as the titular nation of the republic. In the immediate pre-war period, when the Soviet Union was disintegrating, the Abkhaz received further representation, and even overrepresentation, in these institutions. Given the power-sharing arrangement struck with the post-Soviet Georgian leadership, the Abkhaz received a quota of seats in Abkhazia's Supreme Council greater than that given to Georgians, who constituted half (45% as of 1989) of the population of Abkhazia. Moreover, other non-Georgian groups of Abkhazia soon sided with the Abkhaz on most issues in the Council and were part of the Abkhaz movement, both before and in the course of the war. Hence, ethnic marginalization was not the driving motivator of mobilization. The argument does not hold in the Abkhaz case for the covered period (see Table 5).

*3: political/cultural exclusion.*

*OIs:* If this theory is true, we should observe individuals and small groups mobilizing on the side that is excluded from the political process and opportunities for cultural development.

*CA:* This explanation strongly holds and has to be considered further in the Abkhaz case (see Table 5). Throughout the period of the Soviet Union, infringement on political and cultural rights of the Abkhaz from outside by the Georgian center and inside by the predominantly Georgian leadership of Abkhazia was at the core of the Abkhaz claims. While Abkhazia entered the Soviet Union in 1921 as an independent Soviet Socialist Republic, it was soon brought into an alliance treaty with the Georgian SSR and incorporated into the Georgian state structure as its autonomous republic in 1931. The Abkhaz became a minority in the political institutions of Abkhazia. The Abkhaz cultural institutions, such as the Abkhaz language and schools, were gradually abolished and Georgianized, to be partially recovered following numerous attempts by the Abkhaz to appeal to the Soviet center. The mass repopulation of Abkhazia after the deportations of the Abkhaz that took place during the period of the Russian Empire with the Georgian population reinforced and justified the suppression of the Abkhaz in the political and cultural realms in Abkhazia. The Abkhaz remained a minority in Abkhazia thereafter. In the period considered in the dissertation, specifically the 1980s, the Abkhaz gained greater access to the political process, although the Abkhaz who did hold positions of power were seen as loyal to Georgia. As the Soviet Union collapsed, the Abkhaz were guaranteed a level of representation in the government disproportionate to their share of the population. In the cultural realm they were not only represented in the cultural institutions of the republic, but also established exclusively Abkhaz structures, such as the Abkhaz television. Despite these late advances, political and cultural exclusion played a critical role throughout the Soviet period in the construction of the Abkhaz claims for their self-determination and against the Georgian domination of Abkhazia.

To sum up, the relative deprivation school offers some indications for why individuals and groups mobilized in Abkhazia. While the economic deprivation and ethnic marginalization aspects of the relative deprivation theory do not hold strongly in the case of Abkhazia, political and cultural exclusion prove to be critical to an explanation of the case. However, whereas political and cultural exclusion affected the Abkhaz population as a whole, the explanation fails to account for variation in individual mobilization. Namely, why some individuals and groups within the Abkhaz society mobilized, while others did not. Hence, additional explanations need to be considered.

### **2.3.2.2 Collective Action**

The second theoretical school—collective action—is a response to the relative deprivation research. It is rooted in Olson’s (1965) understanding of collective action as action in attainment of public goods, which, Olson argues, invites free-riding. Hence, whereas the relative deprivation literature struggles to answer the question of why some individuals do not participate in collective action given the presence of overarching grievances, the problem of the collective action literature is to answer why people participate at all (Lichbach, 1995: 13). The solution the collective action research offers lies in various selective incentives given to people for participation. Such incentives include material benefits, social sanctions imposed by the communities with strong social structure whose members widely participate in violence, and physical coercion (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008; Weinstein, 2007; Gates, 2002). The factors associated with this theoretical school include:

*4: expectation of material benefits from participation in violence;*

*OIs:* If this theory is true, we should observe individuals and small groups mobilizing on the side that offers material rewards for participation.

*CA:* This explanation does not hold in the case of Abkhazia. Material rewards for mobilization on the Abkhaz side were not available. The Abkhaz movement not only did not offer material rewards, but also struggled to gain resources against the disproportionately powerful Georgian movement.



5: *social sanctioning*;

*OIs*: If this theory is true, we should observe individuals and small groups mobilizing on the side with strong communities.

*CA*: According to Petersen (2001: 15-16), strong communities affect mobilization “by producing accessible information, reducing communication costs, and facilitating recruitment” in general and establishing “status considerations, norms of reciprocity, and threshold-based action” in particular. Constituting a minority in Abkhazia following a long history of wars, occupations, and oppression, including the deportation of most of the population of Abkhazia under the Russian Empire, the Abkhaz developed a strong sense of identity and belonging to the Abkhaz community. *Apsuara*—the Abkhaz code of conduct—is commonly cited as an overarching guide of behavior. It stresses honor as the central quality to be demonstrated by individuals in situations of danger to the Abkhaz community. It is passed through generations and taught in most Abkhaz households by oral history. Specific social structures, including *familia* (family name) ties and elders councils, exist as well to check compliance and punish violations of the code of honor. Offenders are considered to damage the reputation of the whole *familia*—families linked by a shared last name—to which they belong and brought to justice before the council of elders. The small size of the Abkhaz population (93,267 as of 1989) adds to the strength of ties among the Abkhaz and the associated community pressures. It ensures the visibility of individual action in the community and facilitates enforcement. Hence, the aspect of the strong community in important part applies to the case of Abkhazia and calls for further analysis. However, it cannot be considered as a whole explanation in the case of Abkhazia. While the community strength is similar across Abkhazia, some Abkhaz mobilized, but others did not. Furthermore, it was not only the Abkhaz who mobilized on the Abkhaz side. Therefore, though it plays a significant role, mobilization was not only a product of the strong Abkhaz community.

6: *coercion*.

*OIs*: If this theory is true, we should observe individuals and small groups mobilizing on the side where participation is physically forced.

*CA*: The phenomenon of forced recruitment (Gates, 2002) was not present in Abkhazia.

To summarize, the collective action programme is limited in accounting for participation in the Abkhaz movement across the conflict cycle in Abkhazia. While social sanctioning may have played a role, given the strength of community norms in Abkhazia, no structures were established to physically force individuals and groups to mobilize on the Abkhaz side and no material rewards were offered for participation in the Abkhaz movement. Even if certain individuals perceived the possibility of material rewards for participation, for example, through the opportunities created by the collective action outcomes for the participants in the long run, this explanation fails to account for the sheer extent of mobilization in Abkhazia. A remarkably large proportion of the Abkhaz population mobilized on the Abkhaz side at the different stages of the conflict. Furthermore, the strength of community, while it certainly compelled individuals and groups to mobilize, does not explain variation in individual participation by the Abkhaz and mobilization on the Abkhaz side by groups other than the Abkhaz. Therefore, alternative explanations need to be sought.

### **2.3.2.3 Strategic Interaction**

The third theoretical school that addresses the question of mobilization I label as strategic interaction responds to the collective action programme and applies specifically to the war period. While the collective action scholars begin with the premise of the high risk of participation (Wood, 2003), strategic interaction studies propose that participation, especially collaboration in civil war, in fact reduces the risks of war (Kalyvas and Kocher, 2007). Mobilization, they argue, is produced by the expectation of security. Individuals according to this theory should mobilize on the stronger side in the civil war. This theoretical school adds an important explanatory factor for mobilization:

*7: expectation of security from participation in violence.*

*OIs:* If this theory is true, we should observe individuals and small groups mobilizing on the side that is stronger. We should observe defection from the weaker side. If/when capabilities change, we should observe individuals and small groups mobilizing on the side that grew in capabilities.

*CA:* The Abkhaz side was a weaker side throughout the conflict. It did not provide greater chances of security for the participants. The Abkhaz were at a disadvantage numerically and resource-wise. The Abkhaz constituted 17.8% of the population of Abkhazia, contrasted with the 45.7% Georgian share. The Georgian movement mobilized its participants not only from within Abkhazia, but also from Georgia proper, a five-million-large nation with a preponderance of the Georgian population. Furthermore, the Abkhaz movement did not have a comparable access to political institutions and weapons as their Georgian counterpart. The leadership of the Georgian national movement came to power in Georgia as the Soviet Union collapsed. Though it was deposed, its followers continued the struggle for control over Abkhazia. Georgia's inheritance of the Transcaucasian district of the Soviet army shortly before the Georgian-Abkhaz war added to the Georgian superiority in force. However, the Abkhaz and other groups mobilized on the Abkhaz side across the pre-, civil war, and post-war stages. There was little defection from the Abkhaz side during the war. The security-based argument can potentially account for the increased mobilization at the time when the Abkhaz grew in strength in the course of the war, but it cannot account for mobilization across other stages.

Overall, none of the individual explanations drawn from the relative deprivation, collective action, and strategic interaction theories fully account for mobilization in Abkhazia. They do not explain, first, the extent of mobilization in Abkhazia and, second, the variation between individuals and small groups who mobilized at the different stages of the conflict cycle and those who did not. I argue that a normative and socially-embedded theory of mobilization can better inform the case.

## 2.4 Conclusion

Moving away from a variable-based view of mobilization and incorporating ideational and societal mechanisms into a theory of mobilization are key steps for gaining a deeper understanding of the mobilization process across the conflict cycle. The normative, socially-embedded approach to mobilization I advance is a step in this direction. It integrates the aspects of norms and evolving understandings of history and identity that often guide action with the social structures that support these aspects, whereas other explanations rarely do and thus fail to fully account for mobilization outcomes. Focusing on structural concerns upon which individuals and groups may act, grievance-based explanations do not give a sense of how these structural factors are interpreted at the different levels of society and how the meanings given to these concerns are used to motivate action at the different stages of conflict. Hence, these explanations cannot account for variation in mobilization. Based purely on the rational calculation logic, material incentives-based and strategic interaction, security-seeking explanations fail to account for cases where mass mobilization and little defection take place on the weaker side in the civil war. These questions are explored in the next chapters.

The chapters apply the latent normative framework activation mechanism to systematically analyze normative and social factors and explain civil war mobilization by differentiating the roles taken by individuals and groups based on the latent norms supported within the social structure and threat perception triggered at its micro, meso, and macro levels. The chapters further develop and demonstrate each phase of the mechanism. Chapters 3 and 4 address its first phase—formation and transformation of the normative framework in the pre-war period. Chapter 3 looks at formation and transformation of the framework before the first large-scale violence events of the 1980s. Chapter 4 focuses on how the framework transformed following these events. Chapter 5 examines the second phase—framework activation at the civil war onset stage. Continued importance of the framework for further mobilization in the course and after the war is discussed in Chapters 6 and 7 respectively.

### Chapter 3: Norms, Social Relations, and Mobilization

[The] basis of collective behavior is both normative and social relational... [C]ollective behavior can therefore be predicated on... enduring or emergent norms and enduring or emergent social relations.

- David A. Snow and Pamela E. Oliver (1993: 575)

This chapter analyzes the normative and social relational basis of mobilization. It traces the first phase of the latent normative framework activation mechanism I introduce to explain civil war mobilization—formation and transformation of the normative framework in the pre-war period. In this period the normative framework undergoes critical changes which, I argue, shape mobilization patterns at the civil war onset stage and beyond. I examine this phase of the mechanism through the lens of Abkhaz non-violent mobilization in the Soviet period. I focus on the events of 1921-1989 as the Abkhaz movement and perceptions of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict evolved in this period, to be crystallized by the late 1980s in a set of dominant issues and demands made by the Abkhaz.

The question of the Georgian-Abkhaz relations, particularly in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, has received considerable academic attention. Researchers have looked at the historical,<sup>80</sup> political,<sup>81</sup> economic,<sup>82</sup> social,<sup>83</sup> and external<sup>84</sup> roots of the conflict in Abkhazia<sup>85</sup> that culminated in the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-1993 and has not been resolved to date.<sup>86</sup> Most research on the

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<sup>80</sup> Two strands exist. Some scholars look at historical facts using archival materials. The views of Abkhaz and Georgian scholars working in this tradition diverge. See, e.g., Lakoba (1990, 1991, 1993, 2001, 2004); Papaskiri (2010). Others attempt to get at the ways in which history has been constructed and used in the conflict. See, e.g., Coppieters (2002); Anchabadze (1998); Shnirelman (2003); Zverev (1996). See also the foundational text of Suny (1994).

<sup>81</sup> See Coppieters et al. (1996, 1998) for an overview. On the institutional roots, see Cornell (2000, 2002); Beissinger (2002); Koehler and Zürcher (2003); Matsaberidze (2011). On democratization and conflict, see Nodia and Scholtbach (2006); Mansfield and Snyder (2005). On leaders' strategies, see George (2009).

<sup>82</sup> At the macro level, studies apply the economic model to the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. See, for example, Zürcher et al. (2005); Zürcher (2007). See also, Baev (2003); King (2001, 2010); Wennmann (2003). At the micro level, individual participation in the war is attributed to economic factors. See, for example, Fairbanks (1995, 2002). See Darchiashvili (1997) for a critique. On the "war economy," see Darchiashvili (2003c), Chkhartishvili et al. (2004).

<sup>83</sup> This area is not sufficiently explored. See, for example, Hewitt (1993, 1998); Coppieters (2002); Derluguian (2005, 2007). The inter-ethnic aspect is noted throughout the literature on the case. See, in particular, Trier et al. (2010).

<sup>84</sup> Studies have focused on Russia's influence in the conflict. See, for example, Lynch (2000, 2004); Baev (1997).

<sup>85</sup> Respondents in Abkhazia are sensitive to labeling the Georgian-Abkhaz relations as a "conflict." The term "war" is preferred instead. I view the Georgian-Abkhaz armed confrontation of 1992-1993 as a war, but conceptualize the pre- and post-war Georgian-Abkhaz relations within the broader cycle of conflict.

<sup>86</sup> On the peace process, see Cohen (1999); Garb (1999a, 1999b, 2000a, 2000b, 2001); Coppieters et al. (2000).

conflict has focused on the macro-level determinants, of which the institutions and collapse of the Soviet Union and growing nationalism in its constituent parts have been stressed. Analyses of the case have often been based on the data gathered outside of Abkhazia, leaving internal, micro-level processes of mobilization generally unexplored.<sup>87</sup> Work on mobilization from within Abkhazia has been pursued mainly by local researchers and written in the archival and heroic stylistic traditions.<sup>88</sup> The former have landed volumes of document texts related to pre-war mobilization.<sup>89</sup> The latter have drawn on local interviews to pay tribute to fighters on the Abkhaz side in the war.<sup>90</sup> No study to date, as a result, has examined Abkhaz mobilization across the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict cycle.

This chapter draws on extensive interview, archival, and secondary data collected primarily in Abkhazia, but also in Georgia and Russia, to analyze the pre-war dimension of this understudied question. Interviews with participants (62%) and non-participants (38%) in pre-war mobilization,<sup>91</sup> of whom 32% were organized by the Abkhaz movement and 30% mobilized spontaneously, get at the core of the pre-war social relations in Abkhazia, the shifting norms and understandings driving individuals and small groups into different mobilization roles, the spectrum of mobilization roles and repertoires, and its organizational structure, including the interaction between the society and organizational elite and between informal and formal processes of recruitment and participation. Archival materials, namely documents related to pre-war mobilization, identify the core issues and demands made by the Abkhaz as they evolved in the course of organized and spontaneous pre-war mobilization. Secondary materials are utilized as a means of triangulation to verify these findings.

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<sup>87</sup> Exceptions include Hewitt (1993), Cohen (1999), Garb (1999a), Nan (2000), Coppieters et al. (2000), among others. These scholars, however, have often drawn on elite interviews and have not explored the question of mobilization in Abkhazia. Mobilization in Georgia has been addressed by Wheatley (2005), Beissinger (2002), and Driscoll (2009).

<sup>88</sup> An important exception is Brojdo (2008). Note also Lezhava (1997, 1998); Coppieters (2002).

<sup>89</sup> Examples include Sagaria et al. (1992); Chumalov (1995); Shamba and Lakoba (1995); Lakoba and Anchabadze (2002); Maryhuba (1994, 2000).

<sup>90</sup> See, for example, Bebia (1996, 1997); Brojdo (1994); Khodzhaa (2003, 2006, 2009); Zhidkov (2011).

<sup>91</sup> State (20%) and non-state (80%) occupations are represented among the respondents. Those in the state positions in general attempted to avoid public mobilization; non-participants as well include individuals with household duties. See Chapter 1 (p. 28-31) and Appendix A-B for the detailed breakdown and discussion of interview respondent categories.

I apply these materials to demonstrate that the first phase of the latent normative framework activation mechanism holds in the Abkhaz case, namely that the dimensions of the framework were present and evolved in pre-war Abkhazia. First, I show that underlying intra- and inter-group social norms—the first dimension—developed through socialization at the micro, meso, and macro levels of society in Abkhazia. I then illustrate constant evolution of intra-group understandings of history and identity—the second dimension—in the course of pre-war mobilization by the Abkhaz. I trace changes in these dimensions of the normative framework for action following changes in external factors of political opportunity and counter-mobilization. I find, however, that inter-group violence affected the normative framework most dramatically and, hence, focus on this aspect in Chapter 4.

My goal, therefore, is not to recite the history of the Georgian-Abkhaz relations, which has been done before (see fn. 80-86), but rather to place the historical events in Abkhazia within the latent normative framework activation mechanism. I depart from the focus in the Georgian-Abkhaz studies on macro-level conflict determinants and discuss these factors insofar as they contributed to the evolution of the latent normative framework in the course of Abkhaz mobilization—an internal, micro-level process. By tracing the evolution of the normative framework, I establish that Abkhaz preferences were not fixed in the pre-war period and thus challenge the view of preferences as fixed in the civil war studies and of the Abkhaz movement as invariably separatist in the Soviet period in the Georgian-Abkhaz studies.<sup>92</sup> I demonstrate my argument through systematic analysis of Abkhaz pre-war mobilization with its defining moments reflected in interview excerpts, charts, and maps.

In what follows I study in depth formation and transformation of the two dimensions of the latent normative framework for action in the case of Abkhazia. The first section focuses on the first dimension—underlying norms and social relations. The second section then looks at the dimension of emergent understandings of history and identity. I intertwine prescribed action in the discussion.

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<sup>92</sup> See, for example, Papaskiri (2010).

### **3.1 Dimension One: Underlying Norms and Social Relations**

This section explores the first dimension of the latent normative framework for action that developed in Abkhazia, i.e. pre-existing norms embedded in intra- and inter-group social relations. I focus on the social norms guiding behavior among and between the Abkhaz and Georgian groups, which were at the core of the conflict in Soviet Abkhazia. Apsuara, or the Abkhaz code of conduct, emerges as the key intra-Abkhaz normative framework. The norms of friendship and peace served as the basis for pre-war inter-group relations, until their violations became acute and systematic.

#### **3.1.1 Intra-Abkhaz Norms and Social Relations**

An account of intra- and inter-group norms and social relations in Soviet Abkhazia requires an understanding of the territory and major political and social changes that took place in Abkhazia before and during the Soviet period. The density of the population and collective nature of principal economic activities dictated by Abkhazia's geography, and the history of war in Abkhazia, shaped strong intra-Abkhaz norms of reciprocity (*aidgylara*), honor (*alamys*), and conformity to custom (*acas*) and mobilization-specific norms of patriotism (*apsadgyl bziabara*), heroism (*afyrhacara*), and masculinity (*ahacara*). These are among the key norms of the Abkhaz code of conduct, known as Apsuara, or "Abkhazianness" (Hewitt and Watson, 1993: 5; Maan, 2003; 2012; Brojdo, 2008).

##### **3.1.1.1 Basic Intra-Abkhaz Norms: Reciprocity, Honor, and Conformity to Custom**

Social relations among the Abkhaz in Abkhazia are organized around kinship ties, based on "familias" (*advla*), or groups of immediate and distant relatives tied by the same family name, and communities, especially neighborhood (village) communes (*akyta*). The relatively small size of its territory and the density of the population in its settlements were important in shaping the closeness of ties and the strength of communities in Abkhazia. "A system of extremely close relations among members of... familias" exists in Abkhazia, Brojdo (2008: 21) finds. Maan (2012: 23-26) confirms that neighborhood communities are another fundamental unit of intra-Abkhaz social relations.



Embeddedness of social life in familial and communal relations engendered strong norms of reciprocity among the Abkhaz (Maan, 2007: 324; 2012: 23-26). The elements of reciprocity, or *aidgylara* in the Abkhaz language,—“solidarity, communitarianism, collectivism, mutual help—to this day remain one of the defining features of the mentality of the Abkhaz” (Brojdo: 2008, 23). “We do not abandon people in joyful or difficult situations,” Abkhaz respondents regularly report,

We have very strong family ties... In villages we have communes. Everyone is close in the holding of weddings or in situations of death... A person is never left alone. There is moral, material, spiritual support of relatives and neighbors (Interview 84, 12 November, 2011).<sup>93</sup>

The familial and community basis of social life, furthermore, engendered strong norms of honor and conformity to custom. “Familias” constitute a central site of mutual help, but also serve as a source of social appraisal and reputation. Both praise and disapproval of individual members extend to “familias.” “A mere belonging to one or another familia imposes certain obligations on an individual” (Maan, 2007: 325). “If I kill you,” an Abkhaz psychologist explains, “I get engaged with your entire familia” (Interview 132, 6 December, 2011). Through conformity to custom, such as respect for the elders and inter-gender rules, one attains a reputable social position, or honor.<sup>94</sup>

These norms play profound roles not only within the institution of “familias,” but also more broadly, within communities and beyond. Being ousted from a community is as detrimental for an Abkhaz individual as being shunned by her “familia.” An Abkhaz historian provides an indicator:

It is very rare for an Abkhaz to move from one community to another. One can be exiled and as a result live in another community. If exiled, however, you are akin to a slave. You lose your social status. Only in your own community can you reach the highest position in the [social] hierarchy (Interview 137, 7 December, 2011).<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> This account is supported in my participant observation. The entire “familias” and neighborhood communities came together to organize weddings and other important celebrations that I attended in Abkhazia. See also Krylov (2001).

<sup>94</sup> Respect for the elders, for example, is embedded in daily practices and such institutions as the elders’ councils.

<sup>95</sup> In Soviet (and post-Soviet) Abkhazia, one’s professional position and social reputation were among the factors in the social hierarchy. In pre-Soviet Abkhazia, social stratification was class-based. The feudal nobility, including the Abkhaz princes and gentry, were placed at the top of the hierarchy. Free peasants, their servants, and slaves held the lower positions respectively. See Maan (2007: 327-329) for a discussion. The institution of “*atalychestvo*,” whereby children of the higher social strata were sent to be brought up in free peasant families was at the same time meant to bridge the social gap between these layers of the Abkhaz population and maintain the hierarchy (Maan 2012: 13-19).

In “a small society where contacts are tight” a substantial overlap exists between basic familial and communal social relational structures, which provides for shared norms among the Abkhaz beyond familial and communal contexts (Interview 137, 7 December, 2011). Societal norm reinforcement is consistently emphasized by Abkhaz respondents. “Abkhazia is small. We all know each other. If you lose your face once, you will not be able to recover it later” (Interview 15, 1 November, 2011).

Historically, this overlap was one to one. That is, “familias” and communities were located in the same geographical and social space. Socialization into the basic norms of society took place primarily through the community and in the context of collective economic activities, with 90% of the population engaged in agricultural production (Maan, 2007: 328).<sup>96</sup> As a result, the norms of reciprocity, honor, and conformity to custom were passed in collective encounters. Teenagers were socialized into the reciprocity norm “through their direct involvement in all forms of mutual help” practiced by their community and “peers assisted one another with chores” (Maan, 1990: 14-15).<sup>97</sup> Conformity to custom among the youth during economic and other communal activities, including traditional celebrations, was critical. The young developed their reputation, or honor, during these activities, as they were “watched not only by the elders, but also by their entire community” (Maan, 1990: 17). Conformity to custom was, moreover, important as a way of transmitting knowledge in the absence of a written Abkhaz language (Maan, 2003: 63).<sup>98</sup>

Familial and communal socialization was partially maintained in the Soviet era. The Soviet regime worked to eradicate the Abkhaz traditions viewed as harmful, among others, blood revenge, kidnapping of brides, and costly weddings and funerals (Krylov, 2001: 81). However, the traditions

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<sup>96</sup> The coastal and mountainous geography shaped the collective nature of economic activities in Abkhazia. As Hewitt and Watson (1993: 5) argue, “A semi-tropical climate with abundant water-resources, forests and mountain-pasturage dictated an economy based on animal-husbandry, timber and agriculture.” The Soviet Union affected the economy. Agricultural production, especially of tea, citrus, and tobacco was collectivized, with collective farms (*kolkhoz*) placed across Abkhazia. Tourism, light industry, mining in Tqvarchel/i, and electricity production in Gal/i were introduced.

<sup>97</sup> For example, the youth participated in the gathering and processing of the harvest together with the elders. On the traditions of child rearing among the Abkhaz, see also Lakoba (1991: 244-247).

<sup>98</sup> No record of a written Abkhaz language exists up until mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. See Chirikba (2007: 37).

of collective gatherings, such as familial and communal festivities and assemblies, and the elders' councils remained significant meso-level contexts of socialization (Krylov, 2001: 82).<sup>99</sup> "The Old New Year, Easter, prayer to the god of harvest, killing of a bull" are commonly reported as contexts where the Abkhaz socialized the youth and preserved their ways of life (Interview 49, 4 November, 2011). Through these festivities the Abkhaz sustained strong ties among "familias" (Krylov, 2001: 85). Derluguian (2010: 370-371) captures the importance of Abkhaz familial ties in the Soviet era:

An Abkhaz peasant felt much more comfortable and confident in dealing with an Abkhaz official or policeman [in the Soviet period] not simply because they belonged to the same culture and spoke the same language... The main factor was that they, in fact, were connected by the incredibly far-reaching... ties of family relations or at least neighborhood. Two Abkhaz meeting in a formal setting have either met numerous before or would certainly encounter each other again at another table, at a funeral or a wedding.

Communal assemblies endured as a source of decision-making and mutual help in daily life and a site of collective deliberation in situations where Abkhaz interests were perceived to be threatened (Krylov, 2001: 133).<sup>100</sup> The historical record and interview responses confirm: "the Abkhaz always gathered when [they] had critical moments" (Interview 65, 9 November, 2011). Finally, the elders' council continued to be a respected institution. If dilemmas arise "the elders tell us how to behave," Abkhaz respondents often report (Interview 47, 4 November, 2011).<sup>101</sup> Persistence of these familial and communal institutions in the Soviet Union, Krylov (2001: 84) finds, was facilitated by that

the vast majority of the Abkhaz continued to live in the countryside, where they absorbed traditional foundations of moral behavior from birth... The situation did not change even after the 1960s, when Abkhaz youth increasingly migrated to the city, as... they retained strong ties with their native villages: they necessarily attended family celebrations, often spent holidays in their family homes, and helped relatives with the cultivation of the land.

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<sup>99</sup> The institution of "familias" suffered in the Soviet Union. In mass repressions of the 1930s-1940s (discussed below), entire Abkhaz "familias" were targeted by the regime. See Krylov (2001: 83). Still, traditional familial celebrations continued. They combined elements of paganism with Christianity and Islam. See Akaba (2007); Krylov (2007).

<sup>100</sup> The Abkhaz have strong democratic traditions. Key decisions have historically been made at communal, regional, and all-Abkhaz gatherings, where oratory skills played a significant role (Kuprava, 2007). In Abkhaz customary law, "enforcement decisions were reduced to a minimum, while punishment was based on collective agreement" (Brojdo, 2008: 21). "People's Court decisions were binding for all, [e]ven the ruler of Abkhazia" (Maan in Brojdo, 2008: 21).

<sup>101</sup> The institution is reported to be especially important in rural Abkhazia. "In the village we go to the elders in the first place even today" (Interview 39, 4 November, 2011); "Everyone listens to them" (Interview 47, 4 November, 2011).

Along with the meso-level familial and communal institutions, the micro-level, individual family unit began playing a greater role in socialization among the Abkhaz in the Soviet context. Oral tradition became an especially important form of socialization within the family. “Information was hidden [in the Soviet Union],” an Abkhaz librarian clarifies, “Grandmothers, grandfathers told us that we were an ancient people, remembering the legends, what the elders had said in their time.” The following quote captures the situation. “We did not study the history of Abkhazia,” an Abkhaz Soviet official says, “so the traditions were passed through the family” (Interview 49, 4 November, 2011). “Family became the primary guarantee that the Abkhaz traditions [norms] were passed from generation to generation,” an Abkhaz historian corroborates (Interview 84, 16 November, 2011).<sup>102</sup>

As the Soviet regime worked to eradicate many Abkhaz traditions, there were no state-level educational mechanisms in the Soviet period to pass the social norms guiding behavior among the Abkhaz. In fact, Abkhaz schools were closed (discussed below) in the 1940s and Abkhaz language, not to mention history and traditions, were not taught for a while.<sup>103</sup> Thus socialization into the basic intra-Abkhaz norms at the macro level did not commence until the 1990s, when the Abkhaz began building their post-war *de facto* state institutions.

### **3.1.1.2 Intra-Abkhaz Norms of Mobilization: Patriotism, Heroism, and Masculinity**

While the norms of reciprocity, honor, and conformity to custom are viewed by the Abkhaz as the fundamental norms of social relations, upheld on the daily basis and passed through micro-, meso-, and, most recently, macro-level social structures, a number of mobilization-specific norms, particularly patriotism, heroism, and masculinity, developed in the course of pre-war mobilization by the Abkhaz. These norms are generally latent in day-to-day life, but are activated in situations when the interests of the Abkhaz or the Abkhaz as a collectivity are perceived to be threatened.

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<sup>102</sup> My interviews confirm that micro-level socialization was most critical during the 1930s-1950s, when leaders in the Abkhaz society were repressed and Abkhaz schools were closed, preventing open development of the Abkhaz culture.

<sup>103</sup> One indicator is, the first textbook on Abkhaz history for school curriculum was published in 1991 (Lakoba, 1991).

The Abkhaz have a long mobilization history in defence of their interests and their territory. Abkhazia's geographical position at the entry to the Caucasus and a coastal climate have made it a strategically important and sought-after territory. "Endless war with foreign invaders brought about [the norm] of patriotic duty and gave birth to the image of the national hero" (Lakoba, 1991: 154). Patriotism was associated with struggle and self-sacrifice. As an Abkhaz activist and war journalist says, "I was raised in the spirit of patriotism. Kutol is... a deeply Abkhaz village. So I was educated from childhood that we had to struggle" (Interview 114, 28 November, 2011).<sup>104</sup> Selfless struggle in turn is a measure of heroism. The Abkhaz who mobilized and died to defend Abkhazia are praised as heroes, indicated by state recognition. "Masculinity, heroism are recognized," an activist argues,

that these boys, defending their motherland by the cost of their lives, went to the end. Many are marked with high awards, many upon death... The victory and independence are thanks to these men who lost their lives [in the war of 1992-1993] (Interview 7, 27 October, 2011).

This is as well reflected in the literary tradition of heroism (see fn. 90). Heroism, in particular self-sacrifice, is "[t]he supreme manifestation of *Ahacara*" (masculinity) for the Abkhaz (Brojdo, 2008: 20). The patriarchal structure of social relations and upbringing of boys in the fighter tradition, for instance, through arms training and hunting, are among the expressions of cherished masculinity.<sup>105</sup>

Most mobilization by the Abkhaz and corresponding development of mobilization-specific norms broadly relates to historical changes in the political status of Abkhazia. In the recent history, Abkhazia transformed from a princedom to a protectorate and an administrative unit of the Russian Empire over the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to a General-Governorship of Georgia and the incorporation into the Soviet Union in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to a partially recognized and disputed territory in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Table 6 (below) sketches the changes in the political status of Abkhazia over 1810-2014. Table 7 (below) identifies six stages of Abkhaz pre-war mobilization corresponding to these changes.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> This respondent's choice to study Abkhaz history in Soviet Georgia and war reporting indicate her selfless struggle.

<sup>105</sup> On the patriarchal structure of society, see Maan (2007). On the importance of hunting, see Khecija (2007).

<sup>106</sup> See concise mobilization chronology in Appendix G.

Table 6. Political Status of Abkhazia (1810-2014)

Abkhazia under Russian Empire					Restoration of sovereignty		Georgian control			Status changes in the Soviet period			Immediate pre-war status		Post-war status
1810-1864	1864	1866	1880	1907	1917	1918	1918-1921			1921-1922	1922-1931	1931-1990	1990-1992		1993-2014
Russian Protectorate	Abkhaz principedom abolished	Last Abkhaz prince arrested, died	Abkhaz a <i>guilty</i> nation	<i>Guilt</i> removed for loyalty in the 1905 Revolution	Abkhaz People's Council (APC) elected	Abkhazia enters the Mountainous Republic	Attempts to establish Soviet power	Georgian Governor-Generalship, Georgian military in Abkhazia	Third APC adopts autonomy decree	Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) of Abkhazia	Georgian-Abkhaz Union Treaty	Autonomous Abkhazia within Georgian SSR	All-Union Referendum in Abkhazia votes preservation of Soviet Union	Reinstatement of the 1925 Constitution	Disputed territory
							Agreement with Georgia								

Table 7. Pre-War Abkhaz Mobilization (1810-1992)

Period	Russian and Georgian control		Soviet Union						Pre-war
Year	1810-1878	1902-1921	1931	1941-1945	1947	1956-1957	1965-1967	1978	1988-1992
Mobilization Stage	Anti-colonial	Soviet revolutionary	Status change	World War II	Anti-Georgian politics			Status Restoration	
		Anti-Georgian control						Anti-Georgian politics	
Mobilization Repertoire	Uprisings; fighting	Demonstrations; public gatherings; fighting	Public gatherings	Fighting	Letter writing; public gatherings; everyday confrontations			Letter writing; public gatherings; armed clashes; mass strikes; referenda	
Organization		Kiaraz						Aidgylara	

The status changes and corresponding mobilization by the Abkhaz had important effects on the intra-Abkhaz norms and social relations. The history of war, which subordinated Abkhazia to various powers and greatly reduced the Abkhaz population in Abkhazia (see Section 3.1.3 below), sharpened a sense of existential threat, attachment to the Abkhaz nation, and belonging to the land. As Brojdo (2008: 9) argues, “in its long history, the Abkhaz ethnos repeatedly found itself under a real threat of not only physical, but also spiritual destruction.” “We are a small nation,” an Abkhaz elder says, “many tried to seize our land, to leave Abkhazia without the Abkhaz” (Interview 80, 15 November, 2011). Duty to fellow Abkhaz and Abkhazia is thus sharply pronounced across Abkhaz interviews. “Whether we remain alive or not, it is our duty to defend our native land, our home, our relatives, our children, the elderly” (Interview 12, 31 October, 2011). Familial and communal ties are used to demonstrate belonging to the land and readiness to collectively defend it. “Here are the graves of our mothers, [thus] it is our motherland” (Interview 48, 4 November, 2011); “We will be defending our land until the last Abkhaz” (Interview 56, 8 November, 2011); “If you kill me, this will not end it. My son will continue. You cannot eradicate us” (Interview 86, 17 November, 2011).

The historical record of status changes and mobilization supports these Abkhaz perceptions as the Abkhaz fought for their collectivity and land through centuries. The 19<sup>th</sup> century was marked for Abkhazia by the presence of the Russian Empire and Russian-Ottoman struggle for control over the Caucasus. In 1810 Abkhazia became a Russian protectorate.<sup>107</sup> The Abkhaz principedom retained “autonomous control” and “conducted... own affairs” (Lakoba, 1991: 181; Hewitt, 2013: 24). Yet, the Abkhaz mobilized against the rising imperial control. On the one hand, they participated in the Caucasus wars against Russia. On the other hand, they protested tsarist reforms. Indeed, when the Russian War in the Caucasus ended in 1864, Russian rule was established in Abkhazia, leading to

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<sup>107</sup> On 17 February, 1810, Alexander I Charter granted Georgij Shervashidze, “hereditary Prince of the Abkhazia..., the Supreme protection of the Russian empire” (Shamba and Neproshin, 2008: 60; Lakoba, 1991: 161, 2004: 25).

“the abolition of [Abkhaz] autonomy” (Lakoba, 1991: 179).<sup>108</sup> The Abkhaz see this moment as the moment of eradication of Abkhazia’s statehood associated with the Abkhaz princedom (Lakoba, 2004).<sup>109</sup> One of the largest Abkhaz mobilization events of the era—the 1866 anti-colonial uprising against the abolition of statehood and ensuing agrarian reform—took place in response.<sup>110</sup> This and other uprisings were brutally suppressed by Russia’s forces (Bgazhba and Lakoba, 2007: 202-226).

The abolition of the Abkhaz princedom and active colonization of Abkhazia by the Russian Empire was accompanied by another dramatic event for the Abkhaz. Following the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, the Abkhaz were declared a “guilty” nation for mobilization on the side of the Ottoman Empire (Bgazhba and Lakoba, 2007: 236-240). Mass deportations of the Abkhaz, known as *makhadzhirstvo*, were carried out in retribution (Dzidzarija, 1982). The Abkhaz were denied their hereditary right to land and prohibited from settling in central Abkhazia. Those deported were not allowed to return. As a result, no large-scale mobilization by the Abkhaz took place after 1878.

The “guilt” was removed in 1907 as the weakened Abkhaz in general did not participate in the 1905 anti-tsarist Revolution.<sup>111</sup> While this Revolution failed, the 1917 Revolution succeeded in crushing the Empire and led to the creation in Abkhazia of the Abkhaz People’s Council (APC), an Abkhaz representative body elected by the Abkhaz people’s congress 8 November, 1917. The APC instantly set a course for self-determination of Abkhazia. It issued its Declaration and Constitution, entered the newly formed and independent Mountainous Republic of the North Caucasus (MRNC), and declared sovereignty of Abkhazia in its Decree of 2 June, 1918.<sup>112</sup> In the collective view of the Abkhaz, “Abkhazia’s statehood, lost in June 1864, was thus restored” (Lakoba, 2004: 13).

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<sup>108</sup> See the Decree of the Governor-General of the Caucasus Grand Duke Michael of June 26, 1864, on “introduction into Abkhazia of Russian rule” (Shamba and Neproshin, 2008: 63).

<sup>109</sup> This view contrasts sharply with that of some Georgian historians. See, for example, Papaskiri (2010).

<sup>110</sup> The agrarian reform did not take into account the specifics of the Abkhaz class structure (Lakoba, 1990: 33-34).

<sup>111</sup> A minority of the Abkhaz, represented by the Kiaraz organization, participated in Soviet revolutionary mobilization against the empire at the time. Demonstrations took place in Abkhazia throughout the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>112</sup> Document texts are available in Osmanov and Butaev (1994: 79-83); Khodzhaa (2006); Gozhba et al. (2009).



Yet, on 11 June, 1918, the second elected APC signed an agreement with the newly formed Democratic Republic of Georgia, whereby the APC reserved internal control, but Georgia sent its forces to help the APC establish order in Abkhazia in the context of revolution. Punitive measures that followed greatly impacted Abkhaz perceptions of Georgia (Bgazhba and Lakoba, 2007: 290). Abkhazia was declared a General-Governorship of Georgia. In 1919, the third, pro-Georgian APC, renamed People's Council of Abkhazia, declared Abkhazia an autonomous part of Georgia. In the Abkhaz perception, this was an occupation of Abkhazia and the APC's document was thus null.<sup>113</sup>

To end the Georgian control the Abkhaz engaged in Soviet revolutionary and anti-Georgian mobilization. The Abkhaz revolutionary organization Kiaraz was prominent in the introduction of Soviet power in Abkhazia in 1921, when Abkhazia was granted the status of an independent Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) (Kuprava and Avidzba, 2007: 8).<sup>114</sup> Despite this success, soon Abkhazia signed a Union Treaty with Georgia and its political bodies were gradually subordinated to those of Georgia.<sup>115</sup> On 19 February, 1931, Abkhazia was formally integrated into the Georgian SSR as its Autonomous Republic. This was one of the most dramatic moments of infringement on the Abkhaz rights and freedoms in the collective memory of the Abkhaz. "We used to be an independent state before 1931, but were made an autonomous republic," the Abkhaz say (Interview 64, 9 November, 2011); "We were forced to enter the structure of Georgia" (Interview 76, 13 November, 2011).

Mobilization against this 1931 status change and the Georgianization of Abkhazia marked the Soviet period (discussed below). It culminated in mobilization for the restoration of Abkhazia's independent status and the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-1993. Georgia restored its independence

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<sup>113</sup> See Chirikba (1998: 49); Bgazhba and Lakoba (2007: 282-286); on the Georgian view, Menteshashvili (1990: 18).

<sup>114</sup> On 31 March, 1921, the Revolutionary Committee of Abkhazia adopted a Declaration on the Establishment of the Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) of Abkhazia. On 21 May, 1921, the Declaration of Independence was adopted.

<sup>115</sup> The Treaty was signed 16 December, 1921 (see text in Kacharava, 1959: 177-178; see also Zverev, 1996). Although Abkhazia had not yet become an autonomous republic of Georgia, on 17 April, 1930, upon the request from Georgia, the Council of People's Commissars of Abkhazia was merged with the Central Executive Committee of Abkhazia per the decision of the Soviet center on the reorganization of autonomous republics.

as the Union was crumbling (November 14, 1990), while Abkhazia held a referendum to preserve the Union (March 17, 1991).<sup>116</sup> Georgia's Provisional Military Council declared Soviet laws null in 1992 and reinstated its 1921 Constitution, while the Abkhaz restored the 1925 Constitution, where Abkhazia "was not part of Georgia" (Nodia, 1998: 31).<sup>117</sup> The war of 1992-1993 began thereafter.

Following the war, Abkhazia has been building *de facto* state institutions in isolation from Georgia, but its status remains contested as Abkhazia's independence has been recognized only by Russia, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Nauru, Vanuatu, and Tuvalu. The Abkhaz, however, view this post-war status, especially Abkhazia's recognition by Russia, as the uppermost achievement in its recent history, representing the symbolic and actual restoration of justice that the Abkhaz fought for over centuries. "Through all these sufferings," Abkhaz respondents commonly say, "Russia recognized us and life is getting better" (Interview 47, 4 November, 2011). "[N]ow... we have some freedom," a Georgian resident of Abkhazia confirms, "We are recognized" (Interview 12, 31 October, 2011).

### **3.1.2 Inter-Group Norms and Social Relations**

The discussion so far has focused on intra-Abkhaz norms and social relations. Inter-group dynamics, however, are as well critical to an understanding of pre-war mobilization by the Abkhaz. While Soviet Abkhazia was a multicultural space, at the core of the conflict in Abkhazia were two groups, Abkhaz and Georgian.<sup>118</sup> It is the underlying norms guiding social relations between these groups in Soviet Abkhazia that I take up now. A key to an understanding of the Abkhaz-Georgian inter-group dynamics lies in the demographic changes that took place in Abkhazia in the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries and political, cultural, and economic policies viewed as the Georgianization of Abkhazia.

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<sup>116</sup> The Abkhaz referred to the Soviet Law "On the Procedures for Resolving Issues Related to the Secession of Union Republics from the USSR" (3 April, 1990) where autonomies were given a right to decide on whether to remain in the Union; and "On the Division of Powers between the USSR and the Subjects of the Federation" (26 April, 1990) where autonomies were recognized as subjects of the federation. See documents in Shamba and Neproshin (2008: 141-157).

<sup>117</sup> According to the Abkhaz, Abkhazia was occupied by Georgia in 1921 and, therefore, was not subject of state-legal relations with it. Hence, the High Council of Abkhazia had to fill this "constitutional vacuum" by reverting to the 1925 Constitution where the Georgian-Abkhaz state-legal relations were defined by their Union Treaty (Chirikba, 1998: 50).

<sup>118</sup> Armenians, Russians, Greeks, Estonians, and Ukrainians lived in Abkhazia along with the Abkhaz and Georgians.

### 3.1.2.1 Demographic Changes

Inter-group relations in Abkhazia evolved over three stages of major demographic changes, corresponding to the political status changes discussed above (see Table 8 below).<sup>119</sup> The first stage is mass deportation of the Abkhaz and initial Georgian resettlement to Abkhazia under the Russian Empire. Gradual Georgian resettlement continued in the transitional period (as the Empire fell, but Soviet power had not yet been established in Abkhazia), but it was in the second stage in the Soviet Union that mass Georgian resettlement took place, particularly after the status change of 1931. The Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-1993 that followed produced the third stage, i.e. the deportation of most Georgians from Abkhazia. These stages are deeply intertwined with the different Abkhaz and Georgian perceptions of historical justice. As de Waal (2011) says, the themes of “demography and historical justice... constantly recur [and] deserve special attention... as each side in the conflict recalls an act of deportation that dramatically changed the demographic situation against it.” Inter-group norms of friendship and peace transformed to ones of conflict and violence over these stages.

During the period of Russian imperial control, deportations of the Abkhaz were commonly preceded by Abkhaz anti-colonial uprisings, often in the context of Russia’s wars in the Caucasus, which were suppressed militarily, with certain (groups of) individuals repressed. The largest events of deportation followed the Caucasus (1817-1864) and Russo-Turkish (1877-1878) Wars, where the Abkhaz fought against the Empire, and the anti-colonial Lykhny uprising of 1866 against the abolition of statehood and agrarian reform in Abkhazia (Achugba, 2010: 94-112). This period of active deportation ended in the 1880s.<sup>120</sup> By then Abkhazia lost over 135,000 Abkhaz, the majority of the Abkhaz population (Dzidzarija in Achugba, 2010: 106). According to the 1886 census, only 59,000 Abkhaz lived in Abkhazia at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Deportation and resettlement are key processes behind these changes; fighting and repression are as well important.

<sup>120</sup> Thereafter, the Empire monitored the waters so that the ships with Abkhaz deportees did not return to Abkhazia.

<sup>121</sup> As a result of deportations, a large Abkhaz diaspora formed in Turkey, among other countries.

Table 8. Demographic Processes in Abkhazia (1810s-1990s)

Stages	I. Fighting and Deportation												II. Resettlement and Repression						III. IDPs
Period	Russian Empire									Transitional Period			Autonomous SSR Abkhazia						War
	Caucasus War (I wave of deportation)					Agrarian Reform (II wave)	Russo-Turkish War (III wave)	“Guilty” <sup>122</sup> nation (return prohibited)	1905 Revolution	Georgian Control	SSR Abkhazia								
Decade	1810	1820	1830	1840	1850	1860	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990
Mobilization ↓	•	•	•	•	•	•	•			•	•	•		•	•	•	•	☐	•
Fighting ↓	•	•	•	•	•	•	•			•	•	•		☐ <sup>123</sup>					•
Repression ↓		•		•		•	•	•				•	☐	•			•		
Abkhaz Deportation	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	○											
	~30.000 deported					~80.000 deported													
	Abkhaz population decreased by ~135.000																		
Georgian <sup>124</sup> Resettlement			•	•	•	• <sup>125</sup>	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	
						~4.000 resettled <sup>126</sup>			~22.000 resettled	~42.000 resettled		~24.500 resettled	~66.000 resettled	~41.500 resettled	~40.000 resettled				
	Georgian population increased by ~240.000																		
Georgian Displacement																			☐

• – process present    ••• – total increases    ■ - major (set of) event(s)

<sup>122</sup> Not all Abkhaz were considered “guilty.” A proportion of the Abkhaz population was thus not deported.

<sup>123</sup> 17.436 Abkhaz died in World War II (Lakoba, 1991: 357).

<sup>124</sup> Georgians and Mingrelians, considered to be a Georgian sub-group, are combined in this table as both groups resettled to Abkhazia from Georgia.

<sup>125</sup> Resettlement from Georgia started.

<sup>126</sup> Note exact figures: 4.166 → 21.709 → 41.619 → 24.473 → 66.254 → 41.374 → 40.277.

Along with deportations, the process of resettlement of Abkhazia began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was favorable for the Empire to have Russian settlements in the emptied areas of Abkhazia. Due to difficult living conditions, however, the Russian population was not eager to colonize Abkhazia. Thus, other groups, including Armenians and Greeks, established their settlements there. Georgian resettlement, primarily from Georgia's province of Mingrelia, began in the 1860s, subsequent to a new deportation of the Abkhaz (Achugba, 2010: 114-144; Bgazhba and Lakoba, 2007: 241-244).<sup>127</sup>

The resettlement continued throughout the transitional period, along with demonstrations and revolutionary fighting in Abkhazia. As a result of revolutionary actions in the late 1910s, many Abkhaz were repressed and killed by the Georgian military present in Abkhazia at the time. *Mass* repression of the Abkhaz political, intellectual, and agricultural leadership, however, took place in 1937-1938, following Abkhazia's 1931 status change (Sagarija et al., 1992: 4). At the same time, the Georgian population was gradually becoming the dominant demographic group in Abkhazia.

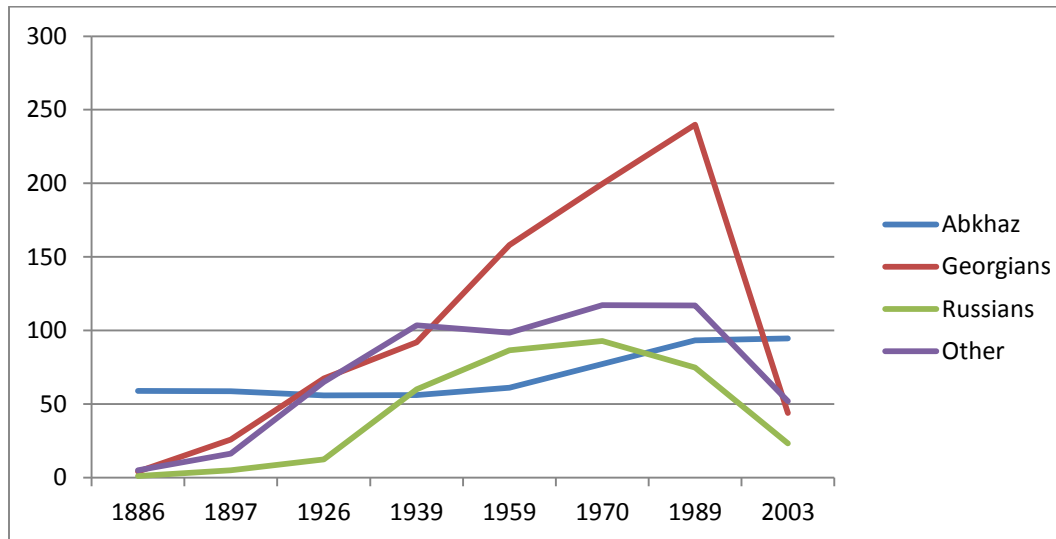
Throughout the period of major demographic changes in Abkhazia, especially in the Soviet Union, over 240,000 Georgians settled in Abkhazia. "As a result," an Abkhaz historian says, "the Abkhaz, the titular nation of this territory, became a minority" (Interview 84, 16 November, 2011). Indeed, by the late 1980s, Georgians comprised 45.7% of the population of Abkhazia, whereas the Abkhaz constituted 17.8%, the ratio that was reverted after the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-1993 (see Figure 12 below). Figure 13 (below) captures the demographic composition of Abkhazia by region in the late 1980s. Georgians were a dominant group across most of the territory of Abkhazia then. The Gal/i region was almost entirely Georgian. The major cities of Abkhazia—Sukhum/i and Ochamchira—as well had a dominant Georgian population. The exceptions included the region of Gudauta, a traditional Abkhaz enclave, and a mountainous mining region of Tqvarchel/i.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> See Lakoba (1993) for a discussion of the Georgian policy of resettlement.

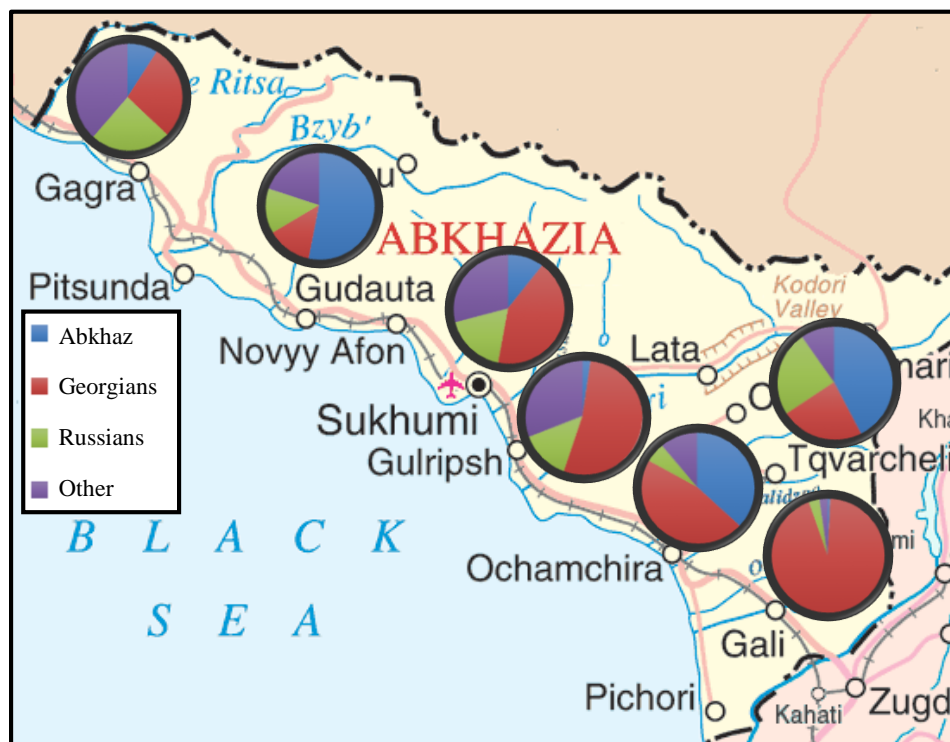
<sup>128</sup> There was a large Armenian population in Gagra and Gulripsh.

Figure 12. Demographic Changes in Abkhazia (1886-2003)



Source: Based on official census data<sup>129</sup>

Figure 13. Demographic Composition of Abkhazia by Region in 1989<sup>130</sup>



Source: Based on UN map of Georgia, August 2004

<sup>129</sup> See Appendix E for a detailed table.

<sup>130</sup> See Appendix F for detailed charts of each region.

Due to the Russian imperial policy banning the Abkhaz from settling in cities, most Abkhaz who were not deported lived in villages. “After the blaming associated with the Caucasus War, we were prohibited from living in cities,” an Abkhaz historian reports, “we all turned up in rural areas” (Interview 84, 16 November, 2011). Families from Georgia were settled in depopulated areas and within Abkhaz villages, to dilute the Abkhaz population (Sagarija et al., 1992: 11).<sup>131</sup> “Where there were few Abkhaz, Georgians were given land and small houses” (Interview 11, 31 October, 2011).

As Georgian families arrived in Abkhazia, especially at the early stages of resettlement in the Soviet Union, the Abkhaz are said to have accepted these families in line with the intra-Abkhaz norms of reciprocity. “When land was taken away from the locals and given to Georgian [settlers],” an Abkhaz librarian explains, “locals shared last piece of *mamalyga* [traditional food], helped them in every way, [for] they had to grow roots. The Abkhaz understood that Georgians were forcefully resettled” (Interview 59, 9 November, 2011).<sup>132</sup> An Ossetian senior in Abkhazia corroborates:

When they were relocated, Georgians were miserable, poor... [A]n elder [from my village] pitied them. He killed a bull and prayed to god for them, so that god gave them plenty... By the time I arrived [in Abkhazia] in 1969... they lived well (Interview 11, 31 October, 2011).

As Krylov (2001: 81) argues in his study on the persistence of Abkhaz norms in the Soviet Union,

Some Abkhaz traditions were further advanced in the Soviet period. This primarily refers to the principle of neighbor solidarity, which was extended not only to the ethnic Abkhaz, but also to those who were resettled to rural areas of Abkhazia for permanent residence.

The norms of inter-group friendship and peace dominate Abkhaz and Georgian responses on the pre-war period. At the micro and meso levels of the social structure in Abkhazia, the Abkhaz and Georgians were tied by individual family and broader familial and communal social relations. Inclusion of both groups in these social relations served as a foundation for the norms of friendship and peace. These norms were observed in neighborhood communities. Abkhaz women commonly

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<sup>131</sup> Resettlement *kolkhozs* were built in the Soviet period (Sagarija et al., 1992: 10; Achugba, 2010: 214).

<sup>132</sup> As Achugba (2010: 200) argues, “In violation of existing laws, land plots were taken away from Abkhaz villages, where peasant settlers from different regions of Georgia were settled. Resettlement was both voluntary and forced.”

report: “As neighbors, we were like closest relatives, helped each other, were friends” (Interview 38, 4 November, 2011); “We lived together with Georgians... as one family, whether a Georgian or Abkhaz wedding, we all went” (Interview 11, 31 October, 2011). Importantly, displaced Georgians concur. “We lived in a very friendly way,” a Georgian official says (Focus group, 2 May, 2013).

Familial ties were as well important in establishing and preserving the norms of inter-group friendship and peace. Over 40% of marriages in Abkhazia were mixed before the war, Chairman of the Union of Georgian-Abkhazian Mixed Families indicates (Interview 167, 27 April, 2013).<sup>133</sup> As Dale (1997: 79) argues, “[a]t the household level, mixed marriages, particularly Georgian-Abkhaz, were common... in a culture that emphasized strong ties with extended family members, for many this meant frequent inter-ethnic interaction in their own homes.” My interviews with Georgian and Abkhaz respondents support this. “There were many inter-marriages. We ate, drank together,” the Abkhaz regularly report (Interview 59, 9 November, 2011). “Relations between people were good. We are relatives. I have Abkhaz blood,” displaced Georgians confirm (Focus group, 2 May, 2013).

Inter-group norms and social ties did not stop at the micro and meso familial and communal levels. As a Georgian displaced from the Gal/i region says, “we were friends with [the Abkhaz] not only in the region, but also in Sukhum/i. We met at weddings, in cultural places” (Focus group, 2 May, 2013). My interviews repeatedly indicate friendship ties forged in educational or professional milieus: “We had a university where the Abkhaz, Georgians, Russians studied together” (Interview 64, 9 November, 2011); “We were friends, worked together” (Interview 131, 6 December, 2011); “I had such great Georgian friends, they were akin to brothers” (Interview 86, 17 November, 2011). These social ties extended even beyond Abkhazia. “In the Soviet army [the Abkhaz and Georgians] socialized, were friends, had celebrations, birthdays together” (Interview 73, 12 November, 2011).

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<sup>133</sup> My interviews support this. “I come from a family of mixed marriages,” an Abkhaz official says, “My nephews are Georgian” (Interview 70, 11 November, 2011). A displaced Georgian official living in Tbilisi confirms, “An Abkhaz woman could be married to a Mingrel or vice versa... My great-grandmother is Abkhaz” (Focus group, 2 May, 2013).



In contrast to intra-Abkhaz norms and traditions, inter-group norms of friendship and peace were actively promoted at the macro level, as part of the Soviet propaganda. Every Soviet citizen knew of the “eternal and indestructible friendship” of the Soviet peoples (Shnirelman, 2003: 11).<sup>134</sup> Yet, the Soviet doctrine of the friendship of the peoples had at its core the purpose of suppressing nationalism in the constituent republics of the Soviet Union. It was part of the Soviet nationalities policy, which “granted political status to the major nationalities which composed the Soviet state and ranked them in a hierarchical federal system” (Coppieters, 1999: 14). Autonomous Republics, including Abkhazia, were embedded in the system of double subordination in this “ethno-federal hierarchy”: They were subordinated to the Soviet Socialist Republics, of which they were part; yet, the highest authority lay in the Soviet center, Moscow (Beissinger, 2002: 118; Cornell, 2000).<sup>135</sup>

A result of this hierarchy, wrapped in the ideology of inter-group friendship and peace, was that Autonomous Republics had little political decision-making capacity (Shnirelman, 2003). This was especially problematic for titular minority groups whose native territory was joined with larger Republics. The nationalities policy gave a special status to groups considered to be titular. For full Soviet Socialist Republics, this meant “the right to self-determination, up to and including the right of secession;” on the other hand, Autonomous Republics were “not granted sovereignty or the right to secede” (Coppieters, 2002: 91). In Autonomous Republics the nationalities policy translated into ethnic quotas in administrative bodies, for instance (Nodia, 1998; Gachechiladze, 1998). For titular nations here, cultural development was thus a primary expression of the right to self-determination.

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<sup>134</sup> As Brezhnev argued in the report to the XXV Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, “We have developed a new historical community—the Soviet people, which is based on the unbreakable alliance of the working class, the peasantry, and the intelligentsia with the leading role of the working class [and] friendship among all nations and nationalities of our country” (cited in Anchabadze, 2011: 193).

<sup>135</sup> As part of the friendship of the peoples doctrine and the related Soviet nationalities policy, “the economy of the Abkhaz ASSR, providing a basis for a common economic life of the Abkhaz nation [was] at the same time an inseparable part of the economy of the Georgian SSR, and the latter [was] an organic part of the economy of the USSR... The territory of the Abkhaz ASSR, which represents the basis of the territorial community of the Abkhaz socialist nation, [was] part of the territory of the Georgian SSR, and the latter an integral part of the entire Soviet Union” (Anchabadze, 2011: 193).

### 3.1.2.2 Georgianization of Abkhazia

Suppression of cultural rights through the policy of Georgianization was another core issue shaping the background of inter-group relations and mobilization in Abkhazia. It was carried out in the name of the friendship of the peoples, but pursued the goal of furthering Georgian dominance in the Autonomous Republic. Along with the changes in Abkhazia's political status and demographic composition, whereby the Georgian Soviet state structure formally incorporated Abkhazia and the Abkhaz became a minority in Abkhazia, Georgianization prevented the Abkhaz from exercising the right to self-determination, especially in the early Soviet decades. As Nodia (1998: 21) writes,

Apart from th[e] demotion in status, under Stalin's rule the Abkhaz endured a period of Georgian demographic expansion... and... a "Georgianization" policy in late 1940s and early 1950s, when the Georgian language was imposed on Abkhaz students in schools and the Abkhaz were forced to use a Georgian-based alphabet.

Table 9 (below) charts the evolution of Abkhaz cultural advancements, their suppression by the Georgianization policy, and subsequent remedy offered by the Soviet Union. The key changes, as Nodia (1998) rightly suggests, include the closing of Abkhaz schools and language assimilation. These reforms were justified by the friendship of the peoples, particularly "the commonality of the material and spiritual culture of the kindred Georgian and Abkhaz nations."<sup>136</sup> Other key changes included the toponymy reform, or translation of place names from Abkhaz to Georgian, and the shutdown of Abkhaz media. A special place in the process was held by the study of the origins of the peoples inhabiting Abkhazia. Ingorokva's (1954) theory rejecting the status of the Abkhaz as indigenous to Abkhazia was one of its highlights (Lakoba, 1990; Hewitt, 1993; Coppieters, 2002). Much Abkhaz mobilization was in response to such claims. The opening of Tbilisi State University in Sukhum/i in 1989 was the culmination of the process. Indeed, the first inter-group violence was an outcome of this action and decades of Georgianization that preceded it (discussed in Chapter 4).

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<sup>136</sup> "On measures to improve the quality of educational work in the schools of the Abkhaz ASSR. Resolution Office of the Abkhazbkom CP (b) of Georgia from March 13, 1945." See Lakoba and Anchabadze (2002); Sagaria et al. (1992).

Table 9. Georgianization Policy in the Cultural Realm (19<sup>th</sup> Century-1992)

	Language	Toponymy	Primary & Secondary Education	Higher Education	Media (print press, radio, TV)	Science & History	Literature	Fine Arts (theater, music, art)	Other
19 <sup>th</sup> c.	Alphabet; language books; school materials; translation of religious books		First schools	Female college; male trades college				Chachba (1867-1968)	Library; typography; bookstore. Church. First telegram.
1900-1921	Schools, religious worship in Abkhaz	Maps show original toponymy			First articles; newspaper “Apsny” (D. Gulia)		First Abkhaz book (D. Gulia)		Development of Gagra as a resort.
1921-1928	<b>Language assimilation (of 55.918 Abkhaz, 47.053 declared Abkhaz as native language)</b>		First kindergarten; boarding school	Teachers College; Industrial College	Newspapers “Soviet Abkhazia,” “Apsny Kapsh” (in Abkhaz)	Abkhaz Science Society; Academy of Abkhaz Language and Literature; archeological studies	Encyclopedia on Abkhazia; “History of Abkhazia” (D. Gulia)	Theater troupe (D. Gulia); first Abkhaz play	Central National Library. Telegraph. Decree on protection of monuments. National flag, emblem. Pine preserve.
1928-1935		<b>First steps in “toponymy reform” (Psyrtskha, Novyye Gagry renamed Akhali Afoni, Akhali Gagra in the list of telegraph offices)</b>	Universal, free, compulsory primary education; primary, middle, high school structure	Georgian, Armenian, Greek Teachers College; Abkhaz Institute of Language and Literature (renamed Abkhaz Research Institute of Local History, 5 August, 1931); Musi.c College; Sukhum Medical College; Sukhum State Teachers Institute	First TV program; broadcasting committee; first issue of “Apsny Kapsh”		First issue of Anthology of Abkhaz poetry; Writers’ Union of Abkhazia	Professional Abkhaz theater; Music College; Abkhaz drama studio; state orchestra; art school	Central archive, records office. State publishing house “Abgosizdat.”
1936-1941	<b>Latin Abkhaz alphabet changed to Georgian</b>	<b>“Toponymy reform” (Abkhaz proper names changed)</b>		Art College	<b>Georgian newspaper “Sabchota Apkhazeti”;</b> regular TV			Art College; Union of the Artists of Abkhazia; state philharmonic	Tbilisi-Sukhum and Sochi-Gagra railroad connection

Issue – Abkhaz cultural development

Issue – infringement on Abkhaz cultural rights

Issue – response to infringement on Abkhaz cultural rights

	Language	Toponymy	Primary & Secondary Education	Higher Education	Media (print press, radio, TV)	Science & History	Literature	Fine Arts (theater, music, art)	Other
1941-1945									WWII heroes
1945-1952		<b>Transcription of locale names; Abkhaz proper names changed</b>	<b>Abkhaz schools closed</b>	<b>Georgian Teachers Colleges across Abkhazia</b>	<b>Abkhaz radio, journals, newspapers closed</b>	<b>Ingorokva's theory rejecting Abkhaz endogenous status in Abkhazia</b>	<b>Writers' Union of Abkhazia changed to the Abkhaz branch of Writers' Union of Georgia</b>	<b>"Nartaa" ensemble; Abkhaz State Ensemble renamed "Georgian State Ensemble of Folk Song and Dance"</b>	
1953-1956	<i>New Russian-based Abkhaz alphabet</i>		<i>Abkhaz schools reopened</i>	<i>Sukhum Teachers College: Abkhaz Department of the Philology Faculty, Abkhaz Language and Literature</i>	"Alashara" magazine			<i>Ministry of Culture of Abkhazia</i>	
<b><i>Resolution of Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union "On the errors and shortcomings in the work of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia"</i></b>									
1957-1977				<b>Subtropical Institute transferred from Georgia; Sukhum Teachers College: Department of Abkhaz Literature</b>	"Amtsabz" children's magazine; radio station		Anthology of Abkhaz Poetry issued in Moscow; multiple book on Abkhaz history	Abkhaz choir "Sharatyn" ensemble; Union of Composers of Abkhazia	New Afon complex
<b><i>Resolution of Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union "On further development of the economy and culture of the Abkhaz ASSR"</i></b>									
1978-1988	Abkhaz-Turkish dictionary			<i>Sukhum Teachers College made Abkhaz State University</i>	<i>First Abkhaz TV programs; school magazine in Abkhaz</i>				<i>Economic aid</i>
1989-1992				<b>Tbilisi State University Sector at ASU</b>					Demonstration for the memory of makhadzhirs; Global Abkhaz-Adyg Festival

Issue – Abkhaz cultural development

Issue – infringement on Abkhaz cultural rights

Issue – response to infringement on Abkhaz cultural rights

Georgianization cut to the core of the Abkhaz self-determination concerns and preservation of the Abkhaz identity and “aroused in the Abkhaz [a] fear of extinction as an ethnic group, through forced assimilation” (Nodia, 1998: 22). “Infringement by Georgia,” an Abkhaz activist says, “was all the more painful as it related to our identity and rejection of an independent political and cultural history” (Interview 132, 6 December, 2011). The Abkhaz felt this infringement strongly. Changes in Soviet Abkhazia sharpened the pervasive feeling among the Abkhaz of being a minority in the land they viewed as their own and becoming assimilated as their identity was gradually suppressed. Abkhaz men and women, both engaged in mobilization and not, strongly support these fears: “they wanted to eradicate the Abkhaz completely—the schools, the language... There was no life for the Abkhaz” (Interview 86, 17 November, 2011); “they wanted to take everything away from us, from our language to being hosts on our land” (Interview 65, 9 November, 2011); “Georgia’s goal was to eliminate self-conception of the Abkhaz and keep an Abkhaz mass that would eventually dissolve in the Georgian identity. This was frightening” (Interview 132, 6 December, 2011).

The Abkhaz perceive the demographic changes in Soviet Abkhazia as part of this goal. The policy of mass Georgian resettlement, they commonly say, was intended to “Georgianize everyone in Abkhazia” (Interview 92, 18 November, 2011); “flood Abkhazia with Georgians” (Interview 58, 9 November, 2011); “mix everyone up and assimilate [the Abkhaz]” (Interview 72, 11 November, 2011). As noted earlier, these changes produced a concentration of the Abkhaz in the villages and created difficulties in preserving the Abkhaz identity in the cities. “As a child,” an Abkhaz historian recalls, “I went from the village where I lived among the Abkhaz to the city... [W]e were the only Abkhaz family [there]... I partially lost my native language” (Interview 84, 16 November, 2011).

The topic of language is one of the core recurrent themes in the discussion of inter-group relations in Abkhazia. Along with Georgian resettlement, changes in the language use are seen as

a central means of the Georgianization of Abkhazia. The closing of Abkhaz schools and language reform are among the early policies leading to a loss of the native language by a generation of the Abkhaz. “I learned Georgian in childhood,” an Abkhaz senior recollects, “We were not allowed to learn Abkhaz” (Interview 105, 23 November, 2011). Younger Abkhaz respondents confirm: “My mother was forcefully prohibited from speaking Abkhaz when Stalin was in power” (Interview 98, 19 November, 2011); “Even when Stalin was gone in the 1950s, they wanted to completely remove written Abkhaz language” (Interview 65, 9 November, 2011). Opposition to language assimilation was punished. “If children refused studying in Georgian,” an Abkhaz mother explains, “they were placed on peas in the corner [of the classroom in punishment]” (Interview 65, 9 November, 2011). Hence, the Abkhaz say, “Our language was being destroyed” (Interview 124, 30 November, 2011).

As a result of these reforms at the macro, state level, “the Abkhaz language was driven out [and p]eople were ashamed, afraid speak it” (Interview 72, 11 November, 2011).<sup>137</sup> Language use gradually became a major factor in daily inter-group relations. My interviews strongly support this: “Every year I felt the strengthening of the demographic pressure. The Georgian language was more heard on the streets, everything was going toward our assimilation” (Interview 107, 25 November, 2011); “In the late 1980s-1990s, you could not shop in stores if you did not know Georgian. “We will serve you [only] if you speak Georgian,” saleswomen said” (Interview 15, 1 November, 2011); “they always complained as to why we did not speak Georgian” (Interview 50, 4 November, 2011). These encounters produced a deep-seated sense of hatred by the Abkhaz toward Georgians. “They implanted their language, of course, there will be hatred toward them” (Interview 78, 15 November, 2011). The following quote of a regular Abkhaz woman is representative of the Abkhaz responses:

They looked at my last name..., said, “You are Georgian,” and spoke to me in Georgian. I responded that I did not know the language. They replied, “How so if you live in Georgia?” This is where my hatred for these people started (Interview 65, 9 November, 2011).

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<sup>137</sup> With time, “Russian... replac[ed] Georgian... as the second language for the Abkhaz” (Cornell, 2000: 133).

Widespread non-violent and violent everyday inter-group confrontations at the micro level emerged on this basis. Examples of this mobilization repertoire include offensive language use and brawls. As an Abkhaz activist reports, “localized clashes and everyday [fights]... were common... [They] always began with [the question], “Why don’t the Abkhaz know the Georgian language?”” (Interview 58, 9 November, 2011). Most common “were youth clashes,” an Abkhaz teacher says,

We had no right to a voice. A conversation would start at a party and transform into [angry] outbursts. We tried not to talk about politics. Periodically, this question did not let us live, breathe, neither us nor them. They always spoke Georgian that we did not understand. The Abkhaz, too, sang [in Abkhaz] and danced [traditional dances]. This was the grounds for a fight. [As a result, w]e were afraid to speak Abkhaz (Interview 39, 4 November, 2011).

While language use was a ready precept for everyday clashes, inter-group confrontations in Abkhazia went beyond it. At the core they had more profound issues, above all ownership and belonging. As noted above, in the hierarchical Soviet system smaller republics were integrated into larger ones and the doctrine of the friendship of the peoples was meant to produce a sense of shared territory. This served as a basis for different groups residing in Abkhazia to claim ownership of its territory. The study of the origins of the peoples added to the shared understanding among these groups that Abkhazia belongs to them. As Nodia (1998: 27) finds, “[b]oth sides sincerely believed in the fairness of their respective claims, founding them on their visions of history.” “[Georgians] said “This is Georgian land, you have to speak Georgian”,” an Abkhaz activist and journalist tells,

A rector once came in[to a class] and began speaking Georgian. He said we lived in Georgia and had to learn Georgian and so all his lectures would be in Georgian. I stood up and said that “I am not Georgian, I am Abkhaz.” He responded “What are you talking about?! There is no such nation as the Abkhaz!”” (Interview 114, 28 November, 2011).

Such beliefs had acute consequences. Pre-war inter-group violence, an Abkhaz psychologist says,

was not of large scale, but if a parent was afraid of anything, it was that Georgians would offend the Abkhaz or vice versa... Because there were more Georgians, the threat usually came from them. There were fears that there would be a fight based on ethnically related humiliation. It was not that Georgians would come to your home and kill you by lists, but rather on the streets, based on stereotypes, language, history... We shrunk when [Georgian] groups walked around (Interview 132, 6 December, 2011).

Important in this regard were differences perceived by the Abkhaz between Georgians local to Abkhazia and those visiting from Georgia—the latter seen as initiators of conflict—and within the Georgian population of Abkhazia. “Those who were resettled here did not conflict [with us],” the Abkhaz repeat over and over again, “but those who visited from Georgia, we had conflicts with them” (Interview 48, 4 November, 2011); “We always ha[d] clashes when Georgians came. [They] said, “I want to drink for united Georgia.” The Abkhaz heard that and began a fight” (Interview 73, 12 November, 2011); “They also came with posters “Abkhazia is a pearl of the whole of Georgia”” (Interview 28, 2 November, 2011). As a result, “[when a] boat from Georgia brought in Georgian tourists, [all-out] fights [were anticipated at] restaurant[s]” (Interview 7, 27 October, 2011). Local Georgians, in contrast, were seen positively by the Abkhaz. As an Abkhaz official and activist says,

[Everyday f]ights and then armed clashes were mostly brought in by [Georgian] visitors. Locals did not take up arms [before the war], did not get into fights. They lived here, were neighbors. They needed to come to weddings, funerals, birthdays with me. They did not like [confrontations] and blamed the politics of Tbilisi (Interview 137, 7 December, 2011).

Thus, “young people [who] came from Tbilisi in the summer act[ed] disrespectfully in bars, kiosks and often initiated clashes; even local Georgians disliked them” (Interview 27, 2 November, 2011).

Not all locals were attributed to this group. The Abkhaz drew a division between Georgians living in Abkhazia who were moved to Abkhaz settlements in the period of resettlement and those who resettled to the areas where few Abkhaz remained. As an Abkhaz librarian suggests,

[The former] were less aggressive [than those] from the Tsandrypsh zone, [for example,] because there we had completely emptied lands; no Abkhaz lived there. These Georgians were not friends with the Abkhaz. They did not know them and did not want to. Those who lived here for a long time, they had a completely different attitude toward us (Interview 59, 9 November, 2011).

This division vanished with time, however. As the conflict intensified in the late 1980s (discussed below), more and more “local Georgians [began] support[ing] visiting Georgians... Both local and newcomer Georgians were involved in [the conflict then]” (Interview 58, 9 November, 2011).



Thus, while genuine relations of friendship were certainly present between the Abkhaz and Georgian individuals and groups, particularly those embedded in the familial and communal social structures, and on the surface inter-group relations in Abkhazia were overall peaceful, at least until the first violent events of the 1980s, deep-seated problems existed that triggered serious violations of the inter-group norms of friendship and peace on both the informal and formal levels. In general, these norms were upheld as long as political issues, especially those of ownership of and belonging to Abkhazia, were not raised. Interviews across respondent categories support this. For example,

It always related back to political issues. It was difficult to communicate without discussing these issues. I managed to keep neutral only by avoiding these discussions. But throughout our lives, as if we walked parallel streets. As soon as the question of Abkhazia was raised, that was it. Everyday questions vanished. In order to keep our relations, these topics had to be avoided. We lived our lives, Georgians lived theirs (Interview 133, 6 December, 2011).

Political issues, however, persisted in the background and their reinforcement at the micro, meso, and macro levels of the social structure played a critical role in transforming the inter-group norms of friendship and peace and generating the counterpart norms of inter-group conflict and violence.

At the micro level, inter-group prejudice shaped by the different understandings of history and identity of the Abkhaz and Georgian groups in Abkhazia was often passed through the unit of family.<sup>138</sup> “[As] children, we were not educated in the nationalist way,” an Abkhaz journalist says,

We grew up as all other children... There was nothing like “Do not be friends with him [because] he is Georgian...” [but] I know that this was in Georgian families. I was a witness to the following incident. I was on a bus with a group of Georgian children. They switched from Georgian to Russian—[a language understood by all in Abkhazia]—in their childlike chatter. But their mother got up, came up to them, hit one on the head, another, and said in Georgian, “Speak Georgian, do not speak Russian” (Interview 83, 16 November, 2011).

Abkhaz families, too, transmitted a sense of prejudice based on their view of history to the children. “In our family,” an Abkhaz professor confesses, “there was a view that Georgians could do evil, as when Menshevik [Georgia] occupied Abkhazia [in 1918]” (Interview 107, 25 November, 2011).

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<sup>138</sup> On the consequences of inter-group prejudice, see, for example, Canetti-Nisim et al. (2008); Bar-Tal et al. (2007).

These sentiments were brought into collective encounters at the meso level. Socialization into the attitudes of prejudice through the family unit was reflected in the relations among children. “In childhood, I remember,” an Abkhaz man illustrates, “[Georgian children in the neighborhood] said, ‘We will show you! This is not Abkhazia, this is Georgia!’... [And so w]e fought. There were always clashes” (Interview 73, 12 November, 2011). As an Abkhaz teacher confirms, “there were tensions between Georgian and Abkhaz children in schools. They had brawls..., humiliate[d] each other openly, ma[d]e [nasty] statements, even in newspapers” (Interview 61, 9 November, 2011).

Inter-group prejudice was as well spread outside of family. As an Abkhaz professor argues, “there [were] rumors, discussions of certain things on the streets... [exposing] nationalist attitudes” (Interview 129, 5 December, 2011). Hence, a general atmosphere of mistrust existed between the Abkhaz and Georgians. “People communicated... [b]ut there was suspicion and a fence appeared,” an Abkhaz historian reports, “If you were Abkhaz, you said [about your Georgian friends], ‘...[H]e is my friend. But he is of a wrong nationality!’ This was [true of] both sides” (Interview 146, 14 December, 2011). The following quote of an Abkhaz teacher captures the responses on this issue,

on an everyday level, people were friends because people are people. But from the higher level such politics was implanted into Georgians that they... considered themselves white bone, blue blood and often said “You are such a good person. What a pity you are Abkhaz!” (Interview 61, 9 November, 2011).

This atmosphere adversely affected social relations even among the Abkhaz and Georgians embedded in close friendship and neighborhood structures, a strong indicator of the transformation of norms. As the Abkhaz often say, “We were friends with Georgians..., neighbors. But all this was in the air... [as t]hey supported [nationalist] idea[s]” (Interview 131, 6 December, 2011); “This did not prevent me from being friends with Georgians. But [they] had different views... It was all calm, but a division existed in [our] minds” (Interview 107, 25 November, 2011); “My neighbors quietly stopped inviting us to their weddings. They were nationalists” (Interview 19, 1 November, 2011).

The inter-group divide was reflected in informal everyday interactions between the Abkhaz and Georgians. My interviews report ownership and belonging as major dividing issues: “The topic of the Abkhaz-Georgian relations was a taboo. If I said something, my Georgian friend got silent. It touched her” (Interview 19, 1 November, 2011); “My Georgian classmates were good friends. But friendship ended completely once political issues were raised” (Interview 97, 19 November, 2011); “As neighbors, directors, co-workers they were wonderful. But as soon as the topic of nationalism came up, nothing holy remained in them” (Interview 38, 4 November, 2011). This transformation was most evident in the war. As an Abkhaz teacher says with grief, “My husband’s best friend was Georgian. Once the war began, they instantly became enemies” (Interview 39, 4 November, 2011).

The division was as well reinforced on the formal, meso and macro levels. The employment issue was important in this regard. “Some posts were held by the Abkhaz,” an Abkhaz worker says,

But posts were not the issue. The issue was the attitude toward the Abkhaz population and individuals of Abkhaz nationality. When there was competition for positions, if a Georgian showed up, he would be automatically hired (Interview 58, 9 November, 2011).

Inter-group relations in the workspace deteriorated after the violence of the 1980s to the extent that macro-level institutions split into two camps. This societal polarization is the strongest indicator of the transformation of inter-group norms. Abkhaz workers, especially in the cities, repeatedly say:

Our team split... Georgians and Mingrels paired up and all the rest—[the Abkhaz, Greeks, Armenians, Russians]—were in the opposite camp... All of a sudden, women co-workers started speaking Georgian to me... If before we had been close with Georgian girls in the brigade, we now had a coldness between us (Interview 103, 23 November, 2011).

The split was visible across the society: “teams, hospitals, kindergartens in 1989” (Interview 129, 5 December, 2011). It was mostly pronounced in the Abkhaz State University, a catalyst issue for the first violence events of the late 1980s (discussed in Chapter 4). As a former Abkhaz professor says,

Since 1989, the university split... Our department split. Half of professors in philosophy were Georgian and went to their sector. We tried convincing them that it was wrong to cut while it’s fresh, cut the university team by ethnicity (Interview 110, 26 November, 2011).

The norms of friendship and peace thus underlay inter-group relations, until their violations became normalized, most importantly, in response to first violence. This transition corresponded to changes in the political opportunity structure and Abkhaz and Georgian mobilization in the 1980s. The following section discusses these factors, especially their Abkhaz side, as it turns to the second dimension of the latent normative framework—emergent understandings of history and identity.

### **3.2 Dimension Two: Emergent Understandings of History and Identity**

Emergent understandings of history and identity are closely linked to basic intra- and inter-group norms and social relations discussed in the previous section. The transformation of the inter-group norms of friendship and peace, for instance, was tied to the shifting understandings of history and identity, above all ownership and belonging, by the Abkhaz and Georgians. In contrast to these generally enduring norms and social relations, which undergo dramatic changes only as a result of major societal shocks, such as events of inter-group violence, emergent understandings of history and identity are subjected to continuous transformation in the course of mobilization. This section traces the transformation of this second dimension of the latent normative framework in interaction with changes in the political opportunity structure and Georgian counter-mobilization in Abkhazia.

To trace changes in Abkhaz emergent understandings, I need to look at public repertoires of mobilization, beyond micro-level everyday resistance discussed above (Tilly, 1978: 152).<sup>139</sup> Two such repertoires dominated—letter writing and public gatherings (see Table 7 above). Most public mobilization was repressed in the Soviet period.<sup>140</sup> The Soviet state hierarchy established a double-tier mechanism of appeal to the state, with the Soviet center as the main arbiter (Coppieters, 2002; Hewitt, 1993). In this context, letter writing to the center emerged as a central Abkhaz repertoire.

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<sup>139</sup> “Repertoires” are best understood as forms of action. See also Tarrow (1998: 20-21, 30-42); Tilly (2003: 45); Della Porta (2013: 15). On the application of the concept to the area of civil war, see Wood (2008); Hoover Green (2011).

<sup>140</sup> This is particularly true of the early decades of the Soviet Union characterized by the leadership of Stalin and Beria. On the importance of political opportunities for the repertoire availability, see Tarrow (1998); Della Porta (2008: 223).

As the totalitarian checks loosened with the deaths in 1953 of Stalin and Beria, the principal figures behind the policy of mass repression in the Soviet Union, public gatherings—a traditional form of mobilization by the Abkhaz—once again became available and pursued by the Abkhaz on a regular basis (1931, 1957, 1967, 1978, and the late 1980s). Public mobilization became especially widespread with Gorbachev’s *perestroika* reforms, of which the *glasnost* policy “created a public sphere where political ambitions could be voiced and... national movements [could form],” and a resultant upsurge of Georgian mobilization in Abkhazia in the 1980s (Zurcher et al., 2005: 261).<sup>141</sup>

Hence, two types of political contention with participation of the elite and the public at the meso level—the Abkhaz letters to Moscow and corresponding public mobilization events—can be used to trace the transformation of the emergent understandings of history and identity among the Abkhaz. Table 10 (below) charts the evolution of claims in the Abkhaz letters and public gatherings in the Soviet period. It isolates the focal letters and mobilization events along with the shifts in the core issues raised by the Abkhaz social and political elite. The issues were drawn from the history of the Georgian-Abkhaz relations discussed above, but were emphasized differently depending on the openness of the Soviet system at a particular point in time. Three dominant themes emerged in the process of mobilization by the Abkhaz. These include the wrongs of the Georgianization policy following the 1931 status change, the historiography reducing the Abkhaz status as a titular nation, and, lastly, the restoration of an independent status of Abkhazia. Most letters and public gatherings were followed by repression. The authors and initiators were arrested, laid off, and dismissed from the Communist Party—a consequential punishment in the Soviet Union. The letters were criticized as nationalist—a taboo issue up until the *perestroika* period—and often forwarded to the Georgian republican center, Tbilisi, for further consideration, which meant little remedial action in response. Some efforts by the Abkhaz, however, achieved positive results noted as “Outcome” in the Table.

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<sup>141</sup> On *perestroika*, see also Beissinger (2002); Cornell (2000); Coppieters (1996); Nodia and Scholtbach (2006).

Table 10. Issues in Abkhaz Letters and Mobilization Events<sup>142</sup>

Letters/Issues	1918 GDR control	1921- 1931 Status change	Topo- nymy	Language (alphabet, etc.)	Abkhaz school closure	Univer- sity	Cad- res	Political represen- tation	Demography (resettle- ment)	Repres- sion	Historiogra- phy (ethnic territorial belonging)	Media	Culture (literature, music, art, theater)	Economy	Status change
1921a		■													
1935			■												
1947			•	•	■	•	•	•	•			•	•		
1952				•	■	•	•					•	•		
1953										■					
<b>Outcome:</b> Abkhaz schools reopened; new Russian-based alphabet introduced; mass lay offs of non-Georgian personnel stopped (related to Central Committee resolution on Beria as a public enemy).															
1954a,b				•	•	•	•	•	•			•	■	•	•
1956			■												
<b>Outcome:</b> Resolution of the Presidium of the Central Committee of 10 July, 1956, "On the errors and shortcomings in the work of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia."															
1957a			•	•		•	•	■	•				•	•	
1957b			•		•	•	•				■	•	•	•	
<b>Outcome:</b> Resolution of the Bureau of the Central Committee of Communist Party of Georgia from April 12, 1957 "On the wrong debate in "Mnatobi" on P. Ingorokva's "George Merchule."															
1965											■				
1967	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		■	•	•	•	•
1977a	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	■	•	•	•	•
1977b							•		■						
1977c											■				
1978	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	■	■	•	•	•	•
<b>Outcome:</b> Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from July 1, 1978, "On the future development of the economy and culture of the Abkhaz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic" (economic assistance to Abkhazia in the amount of 500 million rubles, Resolution of 5 February 1979 on the organization of Sukhumi State University, Abkhaz television broadcast, print press in the Abkhaz language); similar Resolution by the Central Committee of Communist Party of Georgia, Resolution "On Wrong Actions" cancelled (authors of the letter have been restored to their positions and membership in the Communist Party), Toponymy commission created, etc.															
1983		•	•	•	•						■		•		
1985	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	■
1988	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	■
1989a	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•		•	•	■
1989b	•	•	•	•	•			•	•	•	•	•			■
1989-90										■					
<b>Outcome:</b> High Council of Abkhazia August 25, 1990, decrees "On the state sovereignty of the Abkhazian Soviet Socialist Republic" and "On the legal safeguards for the protection of statehood of Abkhazia"; July 23, 1992, restoration of the 1925 Constitution of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia in place of the 1978 Constitution of the Abkhaz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.															

• – issue present      ■ – central issue      1900 – major letter      1900 – major letter and mobilization event

<sup>142</sup> See Appendix G for a concise chronology of Abkhaz mobilization.

In the early decades of the Soviet Union, Abkhaz mobilization was infrequent. 1921 was marked by the incorporation of Abkhazia into the Soviet Union as a Soviet Socialist Republic, but attempts to reduce this status began immediately. While the Abkhaz revolutionary leadership sent letters to Moscow on the maintenance of the republican status and direct incorporation of Abkhazia into the Soviet Union, on 16 November, the Caucasian Bureau issued a decision on “the economic and political inexpediency of the existence of independent Abkhazia.”<sup>143</sup> The Union Treaty linking Abkhazia to Georgia was signed a month later and the status of Abkhazia was reduced to a “Union Republic” and, subsequently, an Autonomous Republic (Bgazhba and Lakoba, 2007: 318-322). In response, over 20,000 Abkhaz gathered to protest the status change in 1931—without success.

The Abkhaz letters thereafter focused on reverting the policies in the cultural realm viewed as part of the Georgianization of Abkhazia. In particular, the Abkhaz leadership and intellectuals tackled the toponymy, language, and school reforms. These issues were at the core of mobilization in the 1930s-1950s—a period of high totalitarian control, when letter writing remained the primary mobilization repertoire for the Abkhaz. In this context, the letters were framed within the Leninist-Stalinist ideology. They opened by praising the Soviet national politics and described the problems in Abkhazia as their perversion (Maryhuba, 1994: 9-10). Their authors, however, were repressed.

With Stalin’s and Beria’s deaths in 1953, an opening was created for broader mobilization. The Abkhaz letters addressed the repression of Abkhaz activists and blamed Beria for the problems in Abkhazia. Abkhaz schools were reopened, among other successes of this period of mobilization. Problems, however, remained and, for the first time, the Abkhaz brought up a possibility of leaving the structure of Georgia. “Many see a solution in the incorporation of Abkhazia into the RSFSR,” a prominent Abkhaz writer wrote to the Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1954.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> This and other documents of the period are available in Maryhuba (1994); Kacharava (1959).

<sup>144</sup> Letter “On the Impediments to Further Development of Abkhaz Culture, Education” in Maryhuba (1994: 110).

A shift in the focus of the Abkhaz letters and public mobilization emerged in the late 1950s in response to further developments in the Georgian-Abkhaz relations. The publishing in 1954 of Ingorokva's aforementioned book on the origins of the peoples inhabiting Abkhazia created a fury among the Abkhaz elite and populace. "Even during Beria's time the autochthony (aboriginal[ity]) of the Abkhazian people on the territory of Abkhazia," an Abkhaz activist and historian says, "was never disputed" (Maryhuba, 1993: 16).<sup>145</sup> As Coppieters (2002: 93) succinctly explains,

[Ingorokva] denied that the Abkhazian community was indigenous to the region. In his view, they had migrated from the Northern Caucasus to Abkhazia in the seventeenth century, taking over the ethnonym of the 'real' Abkhazians, while these 'real' Abkhazians, as depicted in ancient sources, were in fact Georgians.

Not surprisingly, the Abkhaz reacted with the demands in the letters and mass Abkhaz gatherings to banish this and other pseudo-scientific writings on the origins of the peoples of Abkhazia. The participants were once again repressed. "I was on the lists since 1957," an Abkhaz writer says, "In the 1960s, my story book was prohibited [from publication]" (Interview 124, 30 November, 2011).

Yet, "Every ten years after that there was unrest," an Abkhaz teacher recalls (Interview 61, 9 November, 2011). The issue of historiography dominated Abkhaz mobilization in the 1960s and 1970s (Lezhava, 1997: 193). Other problems rooted in the Georgianization of Abkhazia were raised in relation to the falsification of history. In the late 1960s, however, the core issue of Abkhazia's status emerged in the Abkhaz letters. The 1967 letter said, "Abkhazia can no longer remain within the Georgian SSR on an autonomous basis."<sup>146</sup> As an activist who participated in the events argues,

For the first time the people said we could not live in the same state. We held a gathering with Tamara Shakryl [and] wrote a letter to the Central Committee of the Communist Party. There were consultations [in the Philharmonic Theatre], but the people and the government did not find a common language. On April 7, 1967, the letter was read to the people. We sent it to Moscow with a delegation [thereafter] (Interview 124, 30 November, 2011).<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> In the Big Soviet Encyclopaedia of 1949, for example, the Abkhaz are "a people comprising the basic population... [and] ancient inhabitants of this part of the Caucasian Black Sea coast area" (Maryhuba, 1993: 16).

<sup>146</sup> See Letter of "eight" in Maryhuba (1994: 159-163).

<sup>147</sup> For a detailed roundtable discussion, memoirs, and documents on the event, see Kvarchija (2011: 129-158).



The foundation of what later became “the Abkhaz national movement” formed at that time (Maryhuba, 2000: 68). As one of the earliest Abkhaz activists writes in his memoirs, “[t]he years of 1967-1992 stand out as the time of the most organized mass struggle of the Abkhaz people for their rights and the restoration of their own state” (Kvarchija, 2011: 1). The Pitsunda literary club<sup>148</sup> was one cell of the emergent movement, whose participants discussed the long-standing problems in Abkhazia and distributed the information to the Abkhaz populace, first, in the Gagra region and, later, throughout Abkhazia, through leaflets and other information channels. Their first leaflet read,

If you do not open your eyes, you will die... We are not the hosts of our motherland... Our goal [is to] protect the Abkhaz motherland!!! That who deems himself Abkhaz will support us! ... Behind these leaflets are people willing to sacrifice their lives to save [Abkhazia]... Read, pass [them]... to those you consider the Abkhaz patriots (Maryhuba, 2000: 70-71).

Along with the leaflets, Abkhaz activists crossed out signs (city, street, and shop names) in Georgian and painted over Abkhaz inscriptions, e.g. Gagrypsh instead of Gagrypshi (Maryhuba, 2000: 73-74). “We were persecuted for that,” a participant says (Interview 66, 9 November, 2011). Indeed, suspects were detained, but then released following Abkhaz protests, which led to the 1967 letter. Thus “the Abkhaz [began] mobilization for self-determination” (Interview 21, 2 November, 2011). “The central government suppressed, repressed it. In the 1950s, such statements could not be made. And there was not anyone to make them. The intelligentsia was eliminated in the 1940s” (Interview 126, 1 December, 2011). As a result, in the 1960s-1970s, an Abkhaz activist sums up,

it started underground. But what was growing was revolts, people’s gatherings... [which] produced letters to the Central Committee. Not every people went so far as to do this. After this, there was experience, and we could work openly (Interview 15, 1 November, 2011).

Great pride was associated with this awakening. As an activist says, “I participated in the formation of the Abkhaz society” (Interview 66, 9 November, 2011). “Can you imagine?! A small nation like the Abkhaz was destroying the Soviet ideology from the inside” (Interview 15, 1 November, 2011).

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<sup>148</sup> The Abkhaz movement began as a student movement that was later led by elder activists (Kvarchija, 2011: 129).

Mobilization efforts, however, produced meager results. As an Abkhaz activist remembers, “After each unrest a special ruling was passed on the development of [Abkhazia and] fooled people by making concessions, such as building roads,” instead of true change (Interview 15, 1 November, 2011). “The demands were implemented only partially” (Interview 84, 16 November, 2011). In 1957, for example, a resolution was passed in Georgia blaming the revival of Ingorokva’s theory. Other problems were left untouched, while the Georgian-Abkhaz tensions intensified in Abkhazia.

Hence, the Abkhaz continued to mobilize. By the late 1970s, a dominant discourse on the Abkhaz history and identity emerged. The letter of “a hundred and thirty” of 1977 and mass public gatherings, including an Abkhaz plebiscite and boycott, incorporated a comprehensive set of issues addressed throughout the history of mobilization by the Abkhaz.<sup>149</sup> The Abkhaz raised the issues of the infringement of the rights of the Abkhaz by Menshevik Georgia; formation of the sovereign and independent republic of Abkhazia in 1921, followed by the 1931 status change, repression of the Abkhaz intelligentsia and educated peasants, mass resettlement of Georgians to Abkhazia, and the toponymy, language, and school reforms; historic falsification; underrepresentation of Abkhaz cadres, including in the political bodies; and deficiency of educational institutions to prepare such cadres. The letter described these problems as part of the “disproportionate” economic and cultural development of Abkhazia and concluded that “at present the situation that developed in Abkhazia requires radical measures for its resolution.”<sup>150</sup> Echoing the 1921 appeal of the Abkhaz leadership, the letter suggested the incorporation of Abkhazia into the Russian Federation and formation of a governmental commission to discuss the letter. A process of repression and mobilization followed. The mass Abkhaz unrest in response to repression paralyzed Abkhazia and forced changes, among others, the opening of the Sukhumi State University, Abkhaz television broadcast, and print press.

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<sup>149</sup> For speeches made in public gatherings and documents related to the event, see Maryhuba (2003).

<sup>150</sup> Letter of “a hundred and thirty” in Maryhuba (1994: 164-186). For a discussion, see Lezhava (1997: 193-212).

The final stage in the transformation of the emergent understandings of history and identity in Abkhazia took place in the 1980s. Whereas prior to that, the Abkhaz developed a comprehensive set of issues they posed in their mobilization efforts and offered the status change as one potential solution, in the 1980s status change became the core issue of the Abkhaz mobilization—an answer to all historical injustices jointly felt and perceived by the Abkhaz. As an Abkhaz activist explains,

People were dissatisfied with the existing system of rule, particularly the prohibition to use the native language, negative attitude toward traditions, suppression of development in the scientific or cultural life... How could [we] develop further after that? ... Thus the decision was made to go for independence... [and] build a state (Interview 129, 5 December, 2011).

Indeed, the Abkhaz letters and public mobilization of the 1980s openly voiced the wish of the Abkhaz people to change Abkhazia's status. The Gorbachev *perestroika* made it possible. As an Abkhaz activist confirms, "What helped then was Gorbachev's changes, reforms" (Interview 15, 1 November, 2011). Yet, in contrast to the earlier appeals to incorporate Abkhazia into the Russian Federation, the letters of the 1980s sought the restoration of the Abkhaz Soviet Socialist Republic. The letter of 1985 was the first to call to "re-establish Abkhazia as the Abkhaz SSR, which it used to be until 1931."<sup>151</sup> The 1988 letter requested "the revision of [the] provision for the withdrawal of the Abkhaz ASSR from the Georgian SSR and the return of the status of the SSR to Abkhazia."<sup>152</sup> Finally, the 30,000 all-Abkhaz Lykhny plebiscite of 18 March, 1989, including the elite and public, pleaded in its 1989 letter to "restore the status of the SSR of Abkhazia, as proclaimed in 1921."<sup>153</sup> *This event was the apogee in the formation of the Abkhaz national movement and the shaping of the emergent understandings of history and identity in Abkhazia.* "All Abkhaz letters prior to the 1989 letter are a prologue," an Abkhaz activist and historian argues, "[a part of] gradual crystallization of key ideas and program goals of the Abkhaz national movement" (Maryhuba, 1994: 12).

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<sup>151</sup> Letter to the XVII Congress of the Communist Party in Maryhuba (1994: 374-382).

<sup>152</sup> Letter of "sixty" to the XIX All-Union Party Conference in Maryhuba (1994: 383-439).

<sup>153</sup> All-Abkhaz plebiscite of 1989 in Maryhuba (1994: 450-462). The plebiscite is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

An analysis of pre-war mobilization, norms, and social relations in Abkhazia is incomplete without in-depth discussion of the events of the late 1980s. These events, especially the first inter-group violence, were critical for generating a deep sense of cohesion among the Abkhaz. Chapter 4 thus focuses on these events. Here, it is important to stress the changing character of the emergent understandings of history and identity among the Abkhaz throughout the process of mobilization.

The argument that develops from the discussion of the Abkhaz pre-war mobilization is that the Abkhaz understandings of history and identity were not fixed or pre-set as invariably separatist, but rather were shaped in the process of mobilization by the Abkhaz in interaction with the external factors. Table 11 (below) summarizes the core issues raised by the Abkhaz in the Soviet period and shows the changes in these issues through time. It demonstrates that the major issues addressed by the Abkhaz moved from the policies of Georgianization in the cultural realm (toponymy, language, and school reforms) to the falsification of history to status change. Even within the issue of status change, the Abkhaz sought different outcomes at different points in time. While the early Abkhaz demands included greater cultural autonomy, to counter the Georgianization policies, the Abkhaz sought incorporation into the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic with a relative political opening in the Soviet system after Stalin's and Beria's deaths, and it was not until the Gorbachev's reforms that the Abkhaz were able and willing to demand the restoration of the independent status.

Table 11. Major Issues Status and Demands in Key Abkhaz Letters

<b>Year/Issue</b>	1947	1952	1954	1957	1967	1977	1978	1988	1989
<b>Major Issue</b>	Georgianization policies				Historiography			Status change	
<b>Status Demand</b>	Greater cultural autonomy				Incorporation into RSFSR			Restoration of SSR status	

These different interpretations of history and identity, along with the intra- and inter-group norms discussed in the previous section, shaped a range of prescribed action for the Abkhaz. Given the gradually crystallizing perception among the Abkhaz of the historical injustices perpetrated by Georgia against the Abkhaz, including by the use of the Georgian population resettled to Abkhazia, and the intensifying tensions in everyday relations between the Abkhaz and Georgians, the actions of the Abkhaz were often one-sided. By the end of the 1970s the Abkhaz gained overrepresentation in the leadership positions with the concessions granted by the central and republican governments. As Lezhava (1997: 206) argues, “the Abkhaz were appointed to all leadership positions and their number soon exceeded 70%. 16% of the population of the autonomous republic had discriminated against the majority.” As an Abkhaz activist says, “In 1978 there was a minor information war. We were blamed for having too many privileges” (Interview 81, 15 November, 2011).

The wide dissemination and contribution by the Abkhaz to the writing of the Abkhaz letters and other mobilization efforts and the legitimization of the Abkhaz claims and demands by Moscow and Tbilisi’s concessions created a sense of justice of actions in support for the Abkhaz cause. The intra-Abkhaz norms of reciprocity, honor, and patriotism, among others, the inter-group norms of conflict and violence, and an understanding of Abkhaz history and identity as unjustly suppressed led ordinary people to participate in the mobilization events. The following quote captures it well,

I did not participate in the writing of the letters. [But i]n 1977 I participated in [the] strike. I... knew history... [W]hen the strike was announced, I did not go to work and wrote an explanation letter [where] I said that I was in solidarity with my people... My administrator [responded]... “Write [that] you got sick.” I rejected (Interview 59, 9 November, 2011).

Those actively involved in the emergent Abkhaz movement saw it as the duty to defend their view of history through mobilization. “Our intelligentsia [wrote] letters,” an Abkhaz activist explains,

They were punished... We defended them and demanded that they were returned to their positions and that questions they rose be addressed... My mother said “You will be jailed, killed...” I responded “I can die for the national idea” (Interview 114, 28 November, 2011).

As another Abkhaz says talking about his mobilization efforts and commending a fellow activist,

She did this out of her heart. We were not paid for that. When there were elections, we had to advance our people so that the Abkhaz did not turn out as a minority. This required work with the people. We had to go into the masses (Interview 85, 16 November, 2011).

While these seemingly virtuous actions were perceived as solidary, honorable, and patriotic among the Abkhaz, they neglected the Georgian population of Abkhazia. The strengthening of the sense of justice of their cause led to extreme actions by the Abkhaz. For example, the letter of 1980 sent by 338 Georgian residents of Abkhazia to the XXVI Congress of the Communist Party argues that “[Georgian] monuments were being destroyed [in Abkhazia]... for the purpose of humiliation of the national dignity of the Georgian people.”<sup>154</sup> As an Abkhaz activist confirms with pride,

The Bzyb Bridge toward the Riza Lake, they... put the Leselidze memorial there.<sup>155</sup> This touched us strongly... We had an artist in the group who wrote “Here passed the Menshevik forces led by Leselidze” and put that up. There was so much noise because of that. But then we protected this memorial...<sup>156</sup> We defended this issue (Interview 64, 9 November, 2011).

More direct forms of confrontation were present as well. Abkhaz-organized gatherings had signs and slogans, “Georgians, get out of Abkhazia!” or “Whose hands are you in, poor Abkhazia?”; attacks on individual Georgians by Abkhaz nationalists appeared in the 1970s-1980s, to the extent that Georgians wrote letters to Georgian authorities seeking protection from the Abkhaz (Lezhava, 1997: 205-206). Georgian counter-mobilization in Abkhazia and Georgia followed.<sup>157</sup> In 1989, the Abkhaz goal to separate from Georgia and tensions in Abkhazia led to the utmost pre-war hostility, first mass inter-group violence events (discussed in Chapter 4). As Nodia (1998: 27) rightly argues,

It was taken for granted that the wish of the Abkhaz ethnic community could be presented as the wish of Abkhazia because, whatever the current ethno-demographic situation, the historical rights of the Abkhaz community [were understood as needing to] take precedence over the will of the total population of the territory called “Abkhazia.”

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<sup>154</sup> Excerpts from the letter are available in Lezhava (1997: 203-206).

<sup>155</sup> The monument was in the memory of heroes of the Second World War. What concerned Abkhaz activists was that it listed the Georgian general K. Leselidze following the Soviet commander of the 46<sup>th</sup> army (Lezhava, 1997: 207).

<sup>156</sup> A number of armed Abkhaz men guarded it (Lezhava, 1997: 207).

<sup>157</sup> Georgian counter-mobilization began in the 1980s. This aspect of the conflict is briefly discussed in Chapter 4.

### 3.3 Summary of Findings

This chapter established the normative and social basis of Abkhaz mobilization by looking at formation and transformation of the latent normative framework for action in the pre-war period. In the first dimension of the framework, I identified two sets of norms critical for our understanding of Abkhaz mobilization. These include the intra-Abkhaz norms of *Apsuara*, i.e. the general norms of reciprocity, conformity to custom, and honor and the mobilization-specific norms of patriotism, heroism, and masculinity, as well as the inter-group—Georgian-Abkhaz—norms of friendship and peace and their violations-induced counterparts, the norms of inter-group conflict and violence.

The intra-Abkhaz norms evolved in response to the environmental and historical processes, above all history of conflict in Abkhazia, which produced recurrent changes in Abkhazia's political status, demographic composition, and opportunities by the Abkhaz to exercise political, economic, and, most importantly in the Soviet context, cultural rights. Especially significant in this regard are the norms of patriotism, heroism, and masculinity that evolved in the course of mobilization. These norms will be critical to the analysis of mobilization at the civil war onset stage and beyond. As an active member of the *Aidgylara* organization in the pre-war period sums up the Abkhaz responses, “*Apsuara* was the basis—faith, relation to everything, the code of conduct... The national idea was already in place, there was no need to create [a new] one” (Interview 20, 2 November, 2011).

The inter-group norms developed over the Soviet period so as to incorporate two seemingly contradictory sets—friendship and peace, and conflict and violence. In contrast to descriptions of inter-group relations in civil war contexts as either peaceful or conflictual, these norms co-existed to a different extent in Abkhazia, depending on the level of intensity of the conflict. As micro-level everyday inter-group confrontations became normalized, the first events of public violence served as the breaking point shifting the inter-group norms toward the antagonistic end of the continuum. The following quote of an Abkhaz psychologist and *Aidgylara* member summarizes the situation:

We had no unity... Important themes for the people were never discussed with Georgians. On the surface it was calm... But inside, speaking about... historical memory or national values, there wasn't anything shared. There was peaceful co-existence but there was always a feeling of two camps. This did not just happen in 1989. There were also events of 1947, 1967, 1978. We could mourn or celebrate together in everyday life. But what concerned us separated us. We were not a single social organism (Interview 132, 6 December, 2011).

Along with these underlying norms and social relations, I analyzed the second dimension of the latent normative framework—emergent understandings of history and identity. I found that this dimension evolved in the course of mobilization, reflected in Abkhaz letters and public gatherings and secondary repertoires, such as distribution of leaflets. Abkhaz leaders in collaboration with the populace gradually developed a comprehensive set of issues in historical memory in reaction to the openings in the Soviet system and Georgian counter-mobilization, to arrive at the dominant shared discourse on the history of injustices committed against the Abkhaz and its ultimate remedy—the separation from Georgia. Achugba (2010: 256-257) encapsulates the Abkhaz position:

The Abkhaz intelligentsia with active support of the entire Abkhaz people... defended the indigenous ethnic group against Georgia's deliberate assimilation policies... Actions of the Abkhaz in 1957, 1965, 1967, 1978-1980, 1989 were unprecedented in the Soviet period... Ending of demographic expansion of Georgians in Abkhazia, protection of ethnic Abkhaz history, restoration of the native Abkhaz toponymy, preparation of Abkhaz national cadres, ... liberation of Abkhazia from Georgia's dictatorship—this is an incomplete list of issues raised by the Abkhaz intelligentsia before the central authorities of the Soviet Union.

This emergent understanding of history and identity as posed against Georgian assimilation and the basic intra- and inter-group norms and social relations in Abkhazia served as the foundation for the perception of appropriate subsequent action by the Abkhaz—the third part of the normative framework. Righteous from the Abkhaz perspective, the range of actions in support of the Abkhaz cause were detrimental to the Georgian population of Abkhazia, leading to an upsurge in Georgian counter-mobilization in Georgia and Abkhazia. One outcome of these mobilization efforts was the inter-group violence of the late 1980s, critical for the pre-war consolidation of the latent normative framework for action among the Abkhaz. These events are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.



## Chapter 4: Pre-War Mobilization and Violence Onset

The conflict was unavoidable because each side had a radically different answer to the fundamental question: “What is Abkhazia?” For the Georgians, the answer was clear: “Abkhazia is Georgia”... For the Abkhaz side it was equally clear that this answer was wrong. “Abkhazia is Abkhazia.”

- Ghia Nodia (1998: 24)

[T]he events leading up to, during, and following the clashes of 1989 have produced a unique and impressive solidarity among the entire [Abkhaz] nation from its humblest to its most eminent representative.

- George Hewitt (1996: 207)

This chapter seeks to examine whether and how pre-war inter-group violence is important for our understanding of civil war. I extend the analysis in Chapter 3 of latent normative framework transformation by placing the first puzzle of the dissertation—mobilization for pre-war inter-group violence despite state repression and inter-group opposition—in the activation mechanism. I look at the events of Georgian-Abkhaz violence in Abkhazia in the late 1980s to assess the assumptions on the role of pre-war violence in the civil war literature and advance two sets of arguments. First, I argue that pre-war violence should not be automatically seen as part of conflict escalation to war. In the Abkhaz case, the events of inter-group violence of the late 1980s were related to the civil war of 1992-1993, but were isolated. Pre-war violence was an internal, micro- and meso-level process, with a dynamic of its own, whereas the conflict escalated to war at the macro, state level. Second, I argue that pre-war violence can be important for our understanding of civil war beyond the logic of escalation: It can radically transform the latent normative framework for action in the first phase of the activation mechanism by consolidating its dimensions and deepening the intra-group cohesion. The next sections demonstrate these arguments. Using the fieldwork materials outlined in Chapter 3 (p. 82), I situate the puzzle in the literature and trace the events of pre-war inter-group violence in Abkhazia in the late 1980s and macro-level escalation dynamics following these events. Chapter 5 then looks at the second, activation phase of the mechanism at the stage of civil war onset in 1992.

## 4.1 Pre-War Violence in Civil War Research

Chapter 3 discussed the importance of non-violent pre-war mobilization by the Abkhaz for transformation of the latent normative framework for action in the first phase of the mechanism. As Kalyvas and Sambanis (2005: 191-192) find, while civil war studies “privilege acts of violence..., nonviolent acts... may be essential in understanding the occurrence of violence.”<sup>158</sup> Here I turn to pre-war violence. I argue that a deep understanding of its patterns and corresponding mobilization dynamics is indispensable for our understanding of civil war. As Davenport et al. (2008: 8) say,

Active rebels recruit before civil war, practicing rebels instigate others to protest before civil war, experienced rebels attack authorities... Indeed, what is most important about the diverse insurgent strategies mentioned above is that in every case, pre-civil war behavior (below the threshold of civil war) is... important for understanding latter conflict behavior.

Studies of civil war, however, have overwhelmingly focused on violence *in* civil war, separating it from the pre- and post-war dynamics (see Ch. 2: 43-46). In consequence, pre-war violence and the processes it is intertwined with have not been systematically examined in the civil war literature.<sup>159</sup>

Where pre-war violence has been given consideration, it has been placed in the framework of escalation.<sup>160</sup> Namely, an assumption has been made that pre-war violence serves as an indicator of the escalation of conflict to war. This assumption has been common in the research on Abkhazia. Cornell (2000: 151), for example, characterizes the events starting in the 1980s in Abkhazia as part of the process of Georgia’s “escalation of tension with the minorities.” Coppieters (2002: 99) finds that “[t]he events leading up to the [Georgian-Abkhaz] war of 1992-93 were to follow one another at high speed.” It is unclear, however, what escalation means—a trajectory to war? It is, moreover, unclear what escalates in the ostensible lead up to the war—non-violent political conflict or events of violence? With these questions unanswered, confusion remains as to the process of escalation.

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<sup>158</sup> On non-violent mobilization, see also Petersen (2001); Chenoweth and Cunningham (2013); Pearlman (2011).

<sup>159</sup> The social movement literature explores aspects of pre-war violence. See, for example, McAdam et al. (2001).

<sup>160</sup> Lawrence (2010) is a notable exception. Recent studies of escalation include Lichbach et al. (2004); Sambanis and Zinn (2005); Collier and Sambanis (2005); Davenport et al. (2008). For earlier work, see, e.g., Lichbach (1987).

“Extreme political violence does not occur in a vacuum,” Sambanis and Zinn (2005: 1) say, “What is missing is an explanation of the dynamic process leading up to the war.”<sup>161</sup> Escalation is a multi-layered process characterized by complex causality and varying from case to case. Sambanis (2005: 306), for example, finds that “[a]n accommodative state may prevent conflict escalation into war.” Yet, as we see in the Abkhaz case, the state policy of accommodation did not prevent conflict escalation. Instead, concessions given to the Abkhaz by Moscow and Tbilisi were followed by the strengthening of the Georgian counter-mobilization, which was critical for the onset of inter-group violence in Abkhazia in the late 1980s.<sup>162</sup> With these empirical variations left unexplained, “[t]o date, our understanding of escalation is quite limited; either arguments have been indirectly assessed... or only one type of escalation has been considered” (Davenport et al., 2008: 3).

More importantly, pre-war violence does not always sit comfortably with the chains in the causal logic of the escalation of conflict to war mechanism. Pre-war violence may not be associated with either the overarching conflict or the escalation of conflict to war. On the first point, Kalyvas (2006: 4) finds “a disjunction between the macrolevel causes of the war and the microlevel patterns of violence.”<sup>163</sup> In other words, violence events at the micro level need not correspond to the broader conflict. On the second point, some conflicts where pre-war inter-group violence takes place do not eventually escalate to war, while other civil wars begin absent pre-war violence.<sup>164</sup> Equally, events of pre-war violence do not necessarily lead to further escalation of violence short of war. That is, violence does not automatically “beget violence.”

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<sup>161</sup> Collier and Sambanis (2005) find escalation to be one of the most significant omissions of the quantitative civil war research. “Most civil war models do not explain escalation,” Zinn (2005: 114) argues. Sambanis (2005: 318) concludes that “we must take better account of escalation dynamics... to explain the outbreak of war.”

<sup>162</sup> Similarly, “the effects of countermobilization... led to conflict escalation” in the case of Algeria (Lowi, 2005: 235).

<sup>163</sup> Similarly, Brubaker and Laitin (1998: 426) find that “[w]e lack strong evidence showing that higher levels of conflict (measured independently of violence) lead to higher levels of violence.” This point is evident in the discussion of pre-war micro- and macro-level processes in Abkhazia. See also Kalyvas (2003).

<sup>164</sup> As the Collier and Sambanis (2005) volume shows, “the clashes in Kenya did not escalate to civil war” (Kimenyi and Ngung’u, 2005: 150) just as “there was no escalation to war” in Macedonia (Lund, 2005: 235).

The generic association of pre-war violence with the trajectory of the escalation of conflict to war is thus problematic. It implies a linear and deterministic dynamic from conflict to violence to war, while these processes may have distinctive causes and effects and should not be automatically related or confused for one another. As Lawrence (2010: 145) rightly summarizes,

Conflict need not be violent; violence need not reach the level of war; and the causes of violence may differ from the causes of other forms of conflict... The turn to violence may have little to do with the duration of the conflict, its intensity, or the level of antagonism between the parties to the conflict.

I argue that conflict and violence for these reasons need to be disentangled to understand escalation. Instead of generically labelling pre-war violence events as part of the escalation of conflict to war, the phenomenon of pre-war violence can be seen as an isolated (set of) event(s), be it related to the broader conflict or not. It can as well be conceptualized as a dynamic of its own, parallel to or even separate from the underlying conflict. As Brubaker and Laitin (1998: 426) argue, “[v]iolence is not a quantitative degree of conflict but a qualitative form of conflict, with its own dynamics.”

In the case of Abkhazia, the war of 1992-1993 could theoretically have begun regardless of whether the Georgian-Abkhaz clashes of 1989 had happened. The clashes were an outgrowth of the overall Georgian-Abkhaz conflict discussed in Chapter 3. They were directly related to the distinct understandings of history and identity, with ownership and belonging of the Abkhaz and Georgians in Abkhazia constituting key issues, and the non-violent actions taken by these groups in pursuit of their different positions, that is, the Abkhaz plebiscite of 1989 demanding Abkhazia’s status change and the split of the Georgian sector from the Abkhaz State University. The political conflict indeed escalated after these clashes; yet, no further violence ensued before the onset of the 1992-1993 war.

Pre-war violence was generally an internal, bottom-up, inter-group dynamic triggered from inside Abkhazia by the aforesaid actions of the two sides in the conflict. Participants in the violence included the Abkhaz and Georgians primarily from Abkhazia yet groups from Georgia joined these

events in support of fellow Georgians living in Abkhazia. Their participation was not motivated by macro-, state-level decisions. In contrast, the escalation toward and the Georgian-Abkhaz war itself followed a top-down dynamic. Decisions made by the respective state structures escalated political tensions between Georgia and Abkhazia. The war then was commenced not by groups from inside Abkhazia but rather a decision of the government of Georgia to send Georgia's troops to Abkhazia.

If pre-war violence was not necessary or sufficient for the escalation of conflict to war, why was it significant? The core argument of this chapter is that pre-war violence can be seen as critical not simply for conflict escalation, but also for its ability to transform the norms and social relations underlying the conflict. The inter-group violence events of the late 1980s in Abkhazia, I find, most deeply transformed the latent normative framework for action. It increased intra-Abkhaz cohesion, indicated by the uniting of the Abkhaz population in the general strike after the violent events, and deteriorated inter-group relations, indicated by polarization, or split in the organizations of society, and militarization, or creation of armed groups on both sides in the conflict, following the violence. Sections below focus on the intra-Abkhaz transformation, but note the inter-group changes as well.

## **4.2 Pre-War Violence, Intra-Group Cohesion, and Inter-Group Relations**

Two sets of inter-group violent clashes unfolded in Abkhazia in 1989, despite the continued repression of violent mobilization in the falling Soviet Union (Beissinger, 2002: 328). This section traces the clashes and related mobilization to then demonstrate their impact. Pre-war mobilization in Abkhazia, I find, follows a pattern of action and reaction by the Abkhaz and Georgian groups in the respective national movements. Table 12 (below) captures their claims in the events leading up to the clashes. I identify four stages of mobilization preceding these clashes—movement formation in the late 1980s, the 1989 Lykhny gathering and Abkhaz letter leading to the first set of clashes in April, 1989, Georgia's Independence Day celebration in Abkhazia, and the opening of the Tbilisi branch of the Abkhaz State University triggering the second and largest set of clashes in July, 1989.

Table 12. Georgian-Abkhaz Reactionary Claims (1987-1989)

Stage	Month(s)	Event	Claims
1987			
Movement Formation	April	Creative Youth Union	Social issues; history; Georgian-Abkhaz relations
	Summer-Fall	Formation of national organizations in Georgia	Georgian independence; Anti-Abkhaz; Anti-Russian
1988			
Movement Formation (cont'd)	June	Abkhaz Letter	Anti-Georgian politics; Status
	May	Georgian Student Society Tskhumi	Social issues; history; Georgian-Abkhaz relations
		Abkhaz Student Society Anakopia	Social issues; history; Georgian-Abkhaz relations
	Fall	Protests (in Georgia & Abkhazia)	Georgian independence; Anti-Russian
	Nov	Formation of national organizations in Abkhazia	Georgian independence; Anti-Abkhaz; Anti-Russian
		Formation of Aidgylara	Status
	Dec	(Failed) march into Abkhazia	Georgian independence; Anti-Abkhaz; Anti-Russian
1989			
Lykhny Gathering	Feb	Protests (in Georgia & Abkhazia)	Georgian independence; Anti-Abkhaz; Anti-Russian
	Mar	Lykhny Gathering & Statement	Anti-Georgian politics; Status
	Mar-Apr	Protests (in Georgia & Abkhazia)	Anti-Abkhaz; Against Abkhaz Letter & Lykhny Statement; For Georgian independence; Anti-Russian
Outcome: 1 April clashes			
Georgian Independence Day	May	Independence Day Celebration	For Georgian independence; memory of April 9
		Protest	Anti-Georgian politics
Tbilisi State University	Apr-July	Student protest (in Abkhazia)	University
		Protest	University
Outcome: 15-16 July clashes			

Abkhaz      Georgian

#### 4.2.1 Stage I: Movement Formation

To understand pre-war violence we need to understand the structure of actors engaged in it. This section briefly discusses formation of the Abkhaz and Georgian national movements involved in pre-war mobilization in Abkhazia. I find that the catalyzing events in their formation include the writing of the 1988 Abkhaz letter, which for the first time sought the reestablishment of Abkhazia's republican status, and mass protests for the independence of Georgia from the Soviet Union, which spread in Georgia and Abkhazia after the publication of this letter (Lezhava, 1997: 216-217). These events took place in the context of the falling Soviet Union and reflected the actors' core demands.

Key actors in the Abkhaz movement initially included students and intellectuals, especially those related to the Abkhaz Institute of Language and History. The Pitsunda literary club formed in the late 1960s was a kernel of the emergent Abkhaz national movement. Most movement formation on both sides, however, followed the Gorbachev opening in the Soviet system in the late 1980s. In 1987, a student branch of the Abkhaz movement, the Creative Youth Union (see Table 12), formed in "meetings of creative youth in Pitsunda: artists, writers, scientists" (Interview 140, 13 December, 2011). As its member says, "It was a social organization that dealt with everything from ecology to exposed electricity lines" (Interview 140, 13 December, 2011).<sup>165</sup> In 1988, Abkhaz students of the Abkhaz State University formed a parallel group Anakopia, in response to the creation by Georgian students of the Tskhumi group. The student organizations focused on the Georgian-Abkhaz history and lay at the core of the 1989 clashes around the opening of the Tbilisi branch of the university.<sup>166</sup> By the time of these clashes, they were merged with the broader Abkhaz and Georgian movements, which formed after the writing of the Abkhaz letter calling for Abkhazia's status change in 1988.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> In reporting interview responses, this chapter refers to spontaneous mobilizers as "participants in the events" and organized mobilizers as "activists." If not noted otherwise, the "activist" category includes members of Aidgylara.

<sup>166</sup> See "On results of investigation of events that took place in Sukhumi, other cities and regions of the Abkhaz ASSR 15-16 July 1989" in Sagarija (2002: 188-225). Key documents related to this process are available in Sagarija (2002).

<sup>167</sup> Georgian groups consolidated into a movement in protesting this letter. The Abkhaz movement formed in response.

At the core of the Abkhaz movement was Aidgylara (*unity* in Abkhaz).<sup>168</sup> Activist students and intellectuals created the socio-political organization. Its formation process began in November, 1988, and founding congress in December announced the Charter and Program of the organization, which set as its key goal the pursuance of “the legal status of Abkhazia.”<sup>169</sup> Aidgylara amalgamated broader segments of the Abkhaz population, for instance, by organizing a general Abkhaz workers’ strike in 1989 (discussed below). It brought other non-Georgian segments of the population in line with the Abkhaz movement as it became deeply embedded in Abkhazia’s government in the 1990s. The organization’s founding activists became part of the government then and members included political leaders. Most notably, Aidgylara worked to ideologically prepare the Abkhaz for further mobilization after the 1989 clashes. It was active in the organization of the Abkhaz pre-war armed formation, the Abkhaz Guard, and mobilized Soviet soldiers and Abkhaz reservists to serve there.

The Georgian national organizations that opposed the Abkhaz national movement included the Societies of Rustaveli and Ilia Chavchavadze, first established in Georgia in 1987 to pursue the independence of Georgia from the Soviet Union and brought to Abkhazia in 1988 after the writing of the Abkhaz letter.<sup>170</sup> The issues of Abkhazia’s demands to separate from Georgia and Georgia’s demands to separate from the Soviet Union intertwined in this movement’s claims. As a Georgian expert says, “It all started with the issue of Abkhazia and then moved to independence of Georgia” (Interview 168, April 29, 2013).<sup>171</sup> As the independence campaign advanced, mass propaganda was launched in Abkhazia. The Abkhaz were accused of oppressing Georgians at protests in Abkhazia. Rallies mourning the destruction of independent Georgia by Soviet Russia spread across Abkhazia.

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<sup>168</sup> It was also called the National Forum of Abkhazia. Other Abkhaz organizations existed, but were not as influential, e.g. the Gagra union Abrskyl (Prometheus; extremist wing of the Abkhaz movement), the Strike Committee (of which Abrskyl leader was head), the Association Apsadgil (Homeland), the cultural-educational society Nartaa (Tkvarcheli), the youth organization Auybla (Gudauta), the Abzhua group (Ochamchira), the Demographic Charitable Society, the Democratic Union of Abkhazia, and the Association for the Relations with Compatriots Abroad.

<sup>169</sup> This and other documents of the period are available in Maryhuba (1994); Chumalov (1995); Kvarchija (2011).

<sup>170</sup> One of the leaders of the Georgian movement, Gamsakhurdia, became Georgia’s first president in 1991.

<sup>171</sup> Georgia’s independence was initially and primarily the movement’s focus in Georgia (Lezhava, 1997: 215-216).



#### 4.2.2 Stage II: Lykhny Gathering and April Clashes

The 18 March, 1989, Abkhaz Lykhny plebiscite is the most immediate event in the process of escalation to the first inter-group clashes in Abkhazia on 1 April, 1989. It marks a transition from the more spontaneous, private micro-level everyday resistance and elite-based meso-level political contention to organized, public meso- and macro-level pre-war mobilization involving the national political and social elite and the public.<sup>172</sup> The event is rooted in the overall conflict. “The conflict had been going on for 80 years,” an Abkhaz professor says, “The Lykhny gathering... [with] up to 30,000 people was a logical conclusion to the ongoing events” (Interview 134, 6 December, 2011). As Chapter 3 argued, it was one of the most vocal expressions of the national consciousness of the Abkhaz prior to the war of 1992-1993. The intra-Abkhaz norms and understandings of history and identity among the Abkhaz were brought together in this mobilization event. The following quote of an Abkhaz journalist and activist captures the Abkhaz position: “Our national consciousness was very high. We said that we did not want to be part of the Georgian nation. We wanted to be Abkhaz and develop our culture. Georgian leaders did not like that” (Interview 15, 1 November, 2011).

The event, and the Abkhaz movement formation preceding it, were as well a reaction to the increasing anti-Abkhaz sentiments in Georgian counter-mobilization. Abkhaz activists and regular men and women often recall that “Georgians, including Georgian authorities, openly demonstrated in Abkhazia” (Interview 15, 1 November, 2011). Secondary materials support the presence of anti-Abkhaz sentiments in Georgian mobilization in Abkhazia. The leaders of the Georgian movement, above all Gamsakhurdia, introduced such anti-Abkhaz slogans as “Georgia only for Georgians” or “Abkhazia an inseparable part of Georgia” (Lezhava, 1997: 227). These slogans were widely used in Georgian mobilization (Kvarchelia, 1998: 20). The Abkhaz thus conclude that “[Georgians] did not just support Gamsakhurdia; they supported his idea” (Interview 131, 6 December, 2011).

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<sup>172</sup> The relevant groups in the Abkhaz society, given its Soviet structure, include the students, the workers, and the elite.

My interviews strongly confirm the significance for the Abkhaz movement of anti-Abkhaz sentiments in Georgian mobilization. The Lykhny gathering was in important part a response to the calls of the Georgian movement to further downgrade the status of Abkhazia from the Autonomous Republic to one of Georgia's provinces. The following quote by an Abkhaz activist is illustrative:

Our national movement was built on the rejection of Georgian nationalism... In 1988 [after the writing of the Abkhaz letter] protests in Tbilisi called to annul the Abkhaz autonomy [to make Abkhazia a Georgian province]. In [response, in] 1989, we had the Lykhny plebiscite on the restoration of our status as a full Soviet Republic (Interview 132, 6 December, 2011).

Non-violent public gathering was a mobilization repertoire, or prescribed action, seen as right and feasible by the Abkhaz at the time. An Abkhaz activist involved in the organization of the gathering explains: "We knew that the struggle was necessary [and] fought by means of a popular gathering" (Interview 114, 28 November, 2011). Importantly, while the event was organized by Aidgylara, not only the activist part of the population participated, but also the Abkhaz national leaders;<sup>173</sup> and not only the Abkhaz signed the resulting letter, but also other segments of Abkhazia's population.<sup>174</sup> As Coppieters (2002: 97) summarizes, "30,000 people gathered in Lykhny... national minorities in Abkhazia, such as the Greek, Armenian and Russian communities, took part in this mobilization."

Despite its scale, the plebiscite did not receive due attention in Moscow.<sup>175</sup> Yet, it exploded Georgian counter-mobilization in Abkhazia. Both interviews and secondary materials confirm. "In 1989, it went out of control" (Interview 134, 6 December, 2011). "It was the Lykhny declaration... that ushered in a wave of protest" (Francis, 2011: 72). "The consequences were dire. An intense anti-Abkhazian campaign was started by leaders of the [Georgian national movement]" (Hewitt, 1996: 205). After the publication of the 1989 Abkhaz letter in the local Abkhaz and Russian media, the Georgian national movement organized a wave of mass protests in Sukhum/i, Gal/i, Gagra, and

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<sup>173</sup> Non-Georgian party leaders, including First Secretary of Abkhazia, signed the Lykhny letter (Avidzba, 2012: 49).

<sup>174</sup> The Lykhny letter was signed by 32,000 people, including over 5,000 non-Abkhaz signatories (Avidzba, 2012: 49).

<sup>175</sup> The Soviet center was weakening at the time and anticipating Georgia's separation from the Union aimed to prevent a further escalation of tensions with Georgia and its nationalist movement increasingly supported by local authorities.

Tbilisi, among others, at the end of March and beginning of April. As Lezhava (1997: 225) argues, these actions were “a response of the Georgian national movement to the decisions of the Abkhaz gathering in Lykhny.” Some protests were sanctioned, but others were not. One unsanctioned event of 25 March held by the Chavchavadze Society in Sukhum/i brought together up to 15,000 people and “condemned [the Lykhny letter] as offensive to the Georgian people” (Lezhava, 1997: 225).

The most explosive Georgian counter-mobilization event following the Lykhny gathering, however, took place on 1 April. This time the leaders of the Georgian movement sought a sanction. To preclude the escalation of tensions with the Georgian national movement in Georgia, Georgia’s leaders had to satisfy the demands of the local branch of the Georgian movement (Lezhava, 1997: 228-230). Thus, First Secretary of the Communist Party of Georgia openly condemned the Lykhny gathering (Avidzba, 2012: 52). First Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia in turn reached out to the leadership of Aidgylara for assistance in preventing potential violence during the protest of 1 April. The protest should not have exceeded one hour in duration. The village of Leselidze in the Gagra region, the furthest point of Abkhazia to the Russian border, was chosen as its location.

A report to the Supreme Council of the Soviet Union on the situation in Abkhazia describes the protest as “having a distinct anti-Abkhaz nature, anti-Soviet, anti-Russia slogans and speeches” were made at the protest by the leaders of the all-Georgian and local branches of the movement.<sup>176</sup> As the leaders of Aidgylara wrote in a telegram to Gorbachev on the day of the protest, “Menshevik [flags] and nationalist appeals” were widespread at the protest.<sup>177</sup> Critically, the Abkhaz view these flags as an extension of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, which, in 1918, established a military presence and carried out mass repressions in Abkhazia (see Ch. 3: 93). This irritated the Abkhaz greatly. Abkhaz Pitsunda Kolkhoz Chairman and spontaneous participant in the event describes it:

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<sup>176</sup> See “Development of the socio-political situation in the Abkhaz ASSR in the period from December 1988 to now” in Sagarija (2002: 23-38). See also Lezhava (1997: 226-228). See also Gyts (unpublished: 16-21).

<sup>177</sup> The text is available in Lezhava (1997: 226-227). See also Chumalov (1995).

It was an invasion! They assembled people... against us. Our youth all gathered... Assistant Minister of Internal Affairs arrived from Sukhumi, to calm people down so that there is no clash... but Gamsakhurdia went on with the propaganda (Interview 42, 4 November, 2011).

The cordon was put around the platform where speeches were made to prevent violence. Yet, more and more Abkhaz arrived as the event unfolded. Some Abkhaz organized a picket around the area.

As the protest exceeded an hour, First Secretary of Gudauta stopped it: “Stop the agitation! Do not clash the people!” (Interview 42, 4 November, 2011). As a result, the protest “ended with a provocative, triumphant passage of protesters waving the Menshevik flags.”<sup>178</sup> The violence that followed was in part Abkhaz-organized and in part spontaneous. Abrskyl, an extremist wing of the movement, gathered its youth network in Bzyb where the first violence occurred. As a bus with Georgian protesters “passed Bzyb, our boys stopped it with stones,” Bzyb residents say (Interview 42, 4 November, 2011). Protesters rejected removing their Menshevik flags and were beaten by the Abkhaz. Abrskyl leader commends this organized, meso-level violent action by the Abkhaz youth:

We were a political organization formally registered in Gagra. But we, Bzyb activists, were considered to be hooligans because we took all the action. We broke down the Georgian bus with the flags as they screamed “This is our land!” We did not let them through and finished them off without being afraid of anything (Interview 64, 9 November, 2011).

Some Abkhaz youth followed this bus by cars, but were dispersed by local traffic police (*militsiya*).

At the same time another group spontaneously attacked a second bus in Lykhny. In this case passengers were not involved in the protest taking place in Leselidze. They were Georgian students returning to Sukhum/i from a funeral. However, the Abkhaz followed the bus by truck, attempting to run it downhill. Georgian students were beaten as they arrived in Sukhum/i. Individuals involved in the violence were prosecuted in the following weeks.<sup>179</sup> As a result, Lezhava (1997: 228) writes,

One bus with protest participants... and another random bus with people who did not have any relation to the protest were attacked, resulting in [over a dozen of] injured. News of this caused a new wave of [Georgian] demonstrations and rallies [in Abkhazia].

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<sup>178</sup> See fn. 176 above.

<sup>179</sup> Prosecution was the most common form of repression. For a detailed discussion of the events, see Zhidkov (2012).

Indeed, Georgian protests took place on a daily basis across Abkhazia after these first inter-group violence events. Among other claims, Georgian protesters demanded that “the crimes related to the attacks against the buses on 1 April be considered a nationalist action rather than hooliganism.”<sup>180</sup>

Hence, rallies against the Lykhny gathering in general and the events of 1 April in particular started on 2 April in Sukhum/i, Gagra, and Gal/i, among other cities. On 3 April, Georgian students of the Abkhaz State University and other institutes started a boycott. They demanded that the media in Abkhaz and Russian languages stop pro-Abkhaz propaganda, the recently introduced subject of Abkhaz history be removed from the school curriculum, the history of Georgia become part of the university entry exams, and those involved in the Lykhny and 1 April events be prosecuted.<sup>181</sup> On 5 April, Georgian professors joined the boycott. On 6 April, boycotters for the first time announced the idea to split the Abkhaz State University by opening a Tbilisi university branch there, which led to the next clashes in July. An ultimatum on the punishment of the Abkhaz actively involved in the preceding events was made. First Secretary of the Abkhaz Regional Committee of the Communist Party, a signatory of the Abkhaz letter, was thus dismissed and replaced (Anchabadze, 2013: 132).

Mass protests unfolded in Tbilisi at the same time. “These demonstrations, prompted by the Lykhny meeting,” Zverev (1996: part 3) finds, “started out under anti-Abkhaz slogans, but quickly acquired a broader, pro-independence character.”<sup>182</sup> Gamsakhurdia’s slogans thus began as “[t]he Abkhaz nation never existed” and shifted in the course of the protest to the new emphasis: “[w]hile there is Soviet power, we cannot abolish the autonomy of Abkhazia” (Lezhava, 1997: 235). Violent reprisals by the Soviet state followed. On 9 April, the Transcaucasus Military District Soviet troops violently dispersed protest participants leaving dozens injured and dead. This event legitimized and strengthened the calls of the Georgian national movement for Georgia’s separation from the Union.

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<sup>180</sup> See fn. 176. Officially, this demand was made as part of the resolution of the rally of Georgian women on 21 May.

<sup>181</sup> See “Demands of a Group of Students of the Georgian SSR Georgian by Nationality” in Sagarija (2002: 16-17).

<sup>182</sup> See “Our Demands” in Sagarija (2002: 18-20). See also Cornell (2000: 148-149).

Nodia and Scholtbach (2006: 8) capture the dire consequences of this Soviet repression in Georgia:

The new Georgia starts with the period of perestroika and glasnost... [in particular] 9 April, 1989, when the Soviet army dispersed a huge pro-independence rally, leaving twenty people, mostly young women, dead. This tragic event represented the moral death of the Communist regime in Georgia: its legitimacy was fatally injured and never recovered.

In Abkhazia this event triggered a further escalation of the conflict in the lead up to the third stage of mobilization related to the violence of 1989—celebration of Georgia's Independence Day in Abkhazia. Georgian students were at the core of the mobilization efforts. From 9 April, together with professors and broader layers of the Georgian population of Abkhazia, which gradually joined the movement, Georgian students gathered in Sukhum/i and other cities to extend the anti-Lykhny campaign and mourn Georgians who died on 9 April in Tbilisi. A sitting strike was organized on 6 May. A thousand Georgian students and professors did not attend university on 10 May. Their core demand was the opening of the local branch of the Tbilisi State University.<sup>183</sup> Aidgylara appealed to Gorbachev to stop these efforts to avert further violence in Abkhazia on 11 May. Yet, Georgia's Council of Ministers approved the establishment of the Tbilisi University branch on 14 May, thus ending the Georgian student campaign. The Abkhaz gathered to publicly protest this decision on 15 May (Kvarchija, 2011: 213). Georgian procession for the victims of 9 April took place on 19 May.

#### **4.2.3 Stage III: Independence Day Celebration**

The main set of May events, however, surrounded Georgia's Independence Day celebration in Abkhazia. The consolidation of intra- and inter-group aspects of the latent normative framework for action can be observed in this set of events. The opposed understandings of history and identity, in particular ownership and belonging to Abkhazia, or what Abkhazia *is*, were sharply pronounced in mobilization surrounding Georgia's Independence Day celebration in Abkhazia by the Abkhaz and Georgian groups involved in the conflict. Inter-group relations deteriorated after these events.

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<sup>183</sup> See Sagarija (2002: 29). Apart from the student strike, Georgian workers held a general strike across Abkhazia.

While the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia decided to make 26 May official day of the celebration of Georgia's Independence across the republic, the Abkhaz Regional Committee adopted a resolution against it, given the intensifying inter-group tensions in Abkhazia. Despite this resolution, the Rustaveli and Chavchavadze Societies held unsanctioned rallies across Abkhazia. The Menshevik flags were once again a mark of Georgian rallies. The flags were put up at the Constitution Square in Sukhum/i. An Abkhaz sports student who spontaneously mobilized as he saw the Georgian action says: "The Sukhum Square was full of flags on each pole. As sportsmen we climbed up and put the flags down. This led to [low-scale] fights" (Interview 97, 19 November, 2011). No major clashes took place at this time as local law enforcement agencies got involved.<sup>184</sup>

The events of the Independence Day celebration went on as a Georgian procession marched to raise the Menshevik flag at the commemorative Stella at Abkhazia's border with Russia in Psou. The action was symbolic both in its use of the flag that the Abkhaz associate with Georgia's violent occupation of Abkhazia in 1918 and location, Psou, that the Abkhaz associate with the introduction of Soviet power in 1921 and Abkhazia's independent status as a full Republic. Using these symbols the action conveyed the Georgian claims to Abkhazia as the Georgian land and could not leave the Abkhaz uninvolved. Both interviews and secondary materials support this. As an Abkhaz historian captures the Abkhaz perception of this action, "To prove their rights to Abkhazia, they held a rally at the border in Psou with the Menshevik flags that left deep wounds in the Abkhaz" (Interview 84, 16 November, 2011). "This provoked a reaction from the Abkhaz population," the aforesaid report to the Supreme Council adds, "since it is here that the restoration of the Soviet power in Abkhazia began."<sup>185</sup> Similarly to the earlier celebration event at the Sukhum/i Square, the Abkhaz mobilized to take down the flag with the help of authorities, participants left, and the situation was stabilized.

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<sup>184</sup> See Doc. №3-17<sup>th</sup>-89 of 25.04.89 in Sagarija (2002: 14-15). See also fn. 166 above.

<sup>185</sup> See text in Sagarija (2002: 35).

Yet, the wave of the Independence Day events went on in eastern Abkhazia. The night of 27 May, Ochamchira Georgians put up a memorial to the victims of 9 April violence in Tbilisi. For the Abkhaz, this action again conveyed the Georgian claims to Abkhazia. As a local Abkhaz explains,

[Georgians] tried “burying” those killed [on 9 April] and putting the monument to this event [in Ochamchira]. All youth went up to it with flowers although no dead were [really] buried there. It was done to show that they have power here (Interview 105, 23 November, 2011).

As a result, over 4,000 Abkhaz gathered to protest against this memorial. In response to the Abkhaz demands, the Regional Executive Committee decided to take down the memorial, and the situation calmed down. Minor incidents continued to take place across Abkhazia throughout the rest of May.

While it did not lead to major clashes, this period exposed an utter division in the two sides’ understandings of what Abkhazia is—a core dimension of the latent normative framework. For the Georgians it is Georgia, for the Abkhaz it is not. An Abkhaz journalist and activist captures it well:

The most difficult problem was that Georgians living in Abkhazia... did not see themselves as citizens of Abkhazia. They considered the interests of Georgia... [T]he Abkhaz, as much as Georgians want to argue against it, are aboriginals here. We can only develop here. Their lack of understanding of this issue was detrimental (Interview 120, 29 November, 2011).

Gradual polarization of society—a marker of inter-group relations—followed. As Chapter 3 found, the societal organizations split between the Abkhaz and Georgian groups. My interviews regularly report this, especially in the cities, where the population was mixed. Sukhum/i respondents discuss polarization most vocally. The split began in regular jobs. “1989 split our team,” a communications operator says, for example (Interview 103, 23 November, 2011). It then moved to the core unifying societal organizations in education and government areas. The State University split as polarization unfolded in lower-level organizations. The final stage in the escalation to major violence of 1989—the split in the university—thus took place in the context of polarization. As the university split and related violence took place, the government could no longer hold unity (see Section 4.3). “The High Council simply split into two,” a government official reports (Interview 90, 18 November, 2011).



#### 4.2.4 Tbilisi State University and July Clashes

Seeing how rapidly and broadly Georgian mobilization unfolded on the Independence Day, in June, 1989, the leadership of Aidgylara activated its work both within and outside of Abkhazia. On the one hand, in letters to the Soviet center—the traditional mobilization repertoire—Aidgylara worked to distance the Lykhny gathering from the events of 9 April in Tbilisi, of which the Lykhny gathering was blamed as a trigger (Lezhava, 1997: 245). In reaction to the creation of a commission on these events at the I People's Deputies Congress, first President of Abkhazia, then Deputy of the Supreme Soviet, Ardzinba voiced the position of the Abkhaz on these events and the history of the Georgian-Abkhaz relations preceding them. He related the claims on historical injustice previously made by the Abkhaz in the letters to Moscow to “why a sanctioned meeting was held on 18 March, 1989, in Lykhny” and argued that due to this history “the Abkhaz people consider remaining in the Soviet Union as the sole possible means of preserving their national self-identity.”<sup>186</sup> This speech was a deeply significant event for the Abkhaz. As an Abkhaz agriculture official captures it well,

In times of tension revolutionaries, leaders are born. Our leader appeared then—Ardzinba, who could bravely get up and say what the true condition of the Abkhaz was, that the rights of the people were infringed. The Congress heard him (Interview 60, 9 November, 2011).

Support for Ardzinba and his stance was already high among the Abkhaz. An Abkhaz underground activist exemplifies his support: “Six of us from my neighborhood secretly went to Moscow to hold a hunger strike in front of the Congress [where] Ardzinba spoke” (Interview 7, 27 October, 2011).

On the other hand, Aidgylara sought the involvement of the Soviet center in the escalating situation in Abkhazia, especially with regard to the opening of the Tbilisi State University branch. While First Secretary of the Abkhaz Regional Committee of the Communist Party promised to the Abkhaz at the 15 May protest that the branch would not be created and the resolution on the branch was a temporary measure taken by Georgia to pacify Georgian unrest, preparation for entry exams,

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<sup>186</sup> The goal of remaining in the Union was a means to distance from Georgia. See text in Maryhuba (1994: 463-467).

including dissemination of information in the Georgian media, continued.<sup>187</sup> Party leaders made the same promise at the meeting with Abkhaz professors and activists on 21 June—to no avail.

Aidgylara thus organized a mass public protest in the Philharmonic Theater on 22 June. Up to 1,000 people gathered in and around the theater (Lezhava, 1997: 248). In the letters to Gorbachev and other Soviet leaders Aidgylara, together with the Abkhaz Deputies, demanded the formation of a Soviet commission on the situation around the university.<sup>188</sup> “The Abkhaz started a hunger strike by the Philharmonic” and rejected leaving until a Soviet commission had arrived (Interview 104, 23 November, 2011). Aidgylara, moreover, made a statement appealing to all groups in the population of Abkhazia. The organization blamed the Georgian national movement for splitting up the society. “The peoples of Abkhazia!” the statement said, “Let us unite in the struggle against any expression of nationalism and extremism, which are foreign to our common spiritual culture.”<sup>189</sup>

The Soviet commission arrived on July 3 and, upon consultation with all parties involved in the conflict over the university, decided that the opening of the Tbilisi State University branch was not acceptable in Abkhazia. Instead of publicizing this decision, however, the Georgian newspaper *Sabchota Abkhazeti* stated that “the Sukhumi branch of the Tbilisi State University announces the admissions.”<sup>190</sup> As Lezhava (1997: 255) puts it well, “the Abkhaz saw this as a call to action.” They gathered in the Philharmonic on 7 July, where party leaders vowed that the editor of the newspaper made a mistake. This explanation was not enough. It was clear that there would be a confrontation. “The confrontation was due to the opening of the Tbilisi State University branch and the beginning of admissions exams,” an Abkhaz Parliament Member says (Interview 118, 29 November, 2011).

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<sup>187</sup> See fn. 166. Tbilisi University rector issued order №101 of 14 July on admissions exams to the Sukhumi branch.

<sup>188</sup> Among others, see the letters to Gorbachev of 23 June, Mikhajlov of 24 June, and the Central Committee and High Council of the Soviet Union of 27 June. Texts are available in Kvarchija (2011: 219-220) and Chumalov (1995).

<sup>189</sup> Aidgylara thus began uniting all non-Georgian population of Abkhazia. See text in Kvarchija (2011: 217-219).

<sup>190</sup> See text in Lezhava (1997: 255). The newspaper was a center of confrontation until the exams of 16 July. Georgian students demanded that it confirm continued existence of the Tbilisi University branch even after reporting the results of the commission. Abkhaz students prevented the publication of the issue by gathering outside the publishing house.

The Abkhaz leaders appealed to the centre to send Soviet troops to Abkhazia and create the state of emergency. Hunting weapons were seized from the population and stored in police stations across Abkhazia. Nevertheless, the confrontation was inevitable, and a spark which under different circumstances would be insignificant—a cameraman recording the events—triggered the violence. The Abkhaz mobilized through Aidgylara-organized networks linking activists across Abkhazia to prevent the admissions exams of 14 July. “People gathered to show their discontent” (Interview 75, 13 November, 2011). A core Abkhaz Aidgylara member explains the organization of mobilization:

The admissions exams would take place in the 1<sup>st</sup> school. [A messenger] came and told us. At night we all went there. The 8<sup>th</sup> division [of Georgian Internal Troops] blocked it and did not let us in... People heard about that and started arriving... We all stood there, when the admissions exams were on, and did not let students in (Interview 104, 23 November, 2011).

Over 1,500 activist and regular Abkhaz picketed the school—to block it by 15 July. They promised to leave once the school was emptied and the Abkhaz party leadership reassured them of cancelling the admissions exams. Neither of these demands were met and minor clashes began by the school.

In the meantime a Georgian crowd gathered in the Rustaveli Park, awaiting First Secretary of the Regional Committee. As an Abkhaz witness reports, “1,000 [Georgian] youth held a protest there. They read something and shouted, “Zviadi! This is our land!” (Interview 104, 23 November, 2011).<sup>191</sup> Presidium of the Supreme Council issued a resolution “On the significant aggravation of interethnic relations in [Abkhazia] due to illicit attempts to form in Sukhumi a branch of the Tbilisi State University.”<sup>192</sup> Information on the escalation of tension spread across Aidgylara networks and the Abkhaz from Abkhazia’s regions began arriving in Sukhum/i. An Aidgylara member explains:

The Abkhaz people were one. A rumor passed that Georgians organized something. Within an hour, the whole of Abkhazia knew to come here. We passed the information by phone. There were representatives [of the Abkhaz national movement] in every region. We called them... and momentarily everyone turned out here (Interview 104, 23 November, 2011).

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<sup>191</sup> “Zviadi” refers to Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the leader of the Georgian national movement, later President of Georgia.

<sup>192</sup> The text is available in Chumalov (1995).

An Abkhaz activist from Bzyb confirms: “A messenger came for me and said “A fight is going on in Sukhumi between the Abkhaz and Georgians!” We went” (Interview 64, 9 November, 2011). An Abkhaz participant from Pitsunda similarly reports: “We took rifles and went where the protest was in Sukhum. We knew this would not end just like that” (Interview 28, 2 November, 2011).

Indeed, around 4pm on 15 July, an Abkhaz student with a camera approached the Georgian crowd by car. Georgian protesters tore the banner Apsny (Abkhazia) off the car and demanded to destroy the film. He rejected to do so and Georgian protesters beat him. An Abkhaz witness reports:

Anzor Sakania had a camera and went to take pictures of the protest. He was noticed and they decided to take away his camera... This is why it all started... He, of course, did not want to give up the camera. They started beating him... Within a segment of a second, someone ran up and told us that ours are being beaten (Interview 104, 23 November, 2011).

As the official investigation confirms, “an unidentified woman informed the crowd at the school... shouting, “Georgians are killing the Abkhaz.” The picketers... headed [to the park], arming along the way with stones, rails, garden benches and fences.”<sup>193</sup> The police attempted stopping them, but they got through anyway. What ensued was a violent clash. The Abkhaz participants call it “a “wall on wall” clash—the Abkhaz from one side, Georgians from the other” (Interview 15, 1 November, 2011). The clash pushed the Georgian protesters to the shore. As an Abkhaz participant recalls, “we drove them to the sea with sticks” (Interview 28, 2 November, 2011). Over 40 people were injured in the clash, some lethally. This was the first set of deaths in the Georgian-Abkhaz clashes of 1989.

The events did not stop there. Following this clash, Abkhaz picketers broke into the school, injured Georgian professors and students remaining there, and damaged safes with the admissions documents. This was at the time when most of the police were sent to the Rustaveli Park. Hearing about the events, Georgians from the regions of Abkhazia set for Sukhum/i. Attempts of the police to block the crowds moving toward the capital were unsuccessful. Furthermore, Svans blocked the

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<sup>193</sup> Details of the event are available in “On results of investigation” (see fn. 166) and Zhidkov (2012), among others.

White and Red Bridges on the entry to Sukhum/i to prevent passage of the Abkhaz from the regions and occupied the Apsny cinema, destroying the facilities.<sup>194</sup> “Svans studied there,” Chairman of the Abkhaz Strike Committee says, “They, too, came here, got involved in arm fights, took defence of the Red Bridge, so that help [for the Abkhaz] does not arrive from Ochamchira” (Interview 64, 9 November, 2011). For example, they stopped a bus from a deeply Abkhaz village of Kutol bringing help for the picketers of the 1<sup>st</sup> school. Two Abkhaz were killed there, others were severely beaten.

Having learned that the mass protest moved to the Council of Ministers building in the city center, a part of the Svan group headed there. “They came by trucks with naked torsos, bandanas, threw stones at us. People had to defend themselves,” an Abkhaz witness, then university student, recalls (Interview 75, 13 November, 2011). Ammunitions brought by the Abkhaz from Tqvarchel/i saved the Abkhaz protesters at the time.<sup>195</sup> An Aidgylara activist and participant in the events says:

Tqvarchelians were right on time with their explosives. They came by cars and surrounded [Svans] with explosives. [Svans] did not have time to shoot. They did, once or twice. But once the explosions went off... they got scared and turned around (Interview 104, 23 November, 2011).

Self-made grenades were used as well. “*Afgantsy*”<sup>196</sup> dropped a self-made grenade,” Chairman of the Strike Committee recalls the events, “It exploded by their truck. Such a fight began that they were beaten to near death... We put them on their truck and they left” (Interview 64, 9 November, 2011). More minor clashes took place in Sukhum/i thereafter, resulting in further injuries and deaths.

The rumors on the situation in Sukhum/i reached Gal/i, the Georgian-dominated region of Abkhazia, in the evening of 15 July; thousands left for Sukhum/i as a result.<sup>197</sup> The Abkhaz stopped the crowd by placing trucks on the Galidzga Bridge in Ochamchira. The local police was given an

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<sup>194</sup> Svans, a Georgian subgroup, resided in the north-east of Abkhazia, particularly the Kodor/i Gorge.

<sup>195</sup> The decision to prepare the explosives in case of a confrontation was made by the leaders of the Tqvarchel/i branch of Aidgylara together with its Chairman on 14 July. See Zhidkov (2011) on the details of Tkuarchelian participation.

<sup>196</sup> *Afgantsy* is a common title given to the veterans of the Afghan War who fought as part of the Soviet army.

<sup>197</sup> See police “Reference to chronicles of events of 15-17 July 1989 in the Gali district” in Sagarija (2002: 10-13).

order to leave the area. Abkhaz civilian militias undertook the defence of the bridge, using stones to protect the passage. As a leader of the Tqvarchel/i branch of Aidgylara reports, “there was nothing to use for defence, no weapons” (Interview in Zhidkov, 2011). However, a Gal/i resident was killed in the fighting. His body was then exhibited in Gal/i, leading to further mobilization by Georgians. Both Georgian and Abkhaz residents of Gal/i, Ochamchira, and Tqvarchel/i worked to gain access to weapons confiscated from the population and stockpiled in anticipation of clashes in Abkhazia.

Given the dramatic escalation of violence over a short period of a day across Abkhazia, the leaders of Aidgylara, along with the Abkhaz Deputies, attempted to convince the Soviet leadership in the dire need to send Soviet troops to Abkhazia. As a result, Internal Forces of the Soviet Union arrived in Abkhazia in the middle of the night. By the time the troops arrived, the situation calmed down in Sukhum/i. An Aidgylara leader convinced the protesters to leave the Council of Ministers square. However, civilian defence groups and road pickets were organized in many villages around the capital and in the regions. Minor clashes took place in the villages and on roads up until 18 July.

Ochamchira remained explosive even with the arrival of the Soviet troops to Sukhum/i. The morning of 16 July, Georgians again approached the Galidzga Bridge. They were now motivated not only by the rumors and the deaths of the Gal/i residents, but also by the arrival of the leaders of the all-Georgian national movement who held rallies and brought with them armed supporters from Western Georgia.<sup>198</sup> Attempts by civilians to get access to weapons were successful. In some areas, including Ochamchira and Tqvarchel/i, the police and party leaders gave orders to distribute arms. In others, such as Gal/i, civilians seized weapons by attacking stockpiles.<sup>199</sup> The Galidzga Bridge, as a result, was now protected by armed Abkhaz militias from Ochamchira and other regions of Abkhazia. First Secretary of Ochamchira Bagapsh mobilized Tqvarchelians in their support.

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<sup>198</sup> See police “Reference” in Sagarija (2002: 10-13).

<sup>199</sup> Of the major cities of Abkhazia, only in Gagra was the police able to prevent distribution of weapons to civilians.

As in other regions of Abkhazia, however, the Galidzga Bridge clashes ended immediately with the arrival of the Soviet troops to the area. Seeing the consequences of the engagement of the Soviet troops in the situation in Abkhazia, among others, the National Democratic Party of Georgia issued a document on 18 July “call[ing] on the Georgian nation to refrain from armed conflict, as today we confront not the Abkhaz separatists..., but the Russian army” (Avidzba, 2012: 104). The document was distributed among the Georgian population of Abkhazia. It once again reflected the two-sided discourse of the Georgian national movement, which positioned itself, on the one hand, against the Abkhaz and other minorities of Georgia and, on the other, against the Soviet center.

In Abkhazia the establishment of order became the priority for the government of Abkhazia following the violent events of July. As a result of these events, a curfew was imposed throughout Abkhazia and the police removed weapons from the population.<sup>200</sup> An investigation and repression of participants began immediately after the pacification of the armed civilians.<sup>201</sup> Despite the pleas of the Abkhaz to use a more neutral Soviet body, the investigation was carried out by the Georgian Prosecutor’s Office (Lezhava, 1997: 258). This meant that the blame for the violence was largely placed on the Abkhaz, both in the state realm and within the national movement. Hence, Georgian intellectuals referred to the violent events of July in a statement as “a tragedy on fault of the Abkhaz part of the population of the autonomous republic.”<sup>202</sup> In response, the Abkhaz national movement leaders, together with the Abkhaz Deputies, wrote to Moscow that they “do not recognize the investigation into the events of 15-16 July... by Georgian or Abkhaz law enforcement agencies or with participation of Georgians and Abkhaz... and call on our people to do the same.”<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> High Council of Abkhazia issued resolutions “On the introduction in the cities of Sukhumi and Ochamchira and the Gulripshi region of the Abkhaz ASSR of the special curfew provisions” (16 July), “On the events in the Abkhaz ASSR” (17 July), and “On the introduction of a special regime of behavior of citizens throughout the territory of the Abkhaz ASSR” (18 July). Texts of the documents are available in Sagarija (2002: 45-50).

<sup>201</sup> 16 people died and up to 400 were injured as a result of inter-group violence. See official data in Sagarija (2002: 45).

<sup>202</sup> See text in Lezhava (1997: 260-261).

<sup>203</sup> See text in Lezhava (1997: 258-259).

Indeed, both the Abkhaz and Georgian mobilization thereafter focused on the investigation process. Mass demonstrations and strikes organized by the Georgian national movement in Tbilisi and Georgian-dominated cities of Abkhazia, such as Gal/i, demanded that the Abkhaz are punished for the July violence. Especially targeted were the Abkhaz party leaders who had earlier signed the Lykhny letter and then assisted their fellow Abkhaz in July by, for example, distributing weapons. These officials included First Secretaries of Abkhaz-dominated Gudauta and Ochamchira regions.

In turn, all Abkhaz efforts were directed toward defending the Abkhaz leaders and civilians who participated in the events of July from persecution. Above all, the events of violence served to demonstrate the sheer preponderance of force and government backing of the Georgian movement, the lack of preparation of the Abkhaz for clashes of this scale, and the need for the Abkhaz to unite and organize further in case of a future escalation, be it violent or not. My interviews with activists and regular Abkhaz consistently report that “After 1989 it was clear that the people were not ready” (Interview 28, 2 November, 2011); “We were woken up in 1989” (Interview 12, 31 October, 2011); “We realized that politically we could not secure Abkhazia” (Interview 7, 27 October, 2011).

#### **4.2.5 Intra-Abkhaz Cohesion: The General Strike**

The July events impacted the latent normative framework of the Abkhaz, strengthening the reciprocity, honor, and conformity norms and understandings of history and identity as comprising ownership and belonging to Abkhazia and the Abkhaz people. These factors formed the basis of the intra-Abkhaz cohesion demonstrated in the ensuing general strike of 1989 and facilitated activation of mobilization-specific norms of patriotism, masculinity, and heroism at the war onset in 1992 (see Chapter 5). It only helped further Abkhaz mobilization that the violence dramatically shattered the already polarized inter-group relations. Formation of armed units on both sides in the conflict after July indicates further deterioration of the relations (see below). “Open division began after 1989,”



the Abkhaz often emphasize (Interview 70, 11 November, 2011); “Our relations were no longer the same” (Interview 75, 13 November, 2011). That the Georgian part of the population followed the lead of the Georgian movement prior to the events of July and immediately mobilized as the events of violence unfolded contributed to the consolidation of intra-Abkhaz solidarity seen in an upsurge in Abkhaz mobilization. Abkhaz activists from east and west say: “a common goal united them into one group” (Interview 118, 29 November, 2011); “We were now certain about their hatred toward the Abkhaz. This was one of the factors that helped us unite” (Interview 58, 9 November, 2011).

Hence, after the July violence, “when people realized that their demands did not go far with the center,” the Abkhaz united in the largest organized pre-war mobilization event—mass workers’ strike across Abkhazia to transfer investigation of the July events to Soviet law enforcement bodies (Interview 15, 1 November, 2011). A Strike Committee formed with key branches in Sukhum/i and Tqvarchel/i: most factories were in these cities.<sup>204</sup> Sukhum/i workers were mainly Georgian, while the Abkhaz dominated in Tqvarchel/i. Although the general strike covered the whole of Abkhazia, the coordination center was thus in Sukhum/i, but most worker mobilization was in Tqvarchel/i.

Aidgylara served as the intermediary in strike mobilization. In preparation for the strike, the leaders of Aidgylara brought together representatives of the Strike Committee from the regions of Abkhazia at the Abkhaz Institute of Language and History—the traditional enclave of the Abkhaz activists. The core group of the Abkhaz national movement, which consolidated at the time, and the future resistance in the Georgian-Abkhaz war made personal acquaintances and created a bond at the meetings.<sup>205</sup> The Committee Chairman clarifies organization of this macro-level mobilization:

Tqvarcheli was the first place that the Abkhaz had to defend... Their intelligentsia... could all be repressed for [participation in 1989 violence] as in 1937... I was called in... There sat Kekhiripa, Gytsba [Abrskyl leaders]... Tqvarchelians came. We decided on a general strike across Abkhazia... first in Tqvarcheli, then in Gagra (Interview 64, 9 November, 2011).

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<sup>204</sup> Smaller branches were formed in other cities of Abkhazia, including Gagra.

<sup>205</sup> This is one way in which the July events strengthened the Abkhaz movement and increased the Abkhaz cohesion.

The strike started at the beginning of August in Tqvarchel/i. “All factories went on strike,” the Tqvarchel/i representative says, “even the bakery—which supplied bread to civilians while its employees were officially on strike” (Interview in Zhidkov, 2011). The Committee announced its demands, including the transfer of the investigation, to First Secretary of Abkhazia on 18 August. The demands had to be implemented by 25 August. “Otherwise, the Strike Committee of Abkhazia will declare a general strike on the territory of the Republic” (Interview 64, 9 November, 2011).

The general strike commenced in early September. The Strike Committee declared that its demands were not implemented and appealed to the workers of Abkhazia to go on strike. As noted above, “the Abkhaz dominated in Tqvarcheli... It was more difficult [to mobilize] in Sukhumi, and especially Gagra, Georgians kept control there” (Interview in Zhidkov, 2011). Nevertheless, over 40,000 Abkhaz workers joined across Abkhazia.<sup>206</sup> These events, motivated by the first large-scale inter-group violence in Abkhazia, marked a qualitatively new stage of mobilization by the Abkhaz, where organizational capacity of the Abkhaz movement and cohesion of the Abkhaz population—its all layers (students, workers, elite) now mobilized, not simply activists and political leaders,—increased significantly. As an Abkhaz analyst argues, the strike “started a new stage of the national movement—across the republic and with broad participation of the people” (Zhidkov, 2012).

Participants in the events confirm: “Information and organization wise, Aidgylara did a lot to unite into one fist the Abkhaz people... 95% of the Abkhaz were united around it” (Interview 15, 1 November 2011); “I joined all clashes... My friends participated in all strikes” (Interview 28, 2 November, 2011). “Everyone my age participated,” an Abkhaz 36 at the time says (Interview 49, 4 November, 2011). As an activist explains, “They all came on their own, those who were concerned with their souls came here, to the center, met with the leaders secretly” (Interview 64, 9 November, 2011). Aidgylara as well reached out to and hosted the first Assembly of the Mountainous Peoples

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<sup>206</sup> See Telegram of the National Forum of Abkhazia to the Central Committee in Chumalov (1995).

of the Caucasus, which played a key role in the 1992-1993 war, and even offered to the Soviet army to form Abkhaz volunteer fighter groups. Abrskyl (formerly the Strike Committee, see p. 12 above) was critical among the youth. Its leaders, “Kekhiripa and Gytsba, gathered and educated the youth” (Interview 65, 9 November, 2011).<sup>207</sup> “[They] were teachers, led educational work on patriotism at schools” (Interview 64, 9 November, 2011). The Abkhaz were thus preparing for further struggle.

Furthermore, as a result of the violent events of July, the repertoires of Abkhaz mobilization broadened. Particularly, 20 Abkhaz organized a hunger strike in Gudauta. As its organizer clarifies, “The street gathered... us in a 12-day hunger strike” (Interview 7, 27 October, 2011). “They used tents, mattresses, and stayed there for... a week and a half,” an Abkhaz witness says (Interview 39, 4 November, 2011). Controversy surrounded these health-risky mobilization forms. It went against attempts by Chairman of the Strike Committee to avoid physical danger to the strikers. As he says,

Parallel to the [general] strike, a hunger strike was announced in Gudauta. But [these] are very different things. I was against hunger strikes... I eat, I do not walk around hungry. I told them, “Our status, our sovereignty stretches up to the border. So you, boys, preserve yourselves for further struggle against them” (Interview 64, 9 November, 2011).

However, the events of inter-group violence incited the more activist group to take extreme action. As an Abkhaz participant in the clashes says, “Ours came to have a hunger strike [after the violent events]. There was a group. I had patriotism but I did not go that far” (Interview 85, 16 November, 2011). “People were ready for the last measure, a hunger strike,” to press forward the so far ignored Abkhaz demands made by the Strike Committee (Interview 65, 9 November, 2011). To this end the hunger strikers sent a telegram to Gorbachev and an appeal to the High Council of the Soviet Union seeking the formation of a Soviet commission to investigate the July events.<sup>208</sup> This action spread across major cities of Abkhazia. As an Abkhaz striker recalls, “Hunger strikes started in Pitsunda, Gagra, every administrative center of Abkhazia” (Interview 8, 27 October, 2011).

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<sup>207</sup> See also documents on the engagement of Abrskyl in mobilization of the strike in Gyts (unpublished: 29-42).

<sup>208</sup> See texts in Chumalov (1995).

In the process of the escalation of the strike action across Abkhazia and with the appearance of the more extreme mobilization repertoires, the general strikers as well adopted further measures. Importantly, these measures were suggested from below—by the strikers. At the end of September, the miners of Tqvarchel/i offered to the Strike Committee “to start a sitting underground strike... Aidgylara brought in food, newspapers, told how things were going and what the effects of the strike were” (Interview in Zhidkov, 2011). As Committee Chairman remembers, “Once a week we went to the Regional Committees [of the Communist Party] with workers’ demands, resolved the demands, and reported back to the people” (Interview 64, 9 November, 2011). Seeing the support of the Abkhaz national movement leadership, this repertoire, too, was picked up across Abkhazia, putting a greater pressure on authorities to satisfy the Abkhaz demands. The strike ended as soon as Soviet authorities intervened, satisfying one of the demands. A Deputy group came to Abkhazia to discuss the events. In turn, members of the Strike Committee met Chairman of the High Council of the Soviet Union in Moscow. The investigation of the July events was transferred to Soviet bodies.

#### **4.2.6 Escalation to War?**

While the inter-group clashes of 1989 were critical for consolidating the Abkhaz movement and deepening the intra-Abkhaz cohesion, as confirmed by the general strike, they were an isolated set of events of violence that were deeply related to the ongoing Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, but that did not lead to further escalation of pre-war violence or produce the war of 1992-1993. Instead, the period following these clashes and until the war was largely non-violent in Abkhazia. On the other hand, the escalation of conflict to war took place at the macro, state level. I demonstrate this below.

My interviews and historical data illustrate that minor inter-group confrontations occurred in Abkhazia after July, 1989, but no clashes of the scale of the July events, with deaths and injuries on both sides, followed. For instance, Georgia’s Independence Day celebration once again brought

tension to Abkhazia in 1990. Gagra became an epicenter of tension. Executive Committee of Gagra City Council sanctioned a rally at the Gagra stadium against the resolution of the High Council of Abkhazia of 18 July, 1989, which “[p]rohibit[ed] the gathering of people..., rallies and marches.”<sup>209</sup> The events unfolded as the last year. Abkhaz activists and regular witnesses describe them: “Georgians marched across Gagra with their old flags” (Interview 75, 13 November, 2011); “they kissed the land of the stadium, saying, “It is our land”” (Interview 97, 19 November, 2011).

The Aidgylara leaders appealed to local authorities to cancel the events. When this attempt failed, the leaders of Abrskyl, in defiance of Aidgylara, organized a hunger strike at the stadium to prevent the events. This repertoire was chosen given potential repression and inter-group violence:

[Abrskyl leader] said, “We should put hunger strikers up at the stadium [as] we will not be jailed for this...” 6 people immediately said yes... I told them to sit by the fence, so that in case of a [Georgian] attack they could quickly run away (Interview 64, 9 November, 2011).

Video footage of the events suggests that the hunger strikers were indeed forced to run and clashes could have started.<sup>210</sup> However, Soviet forces separated the parties and prevented the violence. As an Abkhaz witness reports, “They cordoned the area” (Interview 64, 9 November, 2011).

The actions of the Abkhaz did not stop there. “We will resist as long as Georgians celebrate National Day here and say “Georgia for Georgians”,” Abrskyl leader stated (reported by journalist, Interview 52, 8 November, 2011). An Abkhaz group thus went further to force to resign Chairman of Gagra Executive Committee Kuchukhidze who sanctioned the event. Head of an Abkhaz cultural ensemble who organized the group reports: “My boys... and I nailed the door to the... Committee, blocked the door to the reception room with a couch, and went to the balcony, to wait for what the Executive Committee would tell Georgians”—to fight or leave (Interview 55, 8 November, 2011). The Abkhaz were ready to fight. “We had blocks that we prepared to throw on the Georgian crowd

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<sup>209</sup> See text in Sagarija (2002: 49-50). See also Aidgylara Resolution of 5-6 April, 1990, in Gyts (unpublished: 68-69).

<sup>210</sup> Video 1 (author’s archive). See also Abrskyl Letter to Regional Party Committee of Abkhazia in Gyts (unpublished: 86-88); Abrskyl Letter to Members of the Bureau of the City Party Committee of Gagra in Gyts (unpublished: 88).

from the balcony,” the organizer says (Interview 55, 8 November, 2011). The party leaders realized it and no violence ensued. Instead, Kuchukhidze signed a resignation letter. He was later reinstated in his position, yet the Abkhaz saw the event as a victory. As Abrskyl leader confirms, “Everything dispersed here, calmed down. We thwarted their whole event” (Interview 64, 9 November, 2011).

Similarly, no other events led to clashes in 1989-1992. The Abkhaz report: “We had clashes in 1989 but not after” (Interview 10, 31 October, 2011); “In 1989-1992 there were no more clashes. The situation did not heat up. So they attacked abruptly” (Interview 73, 12 November, 2011). This was the case even in presence of armed groups—a marker of transformed inter-group relations and a difficult test for the argument made here. Although armed groups were formed on the two sides in the conflict after the July violence, no large-scale violence occurred up until the war of 1992-1993.

A Georgian paramilitary unit Mkhedrioni first appeared in Abkhazia after the July violence and was deployed there in 1991 to maintain order. Abkhaz workers, elite, and journalists regularly say: “In the late 1980s Gamsakhurdia was forming the Mkhedrioni units here (it means horsemen)” (Interview 15, 1 November, 2011); “They were fully equipped and stationed at a pension in Gagra” (Interview 13, 1 November, 2011);<sup>211</sup> “90% were from Georgia, but locals also joined, vandalized” (Interview 27, 2 November, 2011). The Abkhaz Guard formed in response (discussed in Chapter 5). Commander of a branch explains its formation: “I formed the Abkhaz Guard with Ldzaa [a village in western Abkhazia] residents to balance out the Mkhedrioni” (Interview 20, 2 November, 2011).

These groups could be expected to clash, yet violence between them was low-scale. Abkhaz Pitsunda Kolkhoz Vice-Chairman clarifies: “[the Mkhedrioni] had clashes with the Abkhaz Guard, but they tried to avoid armed confrontation” (Interview 36, 3 November, 2011). Their clashes were mostly limited to street fights, of the kind that prevailed prior to 1989, but now involving organized groups. Director of Pitsunda Bread Factory summarizes their activities in Abkhazia before the war:

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<sup>211</sup> The pension owner confirms the presence of the Mkhedrioni there in the 1990s (Interview 53, 8 November, 2011).

The Mkhedrioni orchestrated riots, fights in restaurants, such as Gagrypsh (I was a witness there...), and walked around in groups to pick [street] fights. This was going on for a year before the 1992 war. Authorities closed their eyes to it (Interview 27, 2 November, 2011).

In general, their pre-war activities were seen as criminal. An Armenian victim says: “I encountered events of criminal nature but organized violence, no” (Interview 53, 8 November, 2011). A witness adds: “There was an example, a Greek man was fishing. The Mkhedrioni came and killed him, just like that, for nothing” (Interview 58, 9 November, 2011). In response, an Abkhaz guard says, “we were finding these Mkhedrioni, beating, disarming them” (Interview 87, 17 November, 2011). Thus no large-scale violence followed the 1989 events despite the armed units’ presence; yet the conflict escalated dramatically as part of the political process at the macro, state level. An Abkhaz journalist confirms: “From 1989, the political situation worsened” (Interview 140, 13 December, 2011).

#### **4.3 Macro-Level Escalation to War**

The discussion above demonstrated that the inter-group clashes of 1989 in Abkhazia were related to the broader Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, but were isolated, as they did not produce further violence prior to the war. They thus should not be automatically seen as part of the escalation from lower-scale violence short of war to larger-scale violence associated with the war. Mobilization for these clashes took place at the micro and meso levels of the social structure. Participants mobilized from below, through quotidian networks and organizations of the respective national movements, with the macro, state-level structures involved in pacifying them. In contrast, the escalation of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict to war took place at the macro, state level. This political escalation was part of a larger process of the Soviet Union dissolution and the different roads to self-determination that the respective Abkhaz and Georgian state leaders took. As Baev (2003: 138) corroborates, “the war in Abkhazia erupted as a result of deliberate escalation of political tensions by both sides.” The goal of this section is to briefly trace the process of the political escalation of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict to the war of 1992-1993, which will then be discussed in depth in Chapters 5 and 6.

As noted above, after the events of 9 April, 1989, when the Soviet army violently dispersed pro-independence demonstrators in Tbilisi, the Soviet power in Georgia was significantly damaged and the Georgian national movement attained a push forward (Nodia, 1995; Zverev, 1996; Cornell, 2000). Georgia's leaders openly pursued a path toward independence from the Soviet Union from then on. In November, 1989, and March and June, 1990, Georgia's High Council issued resolutions "[d]eclaring null and void all state structures existing in Georgia since February 1921," which the Georgian government labelled as an occupation through the overthrow of the Georgian Democratic Republic (Lezhava, 1997: 267). As a result, Georgia "annulled all the treaties... serv[ing] as a legal foundation for the existence of the Georgian autonomies," such as Abkhazia (Zverev, 1996: part 3). In the summer of 1990, the High Council of Georgia, moreover, changed the elections law, thereby precluding candidates from the autonomous regions of Georgia to run in Georgia's elections, and made Georgian the only working language of the Georgian government, which had repercussions for the non-Georgian speaking minorities, especially in the autonomies (Lezhava, 1997: 267-268).

The Abkhaz leadership took a number of counter-steps in response. On 3 February, 1990, Aidgylara, in its second Declaration and Resolution, officially recognized and condemned forceful resettlement to and from Abkhazia and other Georgianization policies as an act of genocide and the change in the political status of Abkhazia in 1931 as an act of political aggression.<sup>212</sup> At the level of the Soviet Union, Aidgylara, together with representatives of other autonomous regions, worked to preserve the Union and transform the Soviet hierarchical state system into a federation based on the principle of equality of its subjects. Ardzinba's speech during the debate of the High Council of the Soviet Union on the new Union treaty of 21 March, 1990, conveyed this idea in the formal setting.

Reacting specifically to Georgia's resolutions annulling the Soviet laws, which formed the basis of the Soviet Georgian-Abkhaz relations, on 25 August, 1990, the High Council of Abkhazia,

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<sup>212</sup> These and other documents of the period are available in Chumalov (1995). See also Sagarija (2002).



boycotted by its Georgian deputies, issued a declaration “On the state sovereignty of the Abkhazian Soviet Socialist Republic” and a resolution “On the legal safeguards for the protection of statehood of Abkhazia.” These documents integrated a range of claims made throughout mobilization by the Abkhaz. Most importantly, the High Council declared the arrival of Georgia’s troops in Abkhazia in 1918 “a military intervention with the goal of forcible annexation of the territory of Abkhazia,” making the treaties concluded then null and void, called for the restoration of “the legitimate form of statehood” of Abkhazia as a Soviet Socialist Republic founded in 1921, and sought negotiations with Georgia.<sup>213</sup> The High Council of Georgia immediately declared these documents unlawful. At the same time, Georgian deputies of Abkhazia met separately in what they declared an emergency session of the High Council and officially supported the decision of the High Council of Georgia.

The political conflict escalated further when the leader of the Georgian national movement, Gamsakhurdia and his party Round Table–Free Georgia won the multiparty elections in Georgia in October, 1990, and then consolidated his power in May, 1991, as first president of Georgia. In turn, in December, 1990, Ardzinba, who attained a reputation as a fervent supporter of the Abkhaz cause and was actively promoted by Aidgylara, was elected Chairman of the High Council of Abkhazia. As a result, leaders closely related to the respective national movements came to power in Georgia and Abkhazia, which strengthened the pursuit of their different roads to self-determination.

After the election of Gamsakhurdia and his party, on 14 November, 1990, Georgia passed resolutions preparing Georgia to transition to independence.<sup>214</sup> A referendum of 31 March, 1991, unanimously supported the restoration of independence of Georgia.<sup>215</sup> The process culminated on 9 April, 1991, when Georgia adopted the act “On the Restoration of State Independence of Georgia,”

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<sup>213</sup> See documents in Chumalov (1995).

<sup>214</sup> See resolutions “On changing the designation of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic to the Republic of Georgia” and “On the announcement of the transitional period” (Lezhava, 1997: 284).

<sup>215</sup> The Abkhaz boycotted the referendum.

proclaiming “[t]he territory of the sovereign Republic of Georgia as one and indivisible” (Lezhava: 1997: 291). Gamsakhurdia rejected signing the new Union treaty scheduled for August, 1991. As Hewitt (1996: 215) says, “[he] maintained... that Georgia would not be signing any document that preserved his republic’s subservient status *vis-à-vis* Moscow” (emphasis in original).

In turn, the only option for the Abkhaz to pursue self-determination outside of increasingly nationalist independent Georgia was to remain in the Soviet Union. As Nodia (1998: 22) argues,

unlike the Georgians who... appealed to “international law” to uphold their right to restore full independence, annulled by the Russian/Soviet invasion, the only practical option for the Abkhaz was to appeal to Moscow and the Soviet past before 1931.

Hence, the Abkhaz held a referendum on the preservation of the Union, prohibited by the Georgian center. Of the 52.3% of the population participating in the referendum on March 17, 1991,—almost all non-Georgian population of Abkhazia—98.6% voted for the preservation of the Union and the remaining of Abkhazia in it (Hewitt, 1996: 213). Georgia’s reaction was fierce. As Lakoba (2001: 12) finds, “Gamsakhurdia threatened to dissolve the High Council of Abkhazia, called V. Ardzinba a traitor, a tool in the hands of Moscow, and even declared that he would abolish the autonomy [of Abkhazia].” However, the result of the referendum showed that not only the Abkhaz, but also other minorities residing in Abkhazia were reluctant to live in the independent Republic of Georgia.

A similar arrangement soon emerged in the governing structures of Abkhazia, where non-Georgian minorities of Abkhazia united in a winning coalition. Despite his threats, Gamsakhurdia found himself in a challenging situation with regard to Abkhazia. His war in South Ossetia (1991-1992) and the strengthening of ties between the Abkhaz leadership and the mountainous people of the North Caucasus, on the one hand, and Russia, on the other hand, pushed Gamsakhurdia to offer concessions to the Abkhaz. In particular, the elections in October-December, 1991, in Abkhazia assumed a quota system, whereby 28 seats in the Parliament would be given to the Abkhaz, 26 to Georgians, and 11 to other minorities of Abkhazia (Zverev, 1996; Zurcher et al., 2005).

By the time of the elections, Aidgylara had consolidated its power among the non-Georgian population of Abkhazia. A political block Union formed in the lead up to the 17 March referendum. It united political parties and social organizations representing the interests of the Abkhaz, Russian, Armenian, and Greek population of Abkhazia. As a result, this Abkhaz block gained a majority in the Parliament (Lezhava, 1997: 299-300). The Parliament was thereafter divided. At the same time, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the overthrow of Gamsakhurdia by Shevardnadze and his armed supporters, the National Guard of Georgia and the Mkhedrioni, escalated the tensions.

In February, 1992, the Provisional Military Council of Georgia reinstated the Constitution of 1921, “which included only a vague clause on Abkhazian autonomy” (Coppieters, 2002: 99). In response the Abkhaz offered to the new Georgian leadership a draft treaty suggesting the federative solution, “which would have safeguarded Georgia’s territorial integrity” (Cornell, 2000: 170). Yet, Shevardnadze rejected such a solution. Hence, on 23 July, 1992, again in the absence of Georgian deputies, the Abkhaz, together with other non-Georgian deputies, terminated the 1978 Constitution of the Abkhazian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and restored the 1925 Constitution of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia.<sup>216</sup> Importantly, “Abkhazia did not declare independence, but strove for the re-establishment of equal treaty relations with Georgia” (Coppieters, 2000: 24). The Constitution declared Abkhazia “as independent but ‘united with the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia on the basis of a special union treaty’” (Cornell, 2000: 170).

Shortly thereafter, however, the Georgian leadership sent troops to Abkhazia. Controversy surrounds this decision up until today. Cornell (2000: 171) argues that head of the National Guard “Kitovani apparently acted without Shevardnadze’s explicit approval—the latter claiming not to have sanctioned such action.” Baev (2003: 138) corroborates, arguing that “[i]t was—and still is

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<sup>216</sup> The legality of this action is questionable. As Cornell (2000: 170) finds, “a quorum of two thirds was needed for such a decision, which was not the case as a simple majority had been present.”

unclear to what degree Shevardnadze was in charge of the situation in Tbilisi in summer 1992 and whether Kitovani acted largely on his own initiative.”<sup>217</sup> Security of the railroad from supporters of ousted Gamsakhurdia and the search for the kidnapped members of the Georgian government, ostensibly brought to eastern Abkhazia by Gamsakhurdia’s supporters, were variously provided as explanations for the deployment of the Georgian troops (see Chapter 5 on the Abkhaz reaction).<sup>218</sup> These explanations were viable at the time in light of the ongoing war between the post-coup d’état leadership of Georgia led by Shevardnadze and his armed supporters and the Zviadist insurgency in support of Gamsakhurdia, especially in the regions adjacent to Abkhazia.<sup>219</sup> The Abkhaz position in this internal conflict was unclear.<sup>220</sup> However, these explanations were not consistently provided by the Georgian parties following the entrance of the Georgian forces into Abkhazia on 14 August, 1992, and the swift development of events in Abkhazia—with battles between the Georgian forces on their way to the capital Sukhum/i and the Abkhaz levée en masse starting almost immediately (see Chapter 5)—demonstrated that the issues of railroad security and kidnapped officials were not paramount for the Georgian forces in Abkhazia. It is possible to conclude, then, that other motives were at play in sending the troops there. As a member of the then government of Georgia recalls,

Four people in the Military Council, Shevardnadze, Kitovani, Sigua [later Prime Minister], and Ioseliani [Mkhedrioni head], closed the doors. I was in the corridor... Two last people to leave the room were Sergey Bagapsh [Ochamchira head] and David Pilia [Tqvarchel/i head]... They had red faces and said, “They are starting a war”... No one knows, who took the responsibility and how the decision was made (Interview 161, April 21, 2013).<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Hewitt (1996: 217) stands in sharp contrast to these arguments and criticizes Shevardnadze directly for the onset of the war in Abkhazia. On the internal politics in Georgia and the conflict between armed actors, particularly the leaders of the Mkhedrioni and the National Guard, Ioseliani and Kitovani respectively, and Shevardnadze, see Driscoll (2009); Darchiashvili (2003c); Nodia (1998). Documents of the period is available in Lezhava (1998); Volhonskij et al. (2008).

<sup>218</sup> See, for example, Coppieters (2000: 24); Cornell (2000: 171); Nodia and Scoltbach (2006: 12); Zverev (1996).

<sup>219</sup> On the details of this war, see, for example, Zverev (1998).

<sup>220</sup> Both Gamsakhurdia and Shevardnadze were hostile toward the Abkhaz leadership of Abkhazia and promised to the Georgian people that Abkhazia would remain within Georgia, even though Gamsakhurdia offered concessions to the Abkhaz. The Abkhaz were thus wary of supporting the ousted president, but neither did they openly oppose Zviadists.

<sup>221</sup> According to the records of the Abkhaz Ministry of Defence, Georgian General Mamulashvili taken captive by the Abkhaz army on 6 July, 1993, confessed that “in his presence on 8 August, 1992,... Shevardnadze, Sigua, Kitovani, Ioseliani... unanimously decided on the deployment of troops to Abkhazia” (Avidzba: 2008: 124).

Regardless of the pretext, the decision to send Georgian troops to Abkhazia, which quickly turned into fighting and a full-scale war, was made at the level of the Georgian leadership.<sup>222</sup> This decision followed the escalation of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict in the framework of the political process. It is these dynamics at the macro, state level, rather than the escalation of pre-war violence, that led to the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-1993. As Zurcher (2007: 140) corroborates, “until 1992 there was astonishingly little organized violence between local ethnic groups in Abkhazia.”

#### **4.4 Summary of Findings**

This chapter looked in detail at the process of escalation of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict to war. I demonstrated that pre-war inter-group violence of the late 1980s in Abkhazia was an isolated set of events that did not produce further violence prior to the war of 1992-1993 and had a dynamic of its own. Mobilization for these events, deeply connected to the ongoing conflict, unfolded at the micro and meso levels. In contrast, the escalation of the conflict to war was a macro-level process.

I used this puzzle of pre-war violent mobilization to inform the latent normative framework activation mechanism and argued that understanding the events of pre-war inter-group violence is critical for our understanding of the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-1993 in particular and civil war in general not because it escalated the conflict to war, but rather because it led to the transformation of the latent normative framework for action. This included both its inter- and intra-group aspects.

First, the events of violence dealt a dramatic blow to the inter-group norms of friendship and peace and solidified their counterpart norms of inter-group conflict and violence. The indicators of this transformation include polarization of society, or the split in the societal organizations between Georgian and Abkhaz sectors, and its militarization, reflected in the formation of armed groups on the Georgian and Abkhaz sides following the first events of violence. As an Abkhaz security sector official and participant puts it well, “the society was militarized” (Interview 9, 31 October, 2011).

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<sup>222</sup> For further details, see, among others, Coppieters (1998: 127-148); Lakoba (2001: 59-80); Dumaa (2002: 139-141).

Second, the events of violence strengthened the intra-Abkhaz norms and understandings of history and identity, which emerged in the preceding cycles of mobilization by the Abkhaz. On the one hand, ownership and belonging to Abkhazia and the Abkhaz people was sharply pronounced in Abkhaz mobilization surrounding the first events of violence. On the other hand, the intra-Abkhaz cohesion and organizational capacity increased as demonstrated by the consolidation of the Abkhaz national movement, despite its internal divides, in the preparation for the Abkhaz workers' general strike in response to the first violence, and participation of wide segments of the Abkhaz population in this 1989 strike. Aidgylara members and non-members across the respondent population support this argument: "The Abkhaz... were united" (Interview 60, 9 November, 2011); "Aidgylara... was a consolidating power for the Abkhaz" (Interview 118, 29 November, 2011).

Abkhaz mobilization repertoires broadened in this period from spontaneous, private micro-level and elite-based meso-level forms to organized, public meso- and macro-level forms, with the involvement of the elite and broader society (see Table 4 in Chapter 2). The shift is indicated by the prevalence in most of the Soviet period of everyday forms of resistance, such as offensive language use and brawls, and public contention, exemplified by letter writing and public gatherings, and the emergence in the late 1980s of violent opposition, or inter-group clashes, and unifying large-scale organized mobilization events, such as the 1989 Abkhaz general strike (see Table 7 in Chapter 3).

These events implied a radical deterioration of relations and power asymmetry between the Georgian and Abkhaz groups, the ability of the Abkhaz movement to mobilize the population on a large scale, and the unity of the Abkhaz population in this mobilization. Pre-war violence of 1989 thus increased the Abkhaz mobilization potential, or ability to act, and in part prepared the Abkhaz for further mobilization. Chapter 5 discusses in depth the next cycle of Abkhaz mobilization at the onset of the Georgian-Abkhaz war in 1992 and demonstrates the importance of the latent normative framework for immediate mass Abkhaz mobilization at this stage of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict.

## Chapter 5: Mobilization in Civil War

All of a sudden, on 14 August, 1992, Georgian tanks entered Abkhazia.  
Everyone stood up... We had popular mobilization with hunting weapons.  
Whether we remained alive or not, it was our duty to defend our native land.

- Abkhaz fighters

The two previous chapters studied in depth the first part of the latent normative framework activation mechanism, namely formation and transformation of the latent normative framework for action in the process of pre-war mobilization. These chapters established the normative and social foundations of civil war mobilization. In particular, Chapter 3 identified the basic intra- and inter-group norms guiding social relations in pre-war Abkhazia and emergent understandings of history and identity produced by the Abkhaz in the course of mobilization. By looking at the puzzle of pre-war violent mobilization, Chapter 4 then examined the significance of pre-war inter-group violence for consolidation of the latent normative framework for action. It demonstrated that pre-war events of inter-group violence greatly increased the cohesion and organizational capacity of the Abkhaz, preparing the Abkhaz for further mobilization, even though they were not ready for a war per se.

This chapter turns to the second part of the mechanism—activation of the latent normative framework for action at the outset of civil war. To analyze this core argument of the dissertation, I turn to my second, central puzzle of immediate mass mobilization for war, which increases the risks of participation as compared to the pre-war period, especially on the weaker side in the war. I show that individuals and small groups mobilize on the weaker side despite the risks and argue that cost-benefit calculations are insufficient to understand such risky mobilization. Civil war mobilization, I find, depends on the activation of latent norms through the intervening mechanism of framing and perception of threat at the micro, meso, and macro levels of the social structure. Given the presence of latent norms, the variation in mobilization roles adopted at the stage of civil war onset depends on whether the threat is perceived toward oneself or the collectivity within which one is embedded.

The following sections position this argument in the literature on civil war mobilization and trace the normative and social process of mobilization on the weaker side at the civil war onset with fine-grained process tracing based on targeted Abkhaz fighter and non-fighter interviews. While I use interview data with individuals across the mobilization roles spectrum (see Figure 8 in Chapter 2), I focus on armed group members, that is, spontaneous and organized Abkhaz mobilizers, mostly men, in the period of the Georgian advance to Abkhazia on 14-18 August, 1992.<sup>223</sup> With this data, I demonstrate the interaction between framing and perception of threat, latent norms, and individual and small group mobilization roles taken at the civil war onset—the chains in the latent normative framework activation mechanism. Chapters 6 and 7 then reflect on the continued importance of the mechanism at the stages of sustained mobilization in civil war, or retention (1992-1993), and post-war mobilization in support of the achievements gained in the course of the war (1993-2008).

## **5.1 Mobilization in Civil War Research**

Chapter 2 on the concept and theories of mobilization discussed in detail the foundations of the normative and socially-embedded theory of mobilization developed in this dissertation and the latent normative framework activation mechanism that I propose to explain civil war mobilization. This section positions my argument more clearly in response to the research on mobilization within the rationalist tradition. This particularly relates to the work on selective incentives in the collective action program (Weinstein, 2007) and what I label the strategic interaction program that challenges the premises of collective action research (Kalyvas, 2006; Kalyvas and Kocher, 2007). Neither set of studies sufficiently explains the puzzle of immediate mass mobilization at the stage of civil war onset, especially on the weaker side in the war. Understanding such puzzling mobilization, I argue, requires a grounded knowledge of the complexities of normative and social positioning of potential mobilizers. Rationalist cost-benefit analysis, on its own, is unable to capture these complexities.

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<sup>223</sup> My interviews are balanced between 49% non-fighters, 41% spontaneous fighters, and 10% organized fighters.



The primary purpose of this chapter is not to analyze the strategies of leaders who organize mobilization, although these strategies are certainly part of the dynamics of mobilization, but rather to understand the decisions of regular people to engage in the deadly form of conflict that puts their lives in direct danger.<sup>224</sup> As Kalyvas and Kocher (2007: 182) argue, “[t]he world does not lack Che Guevaras ready to launch insurgencies—and likely to fail. What it does lack, however, is a mass of followers willing to take the necessary risks... The puzzle, then, is explaining mass participation.”

The first and foremost challenge in demonstrating the limitations of the rationalist approach to mass mobilization is establishing that individual preferences do matter in situations of civil war onset and that achieving personal security is not the sole motivation behind mobilization. To this end, Kalyvas (2006: 167) makes a powerful statement when he says that “civilians collaborate with the political actor who best guarantees their security.” Within Kalyvas’ theory of irregular war,

Political actors try to shape popular support (or collaboration) and deter collaboration with their rival (or defection). As the conflict matures, control is increasingly likely to shape collaboration because political actors who enjoy substantial territorial control can protect civilians who live in that territory..., giving survival-oriented civilians a strong incentive to collaborate with them, *irrespective of their true or initial preferences* (12, emphasis added).

As “inferring preferences from observed behavior is exceedingly difficult,” Kalyvas (101) brackets the problem of individual preferences. Instead, he adopts a number of assumptions about support. Importantly for our purposes, Kalyvas (101) suggests that “civilians vary the level and the direction of their commitment throughout the war.” It follows that, as political actors alternate control of the territory, the population of that territory will shift their commitment to a political actor currently in control. Thus, control, according to Kalyvas (118), “spawns collaboration independently of prewar patterns of support.”<sup>225</sup> As a result, “[t]he higher the level of control exercised by an actor, the higher the rate of collaboration with this actor—and, inversely, the lower the rate of defection” (128).

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<sup>224</sup> This motivation behind the chapter is akin to that of Wood (2003) and Petersen (2001).

<sup>225</sup> Incumbent control of cities and insurgent control of rural areas regardless of pre-war support is used to support this argument. In Abkhazia, both Georgian and Abkhaz forces controlled cities and rural areas with varied pre-war support.

A significant implication of this argument is that security-seeking individuals will mobilize on the stronger side in the war that will potentially provide them with the greatest level of security. Kalyvas (128) thus argues that “[t]he relationship between control and collaboration... undermines the widespread assumption that joining an insurgent organization is always a highly risky behavior (thus, automatically turning recruitment into a collective action problem).” Instead, collaboration, including active participation in an insurgent organization, for Kalyvas, can be a way to reduce the risks of civil war and even gain personal benefits from the process of civil war. Kalyvas and Kocher (2007: 185-186) further advance this argument by saying that “insurgent participation is much less dangerous relative to nonparticipation... [R]ebel combatants have access to skills, resources, and networks that should promote their survival relative to noncombatants.”

This argument stands in sharp contrast to the widely adopted assertion within the collective action research program that “rebel activists face tremendous obstacles in launching and sustaining insurgencies” (Kalyvas and Kocher, 2007: 181). As Weinstein (2007: 8) argues, situating his work within this research program, “[a]ttracting recruits to participate in civil war is not an easy task. The work of rebellion is difficult and potentially dangerous.” The solution that Weinstein offers to this problem—the provision of selective incentives for mobilization of participants—sits firmly within the collective action tradition. As Weinstein (2007: 7) succinctly captures the argument,

rebel leaders may draw on two types of endowments: economic endowments, which come from diverse sources, including natural resource extraction, taxation, criminal activity, or external patronage; and social endowments, including shared beliefs, expectations, and norms that may exist in (or be mobilized from within) certain ethnic, religious, cultural, or ideological groups.

What we see in the case of mass Abkhaz mobilization for the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-1993, however, challenges both sets of arguments presented above—security-seeking mobilization on the stronger side and high-risk mobilization motivated by selective incentives offered by armed groups.

### 5.1.1 Strategic Interaction and Abkhaz Mobilization for War

According to the strategic interaction research (Kalyvas, 2006; Kalyvas and Kocher, 2007), the Abkhaz should have been observed to mobilize on the disproportionately stronger Georgian side at the Georgian advance into Abkhazia on 14-18 August, 1992, or defect to the Georgian side in the course of the war, as Georgia immediately established control of most of the territory of Abkhazia, demonstrating predominance of power. In line with the security-seeking logic, it would provide the Abkhaz with the greatest level of security; yet the Abkhaz immediately mobilized en masse against the Georgian advance—and did so without actively preparing for or expecting a war. I demonstrate these arguments briefly below and discuss mass Abkhaz mobilization in close detail in Section 5.2.

The Abkhaz side was at a clear disadvantage in manpower and weapons at the war onset. A 93,000-large nation, the Abkhaz did not stand a chance before the five-million-strong population of Georgia, of which Georgians were the dominant group, comprising 46% (240,000) of Abkhazia's population at the time. The danger of opposing the Georgian force was demonstrated to the Abkhaz already in July, 1989, when Georgians from and outside of Abkhazia mobilized in response to the clashes in Sukhum/i. Only the Soviet troops saved the Abkhaz then. As an Abkhaz journalist says,

Abkhaz leaders were writing to Russia the whole night [of 15 July], appealed to save us: “If you do not send the army, there will be no Abkhaz people.” And really..., when the Russian forces came, the situation more or less calmed down (Interview 104, 23 November, 2011).

While inter-group violence had not escalated further in 1989-1992, as Chapter 4 showed, the armed group Mkhedrioni that appeared in Abkhazia after the 1989 events apparently armed and organized the Georgian population for war.<sup>226</sup> Abkhaz fighters report: “the Mkhedrioni were really preparing Georgians after 1989” (Interview 49, 4 November, 2011); “created weapons stockpiles in Georgian homes where they lived compactly” (Interview 75, 13 November, 2011); “distributed arms to hide in gardens until the time comes” (Interview 20, 2 November, 2011). This argument is supported by

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<sup>226</sup> See Achugba (2003) for documents on the preparation and participation of the Georgian population in the war.

the following observation: Georgian families were securing their belongings or escaping Abkhazia in advance of the war. Abkhaz fighters and non-fighters often say: “They knew a month before, got the children out” (Interview 14, 1 November, 2011); “Our neighbor took neighborhood children to Georgia. Another neighbor hid rugs, valuables” (Interview 59, 9 November, 2011). Armed groups were, furthermore, created: “they used local residents” (Interview 27, 2 November, 2011); “formed armed units from the locals” (Interview 126, 1 December, 2011). An Abkhaz researcher confirms:

After the war... I was looking for the Georgians [who disappeared during the war. I found] lists of people, lists of [Georgian] militarized groups and units that were created before the war. They showed me houses where the weapons were stockpiled (133, 6 December, 2011).

Whether local Georgians prepared for war or not, that they joined Georgia in the war meant that the Abkhaz had a great disadvantage in manpower. “If local Georgians had not supported the Georgian side,” an Armenian fighter says, “nothing would happen here” (Interview 53, 8 November, 2011).

Georgia was stronger not only in manpower, but also in arms. As part of the May 15, 1992, Tashkent Agreement, Georgia inherited most Soviet weapons in the Transcaucasus after the Union fell. “In July 1992, the National Guard, [Georgia’s nascent army], received a large amount of heavy armaments, including some 50 tanks” (Zürcher et al., 2005: 272). Zverev (1996: part 4) confirms:

just before August 1992, Russia secured the military preponderance of Georgian forces over the Abkhaz ones, which invited the former to go on the offensive in Abkhazia. In autumn 1992, the Abkhaz had only eight tanks and 30 armoured cars, whereas just one Russian division handed over 108 tanks to Georgia.<sup>227</sup>

The great level of Georgia’s manpower and military equipment was evident from the outset of its advance to Abkhazia. According to the Abkhaz Ministry of Defence (MOD) records, 2,000 fighters of Georgia’s National Guard, equipped with 58 armored vehicles and artillery and supported by air and naval forces, crossed the Ingur/i Bridge into Abkhazia in the early morning of 14 August, 1992 (Pachulija, 2010: 27; see Section 5.2.1). As these fighters “entered Sukhumi; another 1,000 guards

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<sup>227</sup> See also Baev (2003: 138). On the military capabilities of the Georgian forces, see especially Darchiashvili (2005). On the structure of the Georgian forces, see Darchiashvili (1997, 2003c); Driscoll (2009).

landed in Gagra blocking Abkhazia's border with Russia" (Baev, 2003: 138; see Section 5.2.2). In one day, "Georgian troops, with support of tanks and helicopters, took control" of most Abkhazia, effectively encircling its territory (UNPO Report, 1992: 11). This two-part attack that launched the Georgian operation under code name Sword was intended to paralyze the Abkhaz into compliance and against resistance (Pachulija, 2010: 28; Argun, 1994: 4). As an Abkhaz historian explains,

Transcaucasus was the most strategic chain of Soviet defence. There was a huge amount of military technology. Its large portion was given to a completely young state, [Georgia], that used it to go with a war against a weaponless people (Interview 84, 16 November, 2011).

However, the operation did not succeed. A significant proportion of the Abkhaz population immediately mobilized for the war and joined the Abkhaz side in the course of the war. The number of Abkhaz fighters differs according to the source, but it is safe to say that over 12,000 (13% of the Abkhaz population at the time) mobilized to fight on the Abkhaz side.<sup>228</sup> This figure is supported in my interviews and those of other researchers.<sup>229</sup> Of my 150 interviews with respondents across the mobilization roles spectrum in Abkhazia, 72 (51%) involved fighters on the Abkhaz side in the war.

The significance of this mass mobilization outcome could be dismissed from the strategic interaction perspective by demonstrating that the Abkhaz expected a war and were prepared for it. Mobilization on the Abkhaz side in this scenario would indeed provide greater level of security for the Abkhaz over joining Georgia. However, my interviews notably confirm that the Abkhaz did not anticipate an upcoming war or actively prepare for it. Chapters 3 and 4 established that the pre-war time in Abkhazia was marked by Abkhaz mobilization in response to the decades of suppression of the political status and the rights of the Abkhaz. The violent culmination of this mobilization—the bloodshed of 1989—was followed by a period of calm in Abkhazia until the war broke out in 1992.

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<sup>228</sup> The figure is based on the number of casualties on the Abkhaz side in the war. For the population of 93,000 Abkhaz, HRW (1995: 5) records over 4,000 deaths and 8,000 injuries, most incurred after October, 1992 (see Chapter 6). The figure is contested with a range of 1,500-2,700 casualties reported in other sources (Mukomel, 1997: 302; Achugba and Khashba, 2007: 54). See Pachulija (2010: 507-559) for official Abkhaz casualty lists; Yamskov (2009) for a summary.

<sup>229</sup> Khodzhaa (2003, 2009), for example, provides lists of Abkhaz fighters by unit.

As a result, the Abkhaz did not foresee a war. Only a few individuals linked to the Abkhaz national movement perceived the potential danger. “My brother felt that there would be a war. He was even called an extremist for it,” an Abrskyl activist’s sister says, “But he had more information than regular people. Gytsba, Kikhiripa, [Abrskyl leaders], were all from his circle” (Interview 59, 9 November, 2011). Most Abkhaz did not imagine a possibility of a war. Fighters and non-fighters alike report: “tourists were still here. We did not think of a war... It was peaceful time... Weddings were still taking place” (Interview 11, 31 October, 2011); “No one thought there could be a military attack” (Interview 70, 11 November, 2011). A belief that there would be protection from the falling Soviet structures was common. “We could not believe that a war could start. We felt that we were protected by the great powerful Soviet Union” (Interview 49, 4 November, 2011). The majority of the Abkhaz interpreted the Georgian advance as yet another inter-group clash, similar to the one in July, 1989. Fighters and non-fighters say: “We thought it would be over right away, that it was like another clash” (Interview 38, 4 November, 2011); “Everyone was confused... Many thought it was as in 1989” (Interview 75, 13 November, 2011); “On 14 August, we thought it was a usual, regular clash. But a war, of such a large scale?! I did not expect that” (Interview 97, 19 November 2011).

Neither were the Abkhaz actively preparing for a war. Chapter 4 suggested that the pre-war inter-group violence in part prepared the Abkhaz for further mobilization. Yet, the preparation was primarily ideological, carried out in the framework of the Abkhaz national movement. Specifically, Aidgylara was created once it was clear with the explosion of nationalist sentiments in Georgia that the Abkhaz demands would not be met by Georgia. Aidgylara carried out ideological work, which united most of the Abkhaz, including other organizations pursuing the Abkhaz cause. As a member of Aidgylara says, “We foresaw that [further violence] could take place. Apart from the distribution of weapons, ideologically, everything was done” (Interview 15, 1 November, 2011).

Important advancements were also made on the military side, as the Soviet Union collapsed and no longer provided the assurance of military intervention in case of a new armed clash. On 29 December, 1991, Presidium of the High Council of Abkhazia issued resolutions that subordinated the so-called 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the Soviet Army—the Battalions of Internal Forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia that suppressed violence in Abkhazia before the collapse—to the Abkhaz government and formed the Special Regiment of the Internal Forces (SRIF or Abkhaz Guard) on its basis.<sup>230</sup> As Chapter 4 found, the raging Mkhedrioni activity in Abkhazia motivated its creation.<sup>231</sup>

Former 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment officers who wished to stay and reservists across Abkhazia formed the core of the force, which by January, 1992, guarded the Ingur/i Bridge, the Abkhaz border point with Georgia, from intrusions (Pachulija, 2010: 30-31). To fortify the force, on 31 March, Presidium of the High Council of Abkhazia announced a general draft into the SRIF.<sup>232</sup> By August, 1992, when the Georgian-Abkhaz war began, the SRIF thus integrated one thousand fighters, which included a hundred regulars, equipped with weapons and uniforms and stationed across Abkhazia (see Figure 14 below). Fighters and non-fighters confirm: “Many were in the Abkhaz Guard. They were given weapons, uniforms, had barracks” (Interview 38, 4 November, 2011); “It was an official structure. They had documents, were well known—we knew who belonged to the Guard” (Interview 129, 5 December, 2011). Twice before the war SRIF fighters resisted Georgian advances into Abkhazia: in February, 1992, when Georgian forces marched through Abkhazia in a parade of power as they were pursuing ousted President Gamsakhurdia’s supporters; and in April, 1992, when a low-scale armed clash took place between the two forces (Pachulija, 2010: 31; Avidzba, 2013: 371-372).

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<sup>230</sup> See resolutions of the High Council of Abkhazia “On the deployment of military units, institutions of border and internal troops, naval forces and amending their functioning on the territory of Abkhazia” and “On the formation under Chairman of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia of the Provisional Council for the coordination of activities and resubordination of military and police units deployed in Abkhazia” in Volhonskij et al. (2008: 120-121).

<sup>231</sup> On the formation of the SRIF, see also Pachulija (1997); Avidzba (2008, 2013); Khodzhaa (2009); Achugba (2011).

<sup>232</sup> See High Council resolution “On conscription for military service and measures for compliance with the law “On general military duties” on the territory of the Republic of Abkhazia” in Volhonskij et al. (2008: 124).

Figure 14. The Structure of the Special Regiment of the Internal Forces of Abkhazia (August, 1992)



Source: Based on UN map of Georgia, August 2004<sup>233</sup>

The SRIF was certainly formed to resist a potential attack from Georgia. However, most of its reservists were let go before the war. As SRIF fighters say, “When they decided everything was alright, they let us go, even though the Mkhedrioni stayed” (Interview 41, 4 November 2011); “for unknown reasons, our unit was demobilized, and when the war began the Abkhaz met it completely unprepared” (Interview 22, 2 November 2011). Hence, the Abkhaz leadership foresaw a possibility of a war, but did not expect the war to begin when it did, which left the Abkhaz, both the SRIF and regular Abkhaz men and women, shocked by the advance of the Georgian troops on 14 August.<sup>234</sup>

<sup>233</sup> All figures in this chapter are based on my interview, archival, and secondary materials, especially Pachulija (2010).

<sup>234</sup> Shevardnadze assured Ardzinba his forces would not proceed into Abkhazia on the war’s eve (Avidzba, 2008: 124).



Another indicator in support of this argument is the obligatory registration and collection of weapons from the population of Abkhazia implemented prior to the war. On 20 January, 1992, the High Council of Abkhazia passed a resolution that ordered the Abkhaz forces, including the SRIF, to seize illegally held weapons from all individuals and groups on the territory of Abkhazia.<sup>235</sup> My interviews confirm: “We had to register our weapons before the war” (Interview 13, 1 November, 2011); “Weapons were collected from the Abkhaz. Only... unregistered weapons were not taken away” (Interview 10, 31 October, 2011). Consequently, at the outset of the war, Abkhaz defence groups were armed with hunting rifles, if at all.<sup>236</sup> As SRIF and spontaneous fighters report, “There were no weapons” (Interview 61, 9 November, 2011); “We started weakly. Many wanted to fight, but we had no weapons” (Interview 47, 4 November, 2011). The following quote captures the shock of the Abkhaz at the war onset: “50 people gathered by the cathedral. “A war began!” We did not think it would happen, we were not ready. The power was in [Georgia’s] hands” (Interview, 2 November 2011). “Our first [military] successes,” a Georgian commander later confirms, “[show that the Abkhaz] were not prepared [for a war]” (Dumaa, 2002: 143). Nevertheless, they mobilized.

Mass Abkhaz mobilization on the weaker Abkhaz side despite the suddenness of the attack and the sheer preponderance of Georgian force, demonstrated by Georgia immediately establishing control over most of Abkhazia, implies that individual preferences, or pre-war patterns of support, significantly affected Abkhaz mobilization. This case shows that security seeking is not always the principal basis of mobilization. Other motivations were also at play. There was variation in Abkhaz mobilization for war: some mobilized to fight, others chose alternative available options.<sup>237</sup> I argue that the security-seeking argument may hold for the latter, but it does not apply to the former.

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<sup>235</sup> See text in Diasamidze (2002). This decision was meant to disarm the members of the Georgian armed formations, including the Mkhedrioni, present in Abkhazia. According to the Abkhaz government, these formations were illegal in Abkhazia. See 29 December, 1991, resolutions in fn. 230. See also Papaskiri (2010: 398-399); Avidzba (2013: 357).

<sup>236</sup> See accounts on the war onset in the collection of Russian press releases on the war available in Apsynba (1997).

<sup>237</sup> These are remaining in Abkhazia and attempting to hold neutrality, fleeing, and, rarely, collaborating with Georgia.

To understand this variation, I argue, we need to isolate the conditions under which security seeking as opposed to other motivations for mobilization is paramount. As the next sections show, activation of latent norms for action can help explain mobilization and isolate these conditions. We should expect latent norms for action to develop especially in close-knit social units with a history of injustice, actual or perceived, and mobilization in response. Formation of these norms, however, should not be limited to these scope conditions. Given the presence of these norms, security seeking in general will apply to individuals and small groups whose perception of threat posed by the civil war onset is directed primarily toward themselves, rather than the social unit of which they are part. Beyond these conditions, when potential mobilizers are primarily concerned with their social unit, they will adopt mobilization roles that place them in direct danger of injury or death and, therefore, defy the basic logic of security seeking advanced in the strategic interaction research program. This is the core of my latent normative framework activation mechanism, discussed in the next sections. The remainder of this section briefly positions my argument vis-à-vis the selective incentives logic.

### **5.1.2 Selective Incentives and Abkhaz Mobilization for War**

According to the selective incentives argument in the collective action tradition (Weinstein, 2007), the Abkhaz should have been observed to mobilize if offered economic or social incentives. The puzzling outcome of immediate mass mobilization on the Abkhaz side in the Georgian-Abkhaz war challenges the selective incentives logic, as the Abkhaz were not only unable to offer economic incentives to potential mobilizers, but also struggled to get the basic necessities of warfare for those who wished to fight. Both spontaneous and organized fighters confirm: “We had many who wanted to fight, but there were no weapons” (Interview 47, 4 November, 2011); “We tried holding off the young, but they joined nonetheless” (Interview 21, 2 November, 2011); “We mobilized with what we had: some went with sticks” (Interview 12, 30 October, 2011). The economic endowments logic thus does not hold at the war onset, as there were no material rewards for immediate participation.

Social endowments, seen as constraining individual behavior from the selective incentives perspective (see Ch. 2: 49-52), may have affected Abkhaz mobilization, but cannot fully explain it. As Chapter 3 argued, the Abkhaz society is characterized by the high density and strength of ties. It is a classic strong community able to punish its members for breaching the intra-Abkhaz norms, of which patriotism, masculinity, and heroism, demonstrated through selfless struggle, are decisive to one's social standing. The Abkhaz realized the potential effects of their war decisions on the future reputation. As an Abkhaz historian explains, "An Abkhaz who fought would be alright with a non-fighter Armenian, but would be more critical of another Abkhaz who did not fight" (Interview 146, 14 December, 2011). The following quote captures this side of the Abkhaz position on the subject,

[Those] who went to fight on the other side or left for Russia or Georgia... are traitors. My brother, for example, his wife is Georgian, they went to Moscow after the war started, then she went to Georgia and he returned... I cannot accept him (Interview 5, 27 October, 2011).

Yet, variation exists in the effects of war choices on post-war reputation and acceptance within the Abkhaz society. As an Abkhaz commander confirms, "We had a... volunteer army. If some did not fight, we did not have anything against them after, apart from verbal accusations" (Interview 127, 1 December, 2011).<sup>238</sup> Thus the Abkhaz who fled from the war often came back to Abkhazia and even assumed high-level positions in the post-war Abkhaz society. As an Abkhaz respondent says, "When they returned after the war, we could not ask them why they left since this is such a sensitive question. But they brought back money... [and] became leaders" (Interview 5, 27 October, 2011). Furthermore, some groups within the Abkhaz society, such as the intelligentsia and the youth, were purposely protected from war. As respondents in this group say, "a decision was made to protect the intelligentsia, scientists given the small number of our people" (Interview 84, 16 November, 2011); "Ardzinba ordered single sons to not be taken to active army" (Interview 22, 2 November, 2011).

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<sup>238</sup> Verbal accusations, rumors, and a sense of distance toward the Abkhaz who did not fight during the war but returned to live in Abkhazia, especially if taking high posts in post-war Abkhazia, were recorded in my participant observations.

Most notably, neither fighters nor non-fighters provided concerns with post-war reputation, an indicator of community sanctioning, as a reason for mobilization. Instead, the Abkhaz explained their war decisions in line with their understanding of history and identity of the Abkhaz as the just host of Abkhazia, belonging fully to its land and ready to sacrifice themselves in order to defend it. The substantial losses among the Abkhaz during the war support this motivation (see fn. 228). Negative reinforcement of norms through community sanctioning is thus insufficient to understand Abkhaz war mobilization. Positive effects of norms as constituting one's identity and, as a result, shaping individual and group actions played a greater, if not a primary, role (see Ch. 2: 49-52).

This is not to say that the social aspect is insignificant in the Abkhaz mobilization decisions. On a contrary, I argue that the positioning of individuals and small groups at the micro, meso, and macro levels of the social structure can greatly affect their adoption of varying mobilization roles at the war onset. Social sanctioning, however, is not the sole mechanism through which social factors affect civil war mobilization. I advance an alternative mechanism and argue that social positioning can impact civil war mobilization through the intervening aspect of the latent normative framework activation mechanism, namely, framing and perception of threat. In particular, I find that individual and collective actors at the micro, meso, and macro levels of the society frame threats posed by the civil war onset, triggering threat perception among potential mobilizers. This intervening aspect is critical for the resultant variation in mobilization roles adopted by individuals and small groups.

In the sections below, I focus on these aspects of the normative and social positioning of the Abkhaz. First, I trace the process of the Abkhaz mobilization at the outset of the Georgian-Abkhaz war on 14-18 August, 1992. I then look at the second phase of the mechanism—activation of latent norms—and show how its chains—threat-framing triggers at the micro, meso, and macro levels of the society and threat perception by potential mobilizers—relate to the adopted mobilization roles.

## **5.2 Civil War Onset and Immediate Mass Abkhaz Mobilization (14-18 August, 1992)**

In discussing the concept of mobilization, Chapter 2 outlined two dimensions, participation and organization, capturing the two-way process of mobilization that involves individual decisions to mobilize and organizations' recruitment strategies. The following sections apply this concept to Abkhaz mobilization. I demonstrate that most mobilization by the Abkhaz at the beginning of the Georgian-Abkhaz war was not formally recruited. Instead, individuals and small groups decided to mobilize voluntarily within the micro- and meso-level informal social networks. Collective action that followed was spontaneous. The spontaneous local defence volunteer mobilization at the outset of the war represents this type of mobilization. In contrast, SRIF regular soldiers and reservists who mobilized immediately upon the Georgian advance into Abkhazia were formally recruited prior to the war by the macro-level Abkhaz organizations. Their collective action was organized. The joint Abkhaz force that formed over 14-18 August, 1992, thus involved both spontaneous and organized mobilization by both unrecruited regular Abkhaz men and women and recruited military men.<sup>239</sup>

On the spectrum of mobilization roles, those Abkhaz individuals and small groups who did not flee from the war effort adopted a variety of roles from neutrality to membership in the Abkhaz force. Individuals and small groups with household responsibilities, especially young children, and the elderly generally adopted the roles of neutrality and indirect support to the Abkhaz force. Most Abkhaz civil war mobilization, however, encompassed the roles of direct support and membership. Individuals and small groups considered unfit to fight joined the behind-the-lines action, providing the basic necessities for the fighters. The most puzzling aspect of mobilization and the one that this chapter is concerned with is the full membership in the Abkhaz force. The remainder of this section traces risky organized and spontaneous mobilization on the weaker Abkhaz side at the war onset.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Other groups from and outside of Abkhazia mobilized for the war as well. See, for example, Khodzhaa (2005) on the Armenian battalion and Tsushba (2000) on foreign fighters. The focus here, however, is Abkhaz mobilization.

<sup>240</sup> The sections below use my interview, archival, and secondary data to trace and explain the mobilization process.

### **5.2.1 Abkhaz Mobilization in Response to Georgian Advance from the East**

On 14 August, 1992, under the pretense of Georgian hostage release and railroad security, the thousands-strong, heavily armed force of the Georgian State Council entered Abkhazia from its eastern border with Georgia. “They said that they came to guard the railroad but one does not guard the railroad with tanks,” an Abkhaz commander describes this advance (Interview 29, 2 November, 2011). The Georgian forces met no resistance at the entrance into Abkhazia. A day before, upon the insistence of head of the Gal/i region, Abkhaz guards of the Ingur/i post of the Special Regiment of the Internal Forces (SRIF) were dismissed, while the chief intelligence officer reported to the SRIF commander that the border situation was calm (Pachulija, 2010: 28-29; see Figure 15 below).<sup>241</sup>

The Georgian forces thus moved unimpeded toward the capital, Sukhum/i, along the single road connecting the territory of Abkhazia from east to west. The SRIF reserve units were stationed along this road, which made it feasible for them to delay the Georgian advance. Up to ten reservists still guarded the Okhurej post near Ingur/i. These guards, along with their assistants from the unit, were the first to face the Georgian forces but were instantly captured and brought to the Gal/i prison with their commander and head of Ochamchira. Surviving fighters say that they did not expect the fighting, thinking simply that Gamsakhurdia’s supporters sneaked in (Pachulija, 2010: 29-30).<sup>242</sup>

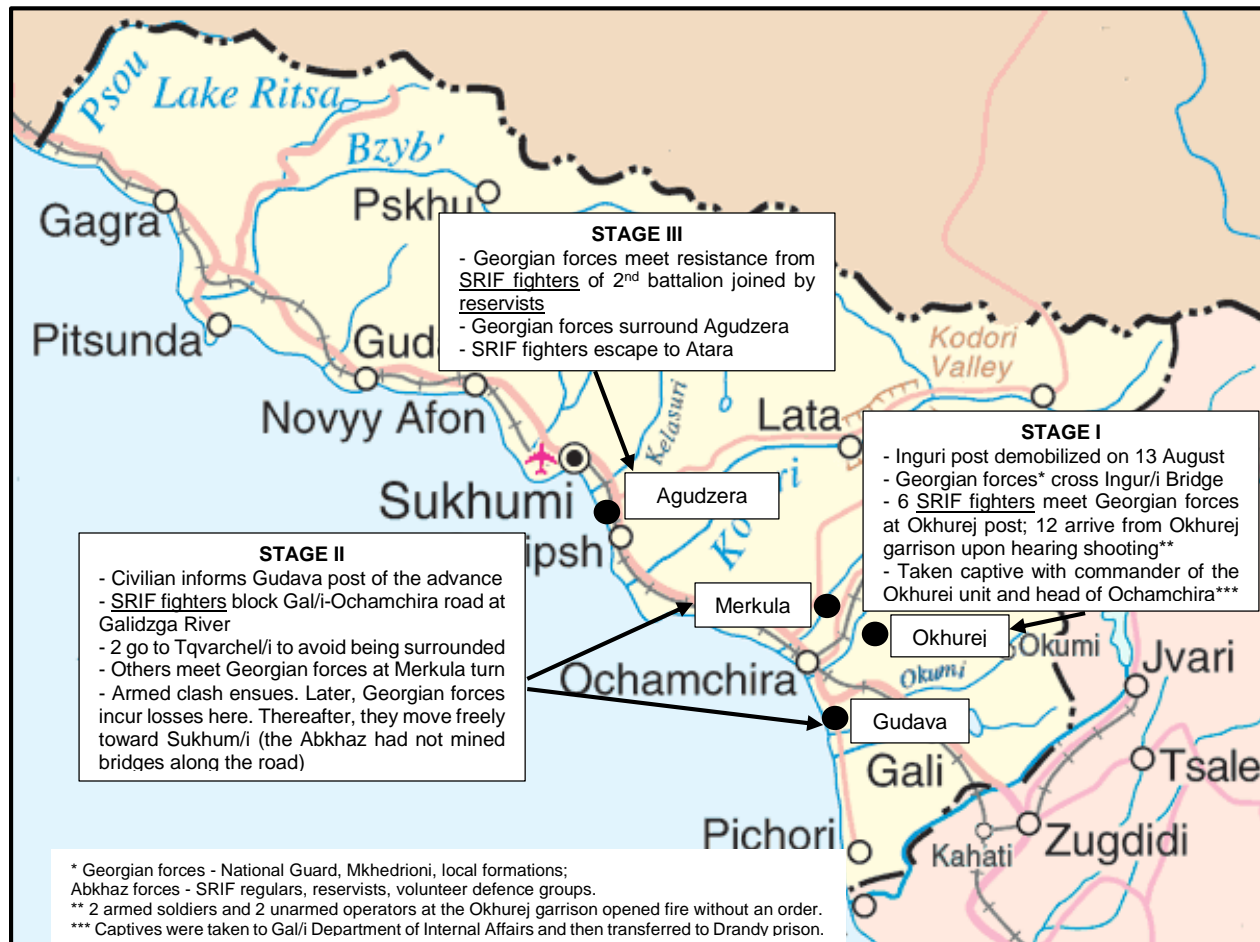
Few fighters remaining at the Okhurej garrison and other SRIF units, informed by civilians, opened fire against the Georgian forces midway to and near Sukhum/i and somewhat delayed their advance by detonating bridges along the main road. The Tamysh Bridge by Agudzera was blasted, for example (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 721). The Agudzera unit, the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion of the SRIF, had the first battle. An Abkhaz fighter was killed here; he blocked the road with an armored vehicle and caused the Georgian forces first losses (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2003: 57; Pachulija, 2010: 35).

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<sup>241</sup> This observation provides further support to the argument made above on unpreparedness of the Abkhaz for war.

<sup>242</sup> See fn. 241 above.

Figure 15. Abkhaz Mobilization in Response to Georgian Advance from the East (14 August, 1992)

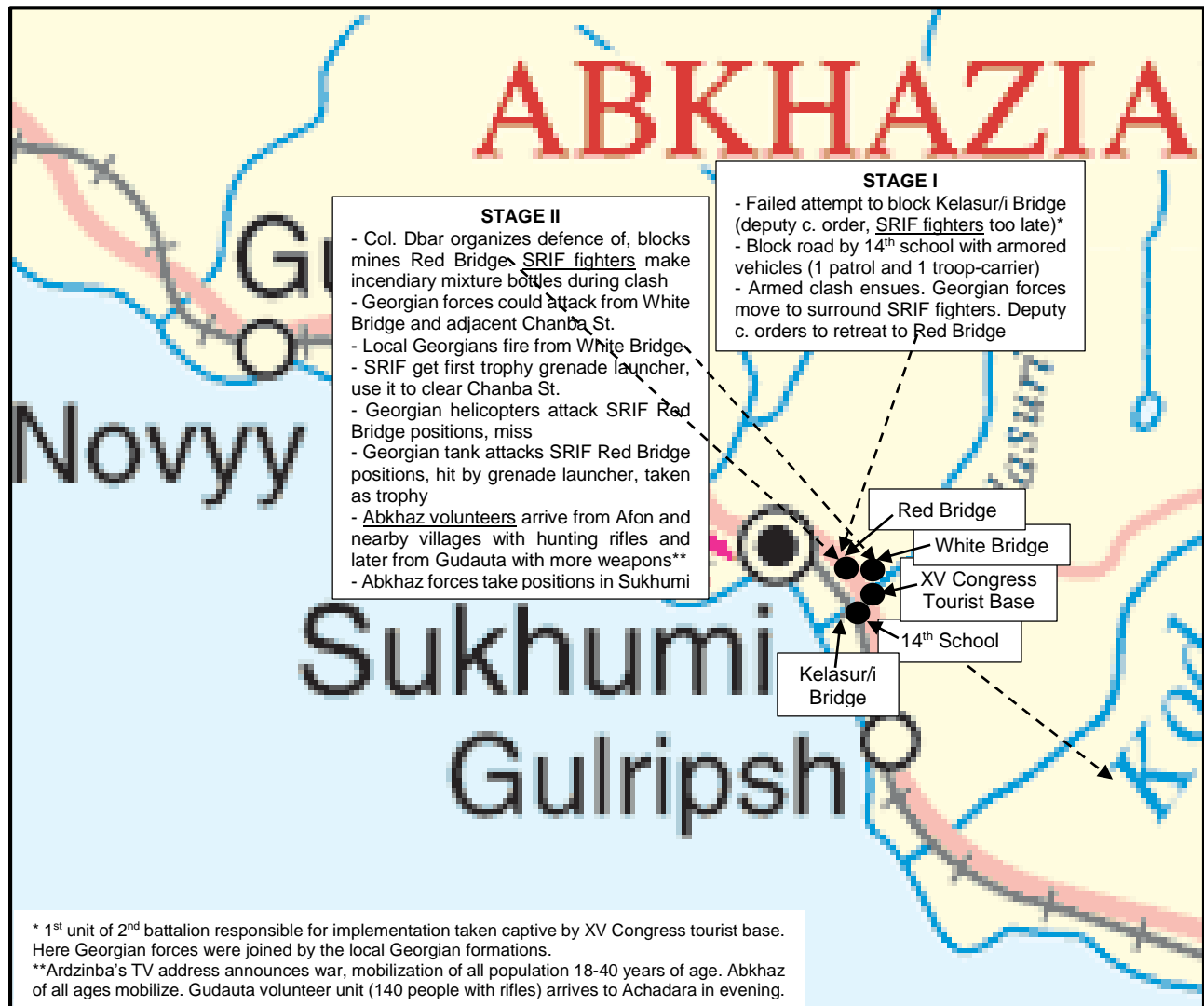


Source: Based on UN map of Georgia, August 2004

Having defeated these small, lightly armed Abkhaz units, the Georgian forces moved freely toward Sukhum/i thereafter. There was a failed attempt to block the Kelasuri Bridge at the entry to the capital (see Figure 16 below). “SRIF deputy commander gave an order... to block the Kelasuri Bridge,” a SRIF regular soldier recalls (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2003: 56-57). Yet, the SRIF forces were too late to block the bridge. The Georgian forces were quickly advancing. In a new clash they moved to surround SRIF fighters who were forced to retreat. As a result, a SRIF reservist reports,

[we] got an order to go to the tourist base of the XV Congress, help Abkhaz guards at the Okhurej post... [b]ut most... had been taken captive..., resistance of the [2<sup>nd</sup>] battalion was broken... in Agudzera..., and the Georgian occupation forces approached the tourist base of the XV Congress, moving to the center of Sukhum/i (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 922).

Figure 16. Abkhaz Mobilization in Response to Georgian Advance to Sukhum/i (14 August, 1992)



Source: Based on UN map of Georgia, August 2004

As Georgia's forces passed SRIF posts along the road to Sukhum/i on 14 August, they met further resistance at the entry into the capital. It was not only regular soldiers and reservists of the SRIF who mobilized there. Abkhaz civilian volunteer fighters (*opolchentsy*) immediately joined as well, first from nearby towns and villages, including Novyy Afon, and later from Gudauta, where a base of the Soviet air forces was located and a limited amount of weapons were stored.<sup>243</sup>

<sup>243</sup> The term closest to Russian *opolchenie* used to describe the Abkhaz forces at the outset of the war is *levée en masse* (see McAdam et al., 2001: 325). In distinguishing between the groups involved in the early Abkhaz mobilization I use (civilian) *volunteer fighters* and *local defence groups* to reflect the *levée en masse* aspect of the Abkhaz mobilization.



These combined Abkhaz forces held the Georgian column at the entry to the capital largely with hunting rifles and improvised incendiary mixtures. Abkhaz volunteer fighters confirm: “When I heard about the beginning of the Georgian occupation, I came to the Red Bridge with my rifle” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 968); “We took some weapons from Russian barracks [in Gudauta], gathered the boys we knew. Right away we were let out with one bullet to the Red Bridge—“You’ll get more in the battle”” (Interview 81, 15 November, 2011). Indeed, the Abkhaz soon got a trophy grenade launcher in a battle at the White Bridge where the Georgian forces were concentrated. The launcher was then used to seize a Georgian tank (Pachulija, 2010: 37-38). “Tank №150 captured by the Red Bridge later became a tank of the Abkhaz Army” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2003: 309).

Due to a stand-off between the forces, Georgian-Abkhaz negotiations began on 15 August. A decision was made to separate the forces—the Georgian forces retreated to the east of Sukhum/i, the Abkhaz to Gumista River to the west of the capital. As a volunteer fighter says, “Our units that took positions in Sukhum retreated to Gumista” (Interview 97, 18 November, 2011). Formation of the Gumista front line, one of the two main front lines in the war, began then (see Figure 17 below). The SRIF command gave an order to plan defence along Gumista. Volunteers from nearby Eshera mobilized to take defence positions along the river, but were soon replaced by the Eshera and other SRIF units armed in Gudauta. In turn, Gudauta became the headquarters of the Abkhaz forces. The Abkhaz MOD reports that 1,000 automatic guns were purchased from the Soviet base there to arm the Gumista defence units (Pachulija, 2010: 42). However, some of these weapons were donated to the Abkhaz by remaining Russian officers or taken by the Abkhaz by force. As a volunteer fighter says, “with some weapons they helped us, others we just took, yet others they sold to us” (Interview 81, 15 November, 2011).<sup>244</sup> Furthermore, North Caucasus volunteers began arriving in Gudauta.

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<sup>244</sup> On the involvement of Russia, including the difference in the positions of the Russian leadership and branches of the military, see Trenin (1996); Zverev (1996).

Figure 17. Abkhaz Gumista Front Line Mobilization (14 August-on)



Source: Based on UN map of Georgia, August 2004

Meanwhile, the Abkhaz mobilization continued in the east, in the villages around the city of Tqvarchel/i (Pachulija: 2010: 49-55). This mining city was blockaded by the Georgian forces upon their arrival to Abkhazia. As an Abkhaz civilian confirms, “Tqvarchal was in the blockade from the beginning of the war. They were isolated right away” (Interview 67, 9 November, 2011). Yet, the Abkhaz in this area where Georgia immediately established control did not defect to the Georgian side. Instead, they swiftly mobilized in almost every village. Figure 18 (below) places some of these villages on the map of the area and provides a quick summary of mobilization in the villages. Once the Abkhaz mobilization was complete around Tqvarchel/i, the east front line formed as a result.

Figure 18. Abkhaz East Front Self-Defence and Partisan Mobilization (14 August-on)



Source: Based on UN map of Georgia, August 2004

Due to the difficult conditions of organizing defence in the area under the enemy's control, the mobilization that took place around Tqvarcheli/i took form of the partisan (guerrilla) movement. Fighter groups were initially formed for self-defence purposes. Abkhaz defence volunteers started

off guarding the villages. “On the second day [of the war], the youth of the village began gathering, arming themselves with whatever they could: made bottles with incendiary mixtures, got ammonal from Tqvarcheli, and put up a barricade... with watch duties” (Interview in Khodzaa, 2009: 615).

Defence was weak at first. “We had three automatic guns in the village,” a Merkula fighter notes, “others were unarmed or with hunting rifles” (Interview in Khodzaa, 2009: 689). Georgians used this weakness. “On 27 August, 1992, Georgians entered Mokva village, burned several dozen Abkhaz houses, killing some civilians” (Interview in Khodzaa, 2009: 683). Fortification of defence lines around the Abkhaz villages was, therefore, an important part of the initial mobilization in the east front. As a fighter from the Mokva tea plantation explains, “Ahead of us was Tsagera village, where Georgians resettled since the times of Beria. It was strongly fortified and armed. And so we had to dig trenches and blindages. We had minor clashes” (Interview in Khodzaa, 2009: 550). With an upsurge in resistance, however, the Georgian forces went into the Abkhaz villages less and less. “They entered Kutol..., burned houses along the road,” an Abkhaz civilian recalls, “When they met resistance, they did not go into [our] villages anymore” (Interview 104, 23 November, 2011).

Guerrilla warfare soon began in the area. Abkhaz groups launched assaults on the Georgian forces positioned in nearby villages to acquire weapons. “Almost every night we sabotaged, [b]lew up electricity pylons, attacked Georgian roadblocks,” a Dzhgerda fighter says, “The main goal was to obtain weapons” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 840). These groups gradually developed into a strong, organized guerrilla force. “We conducted a subversive guerrilla war..., [c]arried out sudden sorties against Georgian units..., mined Georgian military vehicle paths” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 726). The force held Abkhaz defence positions and blocked a further Georgian advance into the mountainous villages and Tqvarchel/i. “Tqvarchal was occupied, but Georgians could not take it because partisan fighting was held in the villages nearby” (Interview 110, 26 November, 2011).

## 5.2.2 Abkhaz Mobilization in Response to Georgian Advance from the West

The developments in the west of Abkhazia took a different course in the process of the war, dominated by position fighting between the forces on the Abkhaz and Georgian sides after the first military successes of the Abkhaz. Here the Georgian advance from the sea began on 15 August, a day after the attack in the east (see Figure 19 below). Thus by the time the Georgian military ships arrived in Abkhazia the Abkhaz started to realize the seriousness of the situation and had a chance to mobilize a fraction of their SRIF forces. Local Abkhaz defence volunteers mobilized as well.

On 14 August, after it was clear with the Georgian advance from the east that a war began, Ardzinba gave a televised address, calling on the population of Abkhazia to mobilize in response to the Georgian attack. Moreover, on the night of 14 August, he informed Jazychba, head of the Gagra administration—a city center in the west of Abkhazia,—of the Georgian approach by sea. Jazychba immediately took steps to mobilize the local SRIF unit. As commander of the Pitsunda unit reports,

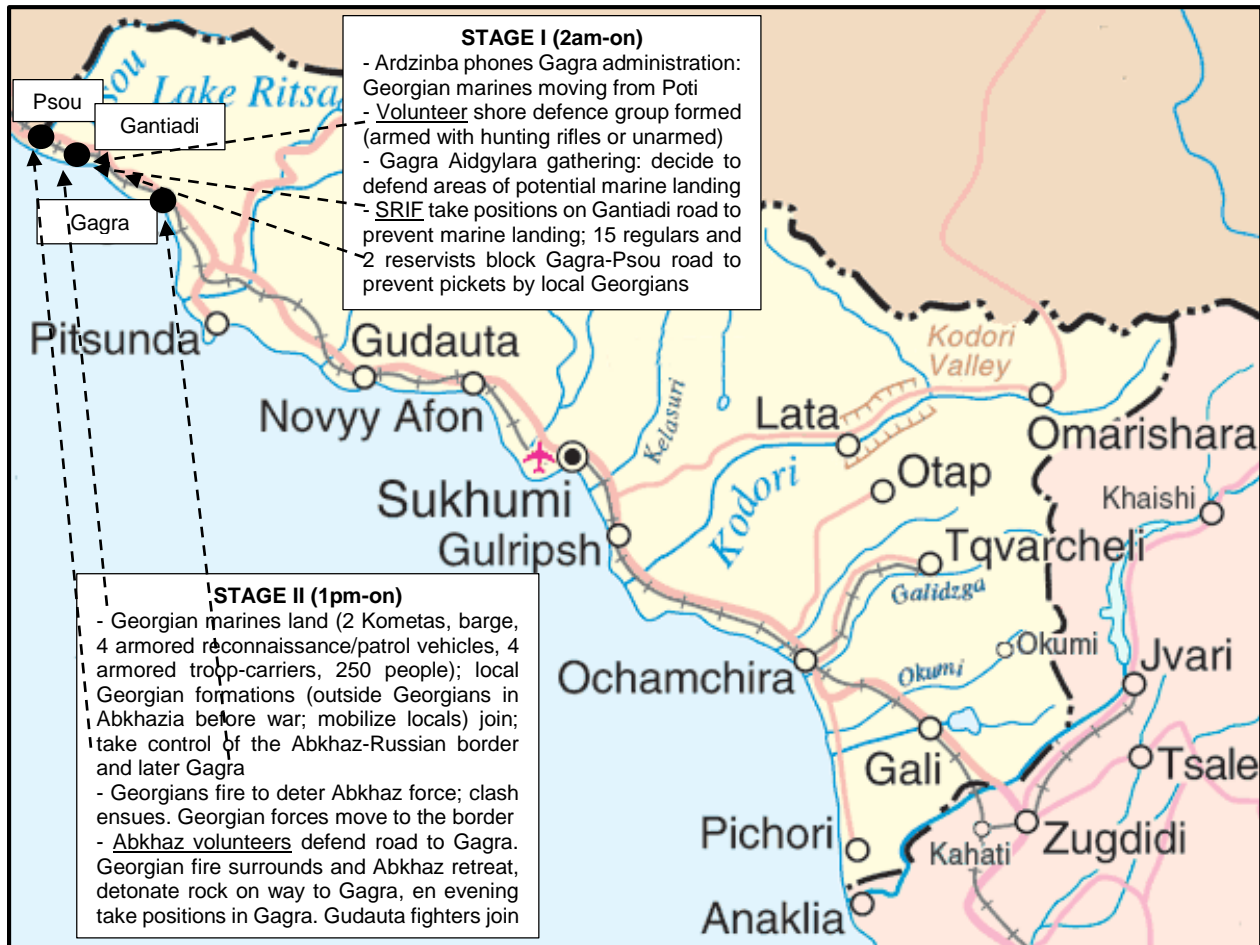
Jazychba called me [with] the order... to take guard of the Psou-Gagra road in the area of Gantiadi... Georgians lived compactly [there] and there was a danger of their picketing the main road as in 1989. We had reliable information that the Georgian population of Gagra... was partially armed, while we awaited help from the North Caucasus and could not permit the blocking of the road (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 437).

He gathered regulars and poorly armed reservists of the unit and organized a number of roadblocks. “I was very troubled,” commander says, “[by] an order a few days before the war to let reservists... go and seize their automatic weapons” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 437). Largely unarmed local defence volunteers gathered to support the SRIF. Volunteer fighters explain: “people without arms began organizing into groups in their villages and patrol the shoreline” (Interview 36, 3 November, 2011); “we stood at the crossroads in [Gantiadi]. Local population was there with hunting weapons and without weapons at all” (Interview 40, 4 November, 2011).<sup>245</sup> Some joined along the central road. “We sat in Kolkhida so that they would not go further” (Interview 49, 4 November, 2011).

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<sup>245</sup> Immediate unarmed mobilization implies that security seeking or a promise of rewards were not the primary drivers.

Figure 19. Abkhaz Mobilization in Response to Georgian Advance from the West (15 August, 1992)



Source: Based on UN map of Georgia, August 2004

The Georgian forces supported by armed local Georgians landed near an Abkhaz roadblock in Gantiadi. They opened fire to prevent the Abkhaz from interfering with the landing. “They shot over the heads when they were downloading to the shore,” an Abkhaz volunteer recalls, “to be able to get to the shore without trouble and cut off our borders” (Interview 40, 4 November, 2011). The Abkhaz endured the first casualties at the west front in the fighting that followed. Fighters confirm:

Everything was arranged spontaneously... We collected automatic weapons and those who managed to get these weapons were sent toward the [Georgian forces]. The first casualties occurred here. Of course, the tens [of us] who got the weapons were not enough [in fighting against the predominantly stronger Georgian forces] (Interview 72, 11 November, 2011).<sup>246</sup>

<sup>246</sup> The acceptance of immediate casualties among poorly armed Abkhaz is a strong indicator of normative motivation.

Thereafter the Georgian forces split and moved to Psou, the border with Russia, and toward Gagra, to establish control over the whole of western Abkhazia. In the meantime, the Mkhedrioni units located in Gagra blocked the city to prevent the Abkhaz forces defending against the landing troops from entering it. As commander of the Pitsunda SRIF unit says, “we were surrounded by the Georgian landed forces on the one side and Mkhedrioni units on the other” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 438). Furthermore, the Georgian forces utilized aviation to clear the Psou-Gagra road of the Abkhaz mobilizers. The Abkhaz forces thus had to retreat. Some moved toward Gagra through the forest, leaving behind obstacles to a further Georgian advance. “On the way to Gagra we mined a rock slope and left a roadblock by the sanatorium Ukraine,” a SRIF commander says, “in case of a sudden Georgian attack on the city” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 440). Others remained at the Ukraine sanatorium roadblock for a period of time. As a SRIF reservist recalls,

we stood on the central road..., blocked the bridge with a truck, sand bags... 12-14 people in black uniform walked toward us with rifles... Those of us from the Abkhaz Guard who had rifles opened fire... We also had self-made grenades in beer bottles that we threw at them... A helicopter appeared, did not spot us, and we could leave to the mountains, toward Gagra (Interview 27, 2 November, 2011).

Numerically and weapons-wise the Georgian forces greatly overpowered the Abkhaz. They crushed the Abkhaz resistance in both directions along the main road, to Psou in the west and Gagra in the east. As earlier in Sukhum/i, an agreement was made to not enter the city. “Gagra is a pearl,” Jazychba appealed to the parties, “We may not have battles in the city” (Interview 20, 2 November, 2011). As an Abkhaz fighter says, “we were told to give up and retreat. We did” (Interview 85, 16 November, 2011). Yet, the Georgian forces entered both Sukhum/i and Gagra on 18 August. “Once [the forces] were separated, our boys retreated, while Georgians went into [Gagra]” (Interview 60, 9 November, 2011) “On the 18<sup>th</sup>, they fully occupied Sukhum and got to the left shore of Gumista” (Interview 110, 26 November, 2011). As a result, the Georgian forces took control of both areas.

The Abkhaz maintained control of central Abkhazia, where the Abkhaz headquarters were located. The Gagra front line was formed from the Mamzyshkha Mountain down to Alakhadzy by the sea (see Figure 20 below). “Two months later the victorious [Abkhaz] attack... to free Gagra... started from these positions” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 442; see Chapter 6 for details). As the Abkhaz took Gagra, two main front lines in the war formed as a result, in the west along the Gumista River and in the east around Tqvarchel/i. Abkhaz mobilization thereafter, until the army formation (discussed in Chapter 6), constituted the joining of the already formed units by more fighters, both with and without military experience and from inside and outside of Abkhazia.

Figure 20. Abkhaz Gagra Front Line Mobilization (15 August-on)



Source: Based on UN map of Georgia, August 2004



### 5.3 Explaining Immediate Mass Mobilization: Framing and Perception of Threat

What explains immediate spontaneous and organized mobilization by the Abkhaz against a disproportionately stronger opponent in the Georgian-Abkhaz war? The following sections use the latent normative framework activation mechanism to respond to this question. In particular, I apply the second part of the mechanism—activation of latent norms—to the civil war onset and find that it helps normatively and socially position potential mobilizers and thus explain their mobilization trajectories. As I argued above, individual and small group mobilization decisions to a large extent depend on the framing and perception of threat posed by the onset of civil war. This section focuses on this aspect of the latent normative framework activation mechanism.

Importantly, the initial Abkhaz mobilization that took place immediately with the Georgian advance into Abkhazia was to an extent situational. That is, individuals and small groups mobilized to resist the Georgian advance by virtue of being positioned along the main road that the Georgian forces had to take on their way to Sukhum/i.<sup>247</sup> Arms availability was as well part of the situational factor, cited by many as important to their decision to mobilize. Most SRIF weapons were stored in the Agudzera headquarters (see Figure 14), which became unavailable early on due to its immediate capture by the Georgian forces. Acquired and trophy weapons allowed more people to fight. “With our combat attacks... trophy weapons increased... and so did the number of fighters” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2003: 134). SRIF regular soldiers who were positioned along the road and had a limited number of weapons were thus first to mount resistance.<sup>248</sup> Further mass mobilization in the east and west of Abkhazia was triggered at the macro, meso, and micro levels, inducing a sense of the threat posed by the war to the Abkhaz nation; cities, towns, and villages; close networks; and individuals.

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<sup>247</sup> As noted above, this road was the single route for the Georgian advance as it is the only road leading to Sukhum/i.

<sup>248</sup> There was confusion regarding the war onset even among the military men. The SRIF commander sent to check for signs of an attack the day before the war. He was so shocked on 14 August that instead of activating battle alarm cried out “Alarm!” to his troops—an ambiguous order for a military commander to give (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2003: 17).

The following discussion demonstrates the importance of threat framing at the micro, meso, and macro levels of the society for triggering threat perception among potential mobilizers and thus activating the latent normative framework for action, especially prescribed mobilization decisions. As Chapter 2 (67) argued, at the macro level, a national leader informing the population of an attack and its threatening nature can trigger the acceptance of the urgency of the situation by the populace: All have to fight for the motherland as otherwise there would be no motherland to speak of. At the meso level, city, town, and village leaders and joint gatherings can induce a sense of threat. At the micro level, authority figures in quotidian networks, such as family elders or esteemed friends, and individuals, by virtue of being positioned in the midst of an attack, can trigger threat perception. I discuss these macro-, meso-, and micro-level threat-framing triggers in turn. I argue that in the case of Abkhazia individual and collective actors at these levels of the Abkhaz society framed Georgia's advance of August, 1992, as a threat, triggering threat perception among potential Abkhaz fighters.

### **5.3.1 Macro-Level Triggers**

At the macro level, shortly after the Georgian advance into Abkhazia began on 14 August, a message of the Abkhaz national leader (Chairman of the High Council of Abkhazia) Ardzinba was broadcast on local television channels across Abkhazia. The message served to frame the Georgian advance as threatening and induced the perception of the threat posed by it among the population of Abkhazia. Informed about the Georgian advance, Ardzinba remembers, he immediately telephoned Shevardnadze, but "another man responded than that who reassured [him that the Georgian forces would not proceed into Abkhazia] the day before. Shevardnadze spoke confidently... knowing that the job was done" (Ardzinba in Avidzba, 2013: 482). This telephone conversation and the observed advance of the Georgian forces toward Sukhum/i motivated Ardzinba to immediately frame it as a threat and call upon the people of Abkhazia to mobilize for the resistance to the Georgian forces.

In his emergency television address to Abkhazia's population aired mid-day on 14 August and widely publicized in print press thereafter, Ardzinba explicitly framed the Georgian advance as an attack and an existential threat to not only the Abkhaz part of the population, but also the entire population of Abkhazia. "I appeal to you at this difficult time," the Abkhaz leader powerfully said,

Our land was *invaded* by the armed forces of the State Council of Georgia, among whom are the criminal elements that spread *death and destruction*... The Abkhaz and the entire population of our long-suffering country is being added to the *blood* spilled by [Georgia's] government (Ardzinba, 2004: 5, emphasis added).

This and other statements of the Abkhaz government were not ethnicized—a critical observation in the contexts commonly understood in ethnic terms. The High Council resolution of 14 August "On mobilization of the adult population and arms transfer" as well urged *all* population to mobilize.<sup>249</sup> The High Council address to the people of Abkhazia of 19 August said "Death to all... who came to us with arms..., enemies of the entire multinational people of Abkhazia."<sup>250</sup>

Ardzinba's televised address served to trigger threat perception in the populace. As argued above, people did not expect a war or believe that a war indeed began. "People were at work, at the beach," an Abkhaz volunteer fighter explains, "It was like a thunder in the middle of the sunny day" (Interview 97, 19 November, 2011). Hence, a reliable source, such as the respected national leader was critical for the inducement of the idea that the Georgian advance into Abkhazia was indeed an armed action threatening the Abkhaz, rather than a police action against the Zviadists, for example.

People across Abkhazia learned about the Georgian advance, framed as a threatening attack and aggression against the people of Abkhazia, from the address. My interviews with respondents across the mobilization spectrum support this: "a message on the aggression was broadcast on TV" (Interview 78, 15 November, 2011); "having come back from work, I learned that the war began on

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<sup>249</sup> See text in Volhonskij et al. (2008: 139).

<sup>250</sup> See text in Ardzinba (2004: 24-26). On 24 August High Council called on Georgians to remain neutral. "Only in this case will moral responsibility of the Georgian population for the tragedy in Abkhazia be removed" (Ardzinba, 2004: 40).

TV” (Interview in Khodzhaa 2003: 63); “Ardzinba addressed us [saying] that an armed attack was carried out against Abkhazia and that we will resist” (Interview 84, 16 November, 2011); “he called us to defend the motherland” (Interview 47, 4 November, 2011). Ardzinba’s persuasive statement touched everyone. “It is not easy to speak,” he said, “when perhaps right now, as I am speaking, our homes are being robbed, people are beaten, and life itself is not guaranteed” (Ardzinba, 2004: 5).

A sense of threat embedded in the address triggered mobilization, observed in the sequence of action and supported in interviews with both ordinary men and women and those in the military. “We began organizing after Ardzinba’s call to self-defence,” a professor reports (Interview 117, 28 November 2011). “When I saw Ardzinba’s speech, I left work and went to the SRIF base,” a SRIF reservist says (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2003: 210). Mobilization of guerrilla units in the east began similarly immediately following Ardzinba’s address. Commander of the Tamysh group confirms: “Ardzinba spoke of the beginning of the aggression... After this, the Abkhaz population of Tamysh gathered and we decided to create a village defence volunteer unit” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2003: 85). A volunteer fighter’s quote captures the Abkhaz responses on how mobilization was triggered: “Ardzinba announced that the war began and everyone, regardless of age, young to old, who could hold a weapon in their hands, stood up to defend Abkhazia” (Interview 58, 9 November 2011).

The High Council resolution of 14 August on general mobilization and transfer of weapons further persuaded Abkhazia’s population of the reality of the war. It said that due to “the *real threat* that appeared to the sovereignty of... Abkhazia [and] life of the population,” the Council decided to mobilize all citizens of Abkhazia 18 to 40 years old and form five battalions, 500 fighters each, on the basis of the SRIF.<sup>251</sup> As Ardzinba later explained, this resolution was informed by the emergent understanding of Abkhazia as a state.<sup>252</sup> Hence, “every citizen, according to all constitutions, must

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<sup>251</sup> See text in Ardzinba (2004: 6, emphasis added).

<sup>252</sup> Chapter 3 traced the emergence of this understanding culminated in the adoption of declaration on state sovereignty of Abkhazia in 1990 and restoration in 1992 of the 1925 constitution of Abkhazia as an independent Socialist Republic.

defend this state” (Zantaria, 2010: 43). In line with this understanding of Abkhazia’s status, on 15 September, the High Council formally recognized the Georgian attack and occupation as an act of aggression against Abkhazia.<sup>253</sup> The State Defence Committee was formed shortly thereafter.<sup>254</sup>

The formal status given to mobilization by the High Council decisions added to its urgency. Mobilization followed a common scenario: “When general mobilization was declared,” a volunteer fighter recalls, “I said, “Everyone, go to Volga!” The headquarters of military staff was there. They separated us into groups” (Interview 97, 19 November 2011). As a result, a Gudauta group of 140 people, formed and armed there, arrived at the entry into Sukhum/i, where the Abkhaz held off the Georgian forces, the same evening (Pachulija, 2010: 39). The process was similar in the east. “The village war council was organized [after] the call to mobilize” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 365).

### **5.3.2 Meso-Level Triggers**

The macro-level triggers—Ardzinba’s address and subsequent High Council resolutions—were insufficient for many to decide on how to react to the information about the Georgian advance into Abkhazia. Actors and institutions at the meso level of the social structure were critical as well. Upon seeing Ardzinba’s televised address crowds poured to local administrations across Abkhazia. These city, town, and village centers have historically served as places of assembly for the Abkhaz population when Abkhaz interests were threatened. Highly regarded leaders of the administrations and the collective decision-making tradition made these centers a key social setting for the Abkhaz. My interviews support their importance at the war onset: “After Ardzinba’s address..., I took my children home and went to the administration” (Interview 61, 9 November 2011); “People gathered there” (Interview 27, 2 November 2011); “Everybody was confused” (Interview 75, 13 November 2011); “No one understood what was going on. Was it a war?” (Interview 72, 11 November 2011).

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<sup>253</sup> See document in Ardzinba (2004: 160).

<sup>254</sup> The fact of the organization of armed resistance was then broadcast outside of Abkhazia (*Pravda*, 20 August, 1992, in Apsynba, 1997: 66). This information soon brought volunteers from outside of Abkhazia.

The perception of the threat posed by the Georgian advance was, therefore, further induced at this meso level. The shocked Abkhaz public gathered by the administrations across Abkhazia in expectation that they would gain more information on the Georgian advance and how to react to it, awaiting the more knowledgeable individuals, especially respected leaders of the cities, towns, and villages and active members of the Abkhaz national movement, to clarify the situation. Hence, as chairman of the Strike Committee approached the Bzyb village council building where people met, the crowd livened up: “He will tell us something serious” (Interview 64, 9 November 2011).

Core mobilization decisions at the war onset were made at this meso level across Abkhazia. Heads of administrations and other respected figures played key roles in channeling the perception of the threat posed by the Georgian forces to the Abkhaz population. Local administrations formed defence councils and volunteer fighter groups and organized area fortification (Brojdo, 2008). This is demonstrated by the similarity in the process of meso-level triggering in the western, central, and eastern cities, towns, and villages of Abkhazia despite the differences in terms of territorial control.

In the west, where Georgian marines landed on 15 August and soon established control over the border area up to Gagra (see Figure 19), Gagra administration head Jazychba played a key role in triggering organized and spontaneous Abkhaz mobilization.<sup>255</sup> Having received a message from Ardzinba about the advance of the Georgian ships toward the Gagra region on 14 August, he took charge of the local SRIF branch and mobilized commanders to organize defence of the road leading to Gagra (see Figure 20)—the organized part of mobilization. He as well gathered the population at the Gagra administration—the spontaneous part of mobilization. As a volunteer fighter confirms,

Jazichba, eternal memory to him, gathered the people. He called... Ardzinba about what to do, personally spoke with Shevardnadze, I was present then, who said “Not one person will suffer. They will come and establish order.” [Jazichba] responded, “How is it that they will not suffer? There are battles, shootings, the aviation!” The third call Shevardnadze did not pick up and then [the Georgian forces] entered [Gagra] (Interview 78, 15 November 2011).

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<sup>255</sup> He was closely related to Aidgylara and actively participated in the organization of the 1989 general Abkhaz strike.

A decision was made at the administration, “given our small numbers, lack of weapons, and inflow of the Georgian forces... [to] retreat in order to organize city defence” (Interview 78, 15 November 2011). The negotiations Jazichba had with the Georgian forces that held them off for a while were crucial for the Abkhaz mobilization. Although the Georgian forces moved into Gagra regardless of the agreement, “resistance began there” (Interview 78, 15 November 2011). “Local defence groups formed in every village” in the west of Abkhazia thereafter (Interview 84, 16 November 2011).

In central Abkhazia, where the capital was the target of the Georgian forces (see Figure 16), the Abkhaz gathered [at the Sukhum/i administration] and discussed what to do, whom to tell, how to save the city, where to get the weapons... We gathered money, gave it to a man [to buy weapons], but he was caught and did not return (Interview 86, 17 November 2011). Organized SRIF fighters who defended Sukhum/i were already mobilized, as they faced Georgia’s forces along the main road. On the other hand, spontaneous mobilization was triggered by respected leaders in the Abkhaz society at this meso level. One such leader, a local Aidgylara activist, recalls:

I organized the boys, told them not to fall in spirit, that something will come out... [and] the people will not leave us... We found a stockpile of pipes. The boys were young. They took the pipes and stood with them at the [entry] to Sukhum... [O]ur boys died right when [the Georgian forces] entered [the city] (Interview 86, 17 November 2011).

Finally, in Abkhazia’s east, where Georgia immediately established control (see Figure 15), crowds gathered by the administrations, shocked by the news of the Georgian advance and seeking clarification on further action. In Pakuash, positioned near Okhurej, where the Georgian forces met first resistance of the SRIF, the entire village gathered on 14 August. Administration staff instilled a sense of imminent danger by informing villagers that the Georgian forces were close, in Okhurej, and took captive heads of the Okhurej garrison and Ochamchira—one of the main cities in the area (see Figure 19). In response, villagers of Pakuash elected one of the first village defence councils in the east of Abkhazia and organized a defence line along the border of Pakuash and attack positions in the mountains. As the head of the headquarters of the battalion formed in Pakuash remembers,

I was secretary of the administration... We were informed that [the] Georgian [forces] were already in the Okhurei village and captured head of the Ochamchira administration... and along with him fighters of the Abkhaz Guard... In the evening, the whole village gathered in the center and elected the village Defence Council... We organized the line of defence... [and] positions on the heights [of the mountains] (Interview by Khodzhaa, 2003: 100).<sup>256</sup>

Partisan mobilization then set off in Mokva (see Figure 18). Once head of the administration assured villagers that the war began, he proposed appointing a former Soviet soldier who fought in Afghanistan (*Afganets*) to spontaneously form a self-defence group. Locals supported his proposal; the first guerrilla group was formed (Pachulija, 2010: 50). A volunteer fighter confirms the events:

there was a gathering of the Abkhaz [in Mokva, including] those who escaped from the city and nearby villages. The gathered mainly had hunting weapons, except for three automatic guns, including my own. We made a decision at the gathering to organize a partisan unit to fight against the Georgian invaders (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2003: 67).

“Up to eighty people gathered,” another Abkhaz fighter says, “Kishmarija was elected commander of this spontaneously formed [defence volunteer group]” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2003: 373).

Mobilization followed this sequence in almost every Abkhaz village in the east, involving a broader spectrum of actors (see Figure 18). First, along with administration staff, Aidgylara leaders were critical in triggering threat perception and fighter mobilization. Aidgylara’s Deputy Chairman reports that his presence in Tkhina at the outset of the war was imperative for mobilization there:

Having arrived to Tkhina, I went from house to house with the locals in search of weapons [and g]athered the village assembly... We decided to blow up some bridge along the main road to stop the movement of the Georgian column for a time (Interview by Khodzhaa, 2003: 50).

Second, military leaders were key to mobilization at the war onset. In most eastern villages, the SRIF commander held explanatory sessions with the locals. A SRIF reservist discusses his role:

We... stopp[ed in]... Tkhina, Chlou, Gvada, Kutol on way to Abkhaz Atara. In all villages Kakalija, [the SRIF commander], conducted explanatory work with the local population. He taught local defence volunteers how to defend the village, which hills to select for the posts, how to make incendiary mixtures (Interview by Khodzhaa, 2003: 51-52).

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<sup>256</sup> Arriving volunteers then joined this battalion. “On 15 August 1992 my father died and I went home to Pakuash. After this, I joined the Pakuash group as a fighter” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2003: 98).



His presence at the meso, village level corroborated a sense of the threat posed by Georgia's forces and triggered mobilization. "I was assured that the war really started," a fighter confirms, "that the Georgian forces occupied a part of Abkhazia... [I] came back for my family..., brought them to my father's home in Durypsh..., [and] went to the... front line" (Interview by Khodzhaa, 2003: 216).

Lastly, the media worked together with these local government, social, and military leaders to instil a sense of threat and trigger mobilization. For example, in blockaded Tqvarchel/i—a vital city for the Abkhaz due to its resources for producing explosives—the administration immediately issued an address to the population. The framing of threat here was realized in interaction with the local media. Head of the Tqvarchel/i administration approached a journalist, asking him to write an address informing the city's population of the threatening nature of the Georgian advance. The text conveyed the threat in such statements as "The Republic is in *danger!*" and "[Georgia's] forces... *invaded* the territory of Abkhazia to *occupy* it" and by describing these forces' swift advance to the capital and fighting along the way (Cherkezija, 2003: 84, emphasis added). It called on the locals to not "panic or trust provocative rumors" and "be ready for city defence" (Cherkezija 2003: 84).

The text was immediately aired on the local television as the address of the Tqvarchel/i City Defence Council to the population, triggering a sense of threat posed by the Georgian advance and spontaneous mobilization by local defence volunteers. The address called for general mobilization of men 18-45 years of age and specified the location of assembly—the Tqvarchel/i administration. Defence volunteers gathered there in response to the address. Self-defence groups were formed and then separated to carry out tasks in eastern and central Abkhazia. Of the 40 volunteers, for example, 15 were sent to hold the Georgian forces midway to Sukhum/i, where the two sides clashed and had the first losses in the war (Cherkezija, 2003: 83-84). Mobilization was thus "accomplished through broadcasting of televised messages about times and places of assembly" (Fairbanks, 1995: 23).

Messages similar in content to this address went on air the following days in Tqvarchel/i. In one, the Tqvarchel/i City Defence Council again emphasized the extent of the threat posed by the Georgian advance and called on the locals to “give decisive resistance to the *invaders*,” stressing that “the civilian population of Abkhazia is under *imminent danger of death*” (Cherkezija, 2003: 88, emphasis added). The city’s highly respected World War II Veteran Council supported the framing of threat and calls for mobilization in the media in a statement transmitted on all local channels:

At this difficult time for all of us, we appeal to you, sons: stop the *hostile* neighbors *raging* in our house, do not allow *massacres* by the Georgian fascists of civilians in our native Apsny!.. Join in a united force (Cherkezija, 2003: 88, emphasis added).

General panic was thus channeled into action, as more and more volunteers mobilized thereafter.

It was not only in the east of Abkhazia where the meso-level triggering involved the media together with governmental, social, and military leaders. Local newspapers and television channels played a significant role in framing and inducing the perception of the threat posed by the Georgian advance and triggering mobilization across Abkhazia in the conditions of scarce information. “We were the only source of information,” an Abkhaz reporter in central Abkhazia reports, “all Abkhaz watched [our channel]” (Interview 120, 29 November 2011).

As the situation developed on the ground, the media in the different parts of Abkhazia drew on the brutality of the Georgian forces against the Abkhaz and other non-Georgian civilians. From the first days of the Georgian advance into Abkhazia reports of killings, looting, and marauding by the Georgian forces spread across Abkhazia.<sup>257</sup> “We went to the homes where people were tortured, robbed,” a Gagra reporter says, “aired it in the Gagra region” (Interview 85, 16 November, 2011). Similarly, the Tqvarchel/i City Defence Council announced on the local television: “The blood is already being spilled, the gunfire rumbles, and the children, women, and the elderly are suffering” (Cherkezija, 2003: 88). These powerful images and statements strongly supported a sense of threat.

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<sup>257</sup> For testimonies of looting and marauding, see Voronov et al. (1993); Tarnava (2008). See also HRW (1995).

The Georgian military and political leaders in their official statements added to framing the Abkhaz threat perception. Georgian commander Karkarashvili, for example, publicly stated that he would sacrifice “100,000 Georgians [to kill] all 97,000 [Abkhaz]” (Amkuab, 1992: 128; Interview 36, 3 November, 2011). Shevardnadze himself warned that “in the struggle for the preservation of the territorial integrity of our state we will not stop before anything. For this we are willing to die ourselves, but also eliminate anyone [in our way]” (Brojdo, 2008: 53). These two statements of the Georgian leaders were broadcast on the Sukhum/i television on 24 and 15 August respectively.

The macro- and meso-level framing of the Georgian advance as an invasion and occupation of Abkhazia was accepted by the Abkhaz public as a result. “A five-million-large nation *attacked* a hundred thousand Abkhaz,” a cultural worker describes the war (Interview 15, 1 November 2011). My interviews strongly support this: “It was an *invasion*” (Interview 42, 4 November 2011); “They *occupied* the whole of Abkhazia and began looting” (Interview 126, 1 December 2011); “we *feared* for our lives and our close ones” (Interview 149, 14 December 2011). As Brojdo (2008: 52) argues,

the problem of bio-ethnic survival of the Abkhaz people was very clearly delineated from the first days of the [war]—due to the cruelty of [Georgia’s] troops and the local Georgian population in the occupied part of Abkhazia and official statements of the Georgian leaders.

### **5.3.3 Micro-Level Triggers**

The micro-level family and friendship networks substantiated the threat perception among the Abkhaz. As significant authority figures within Abkhaz families, parents served to trigger the threat perception and resultant mobilization by their children at the level of the family unit. Prior to the war, parents often supported their sons’ decision to join the SRIF. “I personally brought my son [there],” a father of a SRIF reservist confirms (Interview in Bebia, 1996: 60). When the war started, parents were critical to instilling a sense of threat and affecting their sons’ decision to fight. Abkhaz mothers regularly report: “My son was studying in Russia. When I told him about the war, he left it all and came here... I sent him to the Gudauta army” (Interview 11, 31 October, 2011). This was the

case even with single sons ordered not to fight. As a volunteer fighter and father of two explains,

Our president gave an order, those who have one son, not to send them to the war. Anyway they fought. My two sons fought, all fought: women, the elders, the young... I went through the whole war with my sons (Interview 46, 4 November, 2011).

“Almost all families had one son,” a teacher agrees, “Who would defend Abkhazia if not him? Why would he need his life if we or Abkhazia were no longer there?” (Interview 22, 2 November 2011).

The framing by the parents of the Georgian advance into Abkhazia as a war, rather than a clash or a policing action, was a significant micro-level trigger of the threat perception and ensuing mobilization by the Abkhaz. Abkhaz fighters confirm: “I was on vacation [in] August... My father came to the village to tell me that the Georgian-Abkhaz war began. The same day I joined the local defence unit” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2003: 273); “I went home... My father said “Did you hear what happened?” We had two hunting rifles... He gave me the rifles, cheese, a loaf of bread and said “Go where your friends are” [and] I went” (Interview 27, 2 November 2011).

Mothers were particularly important for the Abkhaz mobilization effort. Given their central position in the Abkhaz family and upbringing of children, mothers’ blessing was consistently sought by sons. “My mother said “Go to the end!” and I went to Sukhum” (Interview 9, 31 October, 2011); “You only try to return!” an Abkhaz mother blessed her son as she sent him to fight (Interview 39, 4 November 2011). This critical role of symbolic support played by mothers in the war and the losses women in general incurred in its course are widely recognized in the Abkhaz society. “Many single sons died,” the Abkhaz commonly report (Interview 47, 4 November, 2011); “two-three sons often died in a family” (Interview 90, 18 November, 2011). A sense of sorrowing pride is associated with these deaths in post-war Abkhazia. “When the war began the best sons took arms to defend their state” (Interview 126, 1 December, 2011); “Mothers hold only on that their sons died for the victory and they brought them up this way” (Interview 98, 19 November, 2011). “You died for Abkhazia, for justice. To me you are alive,” a mother mourns her only son (Interview 64, 9 November, 2011).

As Chapter 3 demonstrated, not only the family unit in a narrower sense, but also extended families, or “familias,” and communal relations, most clearly reflected by neighborhood/friendship networks, are important for the Abkhaz. Actors within these micro-level structures served to trigger threat perception. Relatives, neighbors, and friends persuaded one another of the threat posed by Georgia’s advance and the necessity to mobilize in response. Fighter interviews support this: “I was going home to Dzhgerda on 14 August... My cousin arrived at the station and took me to his house, said something bad was going on in Sukhum” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 365); “My nephew... convinced me that we had to go to the eastern front where it was very difficult due to the blockade. Soon I... was in my native Mokva” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2003: 64); “I was at home... picking tea... [My] neighbor called with urgency and said that the war began... [H]aving taken father’s revolver..., [I] went to the village administration, where the entire village gathered” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 690); “We came to Abkhaz Atara and told our neighbors that the Georgians went against us with the war” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2003: 150); “First I was in shock. Then we started gathering with friends, relatives, [deciding] what to do next” (interview 72, 11 November, 2011).

As a result, immediate and distant relatives, neighbors, and friends often mobilized together at the outset of the war. “The Abkhaz army was formed on the basis of location and friendship ties,” an Abkhaz commander explains, “You want to have someone close during the war” (Interview 47, 4 November 2011). As Abkhaz fighters confirm, “Local defence groups were made of close friends and family” (Interview 5, 27 October 2011); “All my friends were in the battalion” (Interview 72, 11 November 2011). Individual fighters repeatedly note mobilization with the quotidian networks. “I learned that the war began... and together with my son... immediately went to an Abkhaz Guard unit” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2003: 63); “At the beginning of the war, I entered a defence group... with my father” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 590); “[We heard] “The war is in Sukhum”..., went

there with my friends... I took my father's hunting rifle... We passed the rifle back and forth with my cousin" (Interview 73, 12 November, 2011); "When the war began, my neighbor and I... went toward the city with our fathers' hunting rifles" (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 256). This moment of mobilization was critical as new fighters joined units formed based on these ties (see Chapter 6).

Importantly, the three sets of triggers discussed above did not work in isolation to frame the Georgian advance into Abkhazia in mid-August, 1992, as a threat. Instead, they combined to shape the threat perception and ensuing mobilization decisions among the Abkhaz. The following excerpt demonstrates how triggers at the macro, meso, and micro levels of the social structure combined to persuade the population of one village of the threat posed by the Georgian advance into Abkhazia and trigger the Abkhaz mobilization there. As commander of a unit of the Tamysh battalion recalls,

On 14 August... I was at work at the farm... At about 10 am we went outside due to noise... Not understanding anything, all family gathered by the TV... [We saw] Ardzinba's address [*macro*] on the start of aggression..., formation of battalions for defence of the motherland. Right after, the Abkhaz population of Tamysh gathered [*meso*], where a decision was made to create a village defence group... Daur... took a couple of friends [*micro*], went to the Abkhaz Guard unit..., brought [weapons]..., [and] we began shooting at the State Council military convoy moving along the main road (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2003: 85-86).

This account and the section above demonstrate the importance of the social positioning of the Abkhaz at the outset of the Georgian-Abkhaz war. The basic argument of this discussion is that embeddedness of potential mobilizers at the micro, meso, and macro levels of the social structure is important for their mobilization decisions at the civil war onset. It is through triggers placed within these social networks that potential mobilizers come to perceive situations as threatening or not and as requiring action in response or not. Yet, in the conditions where decision-making is strained due to insufficient information and where critical decisions need to be made quickly without due access to information—here, war onset,—triggers alone can be ineffective at quickly persuading potential mobilizers of either existence of threat or the need to adopt high-risk mobilization roles in response, rather than protect oneself and hide or flee from the threat. Latent norms are critical for this reason.

## 5.4 Importance of Latent Norms

I argue that along with the social positioning of potential mobilizers, we need to understand their normative positioning in order to explain mobilization trajectories. Socialization into relevant social norms through micro-, meso-, and macro-level institutions and pre-existing knowledge from the preceding cycles of mobilization are significant in this regard. In particular, triggers framing the threat at the outset of the war have to be complemented by the shared norms and understandings of history and identity in order to be successful in mobilizing high-risk action. This section focuses on this aspect of the latent normative framework activation mechanism.

As the discussion above demonstrated, the social standing, or status, of the triggering agent can play an important role in inducing the threat perception in potential mobilizers. It is the highly respected national and local leaders at the macro and meso levels and micro-level authority figures who were able to convince potential mobilizers that the war indeed began and that collective action was needed in Abkhazia. However, even if persuaded of the threat, the threat perception on its own is insufficient to motivate high-risk mobilization. In situations where bare threat motivates action, potential mobilizers should be expected to escape the threat where possible or join the side that will likely provide most security. In the Georgian-Abkhaz war, it was clearly the Georgian side.

Yet, defection was not common among the Abkhaz. Most Abkhaz who fought did so on the Abkhaz side. The Georgian side attempted to force the Abkhaz to collaborate. As Ardzinba said in an interview, “I know very many Abkhaz who were captured in Sukhum, beaten, and forced to sign papers that said they would cooperate with the Georgian intelligence, but these people came to us” (Interview with Karaulov in “Moment of Truth,” Gudauta, 1993 in Ardzinba, 2011). The Georgian leaders thus admitted that the non-Georgian population rarely supported them (Kvarandzija, 1996). In a situation where there was less than a meager prospect of survival and success for the Abkhaz this implies that something else along with threat perception was driving the Abkhaz mobilization.

Chapters 3 and 4 analyzed in depth the process of formation and transformation of the latent normative framework for action in the course of Abkhaz pre-war mobilization. Here I demonstrate the significance of the framework at the stage of mobilization for civil war. I argue that the Abkhaz developed strong norms and understandings of the Abkhaz as a cohesive collectivity and Abkhazia as the land to which they justly belong. These aspects of the latent normative framework are critical for explaining mobilization decisions among the Abkhaz at the outset of the Georgian-Abkhaz war.

#### **5.4.1 Local Georgian Participation and Intra-Abkhaz Cohesion**

The importance of shared norms and emergent understandings of history and identity in the Abkhaz mobilization for war is supported at the least by the fact of the mobilization by a substantial part of the Abkhaz population to fight against the disproportionately stronger opponent. As Brojdo (2008: 51) finds, “joining the armed struggle in spite of the apparent futility of resistance” indicates the strong influence of the Apsuara norms and the historical memory on the collective action taken by the Abkhaz at the outset of the war. In my and other researchers’ interviews, the Abkhaz fighters widely appeal to shared norms and understandings when explaining their mobilization decisions.

The collective memory of the recurrent changes in the political status of Abkhazia, the wars and repression of the Abkhaz associated with these changes, and the subsequent Georgianization of Abkhazia, which culminated in the inter-group violence of 1989, figure prominently in the Abkhaz fighters’ explanation of their mobilization decisions. These events, especially the violence of 1989, experienced first-hand by the generations of the Abkhaz who then fought in the war of 1992-1993, motivated many to join Abkhaz armed mobilization even before the war. As an Abkhaz journalist says, “[after 1989, Georgians] were so angered. They said “We will show you, destroy you!” and so we created the Abkhaz Guard” (Interview 114, 28 November, 2011). Influenced by the violence of 1989, many enlisted in the SRIF and were first to resist the Georgian forces at the outset of the war. As a SRIF fighter says, “in 1989, I participated in the Georgian-Abkhaz armed clash... [and f]rom



the first days of the Abkhaz Guard joined it with friends..., guarded the Ingur/i and Okhurej posts. On 14 August [we] defended the Red Bridge” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 793-794). Those who did not enter the SRIF often became defence volunteers. “I got an automatic gun in 1989, after the first Georgian-Abkhaz clash” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2003: 273); “I participated in 1989... [and] on the first day of the... war joined as a defence volunteer” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2003: 117).

As Chapter 4 argued, the inter-group relations in Abkhazia as based on the general norms of friendship and peace transformed to those of conflict and violence in the late 1980s. The indicators of this transformation included the militarization of the society, reflected in the formation of armed groups on both the Georgian and Abkhaz sides, and its polarization, or the split in the organizations of the society between the Georgian and Abkhaz groups. The Abkhaz attributed these processes to the upsurge in nationalism among the Georgian population of Georgia and Abkhazia. As Ardzinba said at the People’s Deputies Congress in 1989, “Rallies in Tbilisi called for the elimination of the already reduced autonomy of Abkhazia... Representatives of these “democrats” came to Abkhazia [and] fuel[ed] anti-Abkhaz sentiments among the local Georgian population.”<sup>258</sup>

The support of local Georgians for the nationalist ideas of the Georgian national movement was demonstrated by the mobilization of a large part of the Georgian population of Abkhazia in the late 1980s, including in the events of violence of 1989, and their enthusiasm as the Georgian troops entered Abkhazia at the outset of the war. As a number of witnesses say, when the Georgian forces entered Sukhum/i, Georgian women “ran outside and threw flowers on the tanks: “Ours arrived!”” (Brojdo, 1994: 9); “many happily welcomed the tanks that entered Abkhazia, many threw flowers” (Interview 107, 25 November, 2011). The Abkhaz see this support as an expression of anti-Abkhaz sentiments. Fighters commonly say: “They stood up against the Abkhaz people” (Interview 114, 28

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<sup>258</sup> See text in Maryhyba (1994: 463-467).

November, 2011); “On the one hand, Tbilisi used them; on the other hand, they did not resist. They taught at schools that there is no Abkhazia and it is an integral part of Georgia” (Interview 131, 6 December, 2011); “Some openly rejected nationalism and either left or fought with us [but] most... actively supported and were morally on the Georgian side” (Interview 90, 18 November, 2011); “all supported Georgia, albeit in different forms: Some with weapons, others with words, yet others by looting. No matter what they did, about 90% participated” (Interview 53, 8 November, 2011).

As Chapter 4 demonstrated, the intra-Abkhaz cohesion developed prior to the war with the experiences of Georgianization and inter-group opposition in Abkhazia, especially the violence of 1989, after which the Abkhaz came together in the general intra-Abkhaz strike, of which there had been no precedents before. The general support on the part of the local Georgian population for the Georgian advance into Abkhazia in August, 1992, and the brutality demonstrated by the combined external and local Georgian forces on their way to and in Sukhum/i and other populated areas of Abkhazia greatly increased the cohesion among the Abkhaz and influenced their war mobilization. As an Abkhaz commander says, “the unity of the Abkhaz, stimulated by the Georgian [nationalism, was]... brought to the density of the concrete during the war” (Bzhanija in Zantaria, 2010: 17).

We can indirectly observe this intra-Abkhaz cohesion at the outset of the war in the record of mobilization. Section 5.3 (above) demonstrated that the Abkhaz made immediate individual and group decisions to mobilize to collectively resist the Georgian forces in the process of the Georgian advance from both the east and west of Abkhazia. Once the existence and extent of the threat posed by the Georgian advance were conveyed at the micro, meso, and macro levels of the society, mass mobilization by the Abkhaz followed in Abkhazia’s east and west (see also Section 5.2 above). The mobilization took place by both armed and poorly armed or unarmed individuals and small groups. It was widespread even in the areas where the Georgian forces instantaneously established control,

particularly in the city of Tqvarchel/i and towns and villages around it. As an Abkhaz war journalist concludes based on her records, “[n]o one had to be persuaded to fight” on the Abkhaz side (Bebia, 2011: 141). In the east, in the village of Tamysh, for example, the whole village mobilized after the village council (Bargandzhia, 2012: 11). A similar pattern characterized Bzyb in the west: not only villagers did not need to be forced to mobilize, but they also in fact had to be dissuaded from going to fight against the Georgian forces armed simply with sticks and knives (Bebia, 2011: 141-142).

This intra-Abkhaz cohesion at the beginning of the war, just as in the violent events before the war, was significantly impacted by the actions of local Georgians in opposition to the Abkhaz. Abkhaz fighters report that local Georgians participated in the fighting on the Georgian side from the first days of the Georgian advance. As SRIF fighters who were first to resist the Georgian forces say, “[a SRIF reservist] fought... in the first clash [of the war on the main road]..., local Georgians shot him in the back” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2003: 58); “If the first attack [against us] was by a Kutaisi battalion [from Georgia], the second involved local Georgians” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2003: 184); “On 18 August... [when] the Abkhaz... retreated from [Gagra]... Mkhedrioni men and armed local Georgians appeared in the city that same day” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2003: 203).

The Abkhaz were deeply struck by the sheer brutality and indifference of the joint local and external Georgian forces. “They were brutal to the civilian population” (Interview 58, 9 November, 2011); “had lists of whom to kill in Abkhazia” (Interview 20, 2 November, 2011); “went house by house looking for the Abkhaz” (Interview 101, 20 November, 2011). “Abkhaz civilians were killed en masse in the [blockaded] Ochamchira region... Sudden raids [took place in Sukhum/i] any time of the day and night with interrogations, tracking [the Abkhaz] down, threats of execution” (Argun, 1994: 13-14). Similar accounts of both indiscriminate and selective brutality of the Georgian forces from the outset of the war are offered by the Abkhaz from across Abkhazia (Voronov et al., 1993).

In addition to this brutality, mass looting by the Georgian forces characterized the onset of the war. “Local Georgians... formed armed units and showed the Abkhaz... houses to loot to their own advantage” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2003: 123); “We saw how [Abkhaz] women were raped, houses looted” (Interview 124, 30 November, 2011); “they looted stores and stockpiles” (Interview 50, 4 November, 2011); “all stores were plundered in Sukhumi” a week after the Georgian advance (Ermakov, 1992 in Apsynba, 1997: 70). It was the peak of inter-group opposition in Abkhazia.

Therefore, the Abkhaz mobilization at the outset of the war was in important part a response to the gradual transformation of the inter-group norms and deterioration of social relations between the Abkhaz and Georgians in Abkhazia, which were first violently expressed in the clashes of 1989 and then culminated in the joining of the Georgian forces by local Georgians. Abkhaz respondents repeatedly indicate that this transformation and the local Georgian participation in the war against the Abkhaz moved them. The following excerpts are characteristic of the responses of the Abkhaz:

We thought these were normal, decent people... Some were regular local Georgians, others held high positions... These were the people we had weddings with, shared joy and grief. But during the war they showed how they really were, who was capable of what (Interview 53, 8 November, 2011);

“Their brutality made it clear that Georgians hated us” (Interview 107, 25 November, 2011); “How could we remain friends after such brutality?” (Interview 58, 9 November, 2011).

The Abkhaz thus to an important degree mobilized in response to the participation of local Georgians in the war on the Georgian side. As Abkhaz respondents argue over and over again,

In my opinion, if residents of the Gal region had stood up and said “What are you doing?” to their brothers, “This is an innocent people. We live here, too, as one society.” In this case, we would have thought about [not fighting] (Interview 102, 23 November, 2011);

“There would be no war if the local Georgian population opposed it” (Interview 99, 19 November, 2011). Yet, the Abkhaz say, “They stood against us, gave into this provocation” (Interview 114, 28 November, 2011); “they went against us, did horrible things” (Interview 116, 28 November, 2011);

Georgians who in response to the Abkhaz movement formed their own organizations and armed subdivisions before the war stood up with weapons against us when the war started. A part of the Gagra population went to guard some positions... We knew who they were... They did not even think of the Abkhaz independence (Interview 126, 1 December, 2011);

Volunteer fighters thus justify their mobilization: “They cleared my house, killed my dog, offended my father: all this boiled up and I united people around myself to fight” (Interview 53, 8 November, 2011); “We fought with the population that chose to kill, steal” (Interview 34, 3 November, 2011).

#### **5.4.2 Georgia’s Aggression and “The Only Land We Have”**

As the Georgian force was multilayered, involving both the local and external elements, so were the norms and understandings that impacted the Abkhaz mobilization at the outset of the war. The dramatic transformation of the inter-group norms and relations in Abkhazia and the joining of the Georgian forces by local Georgians at the war onset were not solely responsible for the Abkhaz mobilization for war. In addition, the external element of the Georgian advance helped activate the intra-Abkhaz norms and understandings of history and identity. The forces that came to Abkhazia from Georgia were associated for the Abkhaz with the long-standing Georgianization of Abkhazia and the fear that the new leadership of Georgia would eliminate the autonomous status of Abkhazia and the cultural self-determination of the Abkhaz. As an Abkhaz military correspondent explains,

I participated in the war because since childhood, we lived in the society where the Abkhaz people were humiliated, eradicated. Our language, last names were changed to Georgian. It goes on for long. Over the existence of Abkhazia, Georgians attempted to make it that there was no Abkhaz people, that we became Georgian (Interview 114, 28 November, 2011).

The Georgian advance into Abkhazia in August, 1992, was seen in this light as continuation of the elimination of the status of Abkhazia as a separate political entity and the Abkhaz as its core cultural unit. As Abkhaz respondents say, “they wanted to abolish Abkhazia’s autonomy and create a united Georgia. But the Abkhaz have a language, culture, we are an ancient people. There used to be no Georgians on this land” (Interview 80, 15 November, 2011). The Abkhaz view the rationale

behind the Georgian advance as follows. “They thought they were strong, that their time had come” (Interview 117, 28 November, 2011); “decided that they could settle the problem of Abkhazia once and for all” (Interview 126, 1 December, 2011); “thought it would be a quick three-day operation” (Interview 131, 6 December, 2011); “in three days they would take Abkhazia to unite the Georgian people” (Interview 5, 27 October, 2011). “But we started resisting,” the Abkhaz resume (Interview 131, 6 December, 2011); “The people were ready to resist” (Interview 127, 1 December, 2011).

The memories and experiences of Georgianization and Georgian nationalism discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 generated a view among the Abkhaz that the intention of the Georgian leadership in the war was to eliminate the political status of Abkhazia and the cultural status of the Abkhaz in Abkhazia. As Abkhaz respondents say, “What they called autonomy was a fiction. Georgians ruled everything. It was scary then. They humiliated us” (Interview 92, 18 November, 2011); “They said Georgia should become unitary—without autonomies” (Interview 137, 7 December, 2011); ““Get rid of the autonomous republic!” they said” (Interview 85, 16 November, 2011).

Given this understanding of the Georgian-Abkhaz history, the Abkhaz had no doubt that if they had not mobilized to resist the Georgian forces at the outset of the war, their cultural standing and identity would only be further suppressed in independent Georgia. Interview responses notably confirm: “It was a war against the Abkhaz and for the elimination of the Abkhaz people” (Interview 121, 30 November, 2011); “They wanted to... eradicate us” (Interview 106, 23 November, 2011); “It was a tragedy of a small people. If the events had turned out differently, we would be liquidated or killed and expelled. We had no other imaginations as to how Georgians would behave on this territory” (Interview 117, 28 November, 2011). The following quote captures the Abkhaz view:

The nationalists from Georgia were [even] more brutal [than local Georgians]. They saw our reality from far away differently. They were angry that they came to this beautiful land and did not hear the Georgian speech. They thought they could simply destroy the Abkhaz people (Interview 114, 28 November, 2011).

The Abkhaz saw the brutalities of the Georgian forces in the war as part of the intent to destroy the Abkhaz as a group. Examples included the tracking of the Abkhaz at the outset of the war, above all the intellectuals, and the destruction of Abkhaz property and cultural hotbeds, above all the burning of the Abkhaz Institute for Language and History, where the Abkhaz mobilization took root prior to the war and where the only archive with precious materials on the Abkhaz history was located.<sup>259</sup>

The Abkhaz thus perceive the Georgian advance into Abkhazia as aggression against them, rather than a civil war that the Abkhaz initiated, and their mobilization in response as the defence of what constitutes their identity, that is, the land to which they feel strong belonging and their people.

“The Abkhaz side was not the initiator,” Abkhaz fighters and non-fighters repeatedly argue,

we merely resisted the nationalist ideas and imposed rule coming from the Georgian center. The Abkhaz could not have behaved otherwise in the situation when there was an aggressor in front of us that was not happy with the ethnos that lives on this territory (Interview 117, 28 November, 2011);

“We were defending against the aggression” (Interview 128, 1 December, 2011). A core Aidgylara activist and professor sums up well the Abkhaz position,

The Abkhaz too had nationalism, but it was defensive, while the Georgian nationalism was offensive, aggressive. Everything was directed toward annulling the Abkhaz autonomous republic, that the Abkhaz were Georgians, that this land was Georgian, and those who do not want to recognize that should leave (Interview 107, 25 November, 2011).

For the Abkhaz, mobilization in response to the Georgian advance into Abkhazia was thus in pursuit of a just cause of defending the components of their identity. It was a logical continuation of preceding mobilization against the Georgianization of Abkhazia. “The fighting of our people for national self-determination was always ongoing,” an Abkhaz journalist explains, “throughout the Soviet period” (Interview 83, 16 November, 2011). “They decided that they were a minor imperial center, but did not recognize that they had nothing to offer to the territories that they were trying to colonize and occupy” (Interview 117, 28 November, 2011). Freeing their land and people from this

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<sup>259</sup> On the importance of the burning of the Abkhaz archive, see, for example, de Waal (2008).

occupation was the goal for the Abkhaz. As Abkhaz fighters say, “we fought for the autonomy, for self-preservation” (Interview 92, 18 November, 2011); “It was a difficult war... but it was our goal, our necessity, we did not have any other idea than freeing our territory. Either self-destruct or free” (Interview 58, 9 November, 2011). Abkhaz deputy summarizes it well: “We will fight until we gain our freedom or are exterminated” (Interview in “Pravda,” 20 August, 1992 in Apsynba, 1997: 66).

Given this understanding of the Georgian advance into Abkhazia as an aggression aimed at eradication of Abkhazia’s autonomy and the Abkhaz as a group, and mobilization by the Abkhaz as a defence of what constitutes their identity, it is not surprising that the Abkhaz define the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-1993 as the Patriotic War (*otechestvennaja vojna*) of Abkhazia. As a volunteer fighter puts it, “The war is Patriotic because we are fighting for our home, our Motherland, the land of our fathers and ancestors” (Interview in Bebia, 1996: 49). Chapter 3 established that the Abkhaz developed strong norms toward Abkhazia. These norms include patriotism, seen as the duty toward their motherland, heroism, or selfless struggle and self-sacrifice in defence of their motherland, and masculinity reflected in the highly cherished fighter traditions upheld in the household and broader society. In the course of pre-war mobilization, the Abkhaz as well developed strong understandings of belonging to and ownership of Abkhazia as a titular group on their ancestral land. As Ardzinba’s phrase summarizes it well: “we do not live in Georgia. We live in Abkhazia, on our ancestral land” (Interview with Italian press in Zantaria, 2008: 8). It is these entrenched norms and understandings that the advance of the Georgian forces into Abkhazia activated in the Abkhaz.

The reasons given by Abkhaz fighters for their mobilization decisions are in line with these intra-Abkhaz norms and understandings. Most Abkhaz fighters report that they mobilized to fight in the war because they saw Abkhazia as the only land they had and it was their duty to defend their motherland. As Abkhaz fighters say, “we mobilized to defend our land, motherland, our hearth and



home” (Interview 58, 9 November, 2011); “We realized we had to seriously resist. We do not have another motherland” (Interview 118, 28 November, 2011); “We had nothing to lose except for our motherland” (Interview 7, 27 October 2011); “We have nowhere to retreat. Our motherland is here. Either we free our home or we die” (Interview in Voronov et al., 1993: 122). As a result, the Abkhaz say, “No one forced the Abkhaz to fight for their motherland” (Interview 127, 1 December, 2011).

The duty to defend their motherland, or patriotism, the Abkhaz argue, is what differentiated the Abkhaz mobilization for the war from that of Georgian, by both local Georgians and those from Georgia. “The Georgian forces attacked our motherland without even declaring a war” (Interview 47, 4 November, 2011); “We did not attack them. They did,” Abkhaz respondents explain,

It is strange that they say “Abkhazia is Georgia.” If it had been their land, how could they attack and destroy their own? It is unthinkable. It tells that Abkhazia was never Georgia... We have no other motherland as opposed to Georgians who have their motherland, Georgia (Interview 58, 9 November, 2011).

If the Abkhaz mobilized driven by strong norms toward their motherland, the Georgian forces had weaker motives. “We fought for our motherland, they did for territorial integrity,” the Abkhaz say, “This is why they lost. These young boys came here and died” (Interview 131, 6 December, 2011).

Driven by the duty to defend the motherland, the Abkhaz mobilized selflessly, according to their norms of heroism. The indicators of selfless struggle at the stage of mobilization at the outset of the war include the record of poorly armed and completely unarmed Abkhaz military men and defence volunteers who stood up against the Georgian forces even in the areas controlled by them; the determination of the young, especially single sons, to fight, although the mobilization call was for adults of 18 years and older and excluded single sons; and the human losses among the Abkhaz.

Sections 5.1 and 5.2 demonstrated that all these indicators were in place. The responses by Abkhaz fighters support the widespread presence of these indicators. On the Abkhaz mobilization despite a lack of arms, Section 5.2 demonstrated that the Abkhaz weapons were taken away shortly

before the war and many met the war with hunting rifles and no weapons at all, realizing they went against the disproportionately armed opponent. An Abkhaz commander captures it well saying that

We met the Georgian [forces] with bare hands. A couple hundred of automatic guns against such a mass! I tell often how the Abkhaz went into the first counter-attack of the war—one had a gun, two were unarmed, running behind... to take the gun if the first one is injured or killed. This is how we started the war (Interview 127, 1 December, 2011).

Similarly, there are countless reports of the selfless struggle in the name of the motherland by the youth. As Abkhaz fighters say, “We had a strong feeling of patriotism, especially the young. They were fearless. They did not have the self-protection instinct” (Interview 144, 13 December, 2011); “The young fought the most” (Interview 102, 23 November, 2011); “14-15 year-old boys did such heroic acts. There are many examples” (Interview 60, 9 November, 2011). “I sent the boys to take a position on the Sukhum mountain... They were ambushed,” an Abkhaz commander says,

one lost a rifle. And when he said where it could be, the adolescent son of Dzhuma Akhuba, without telling anyone, secretly went to the Sukhum mountain risking being killed by local Georgians who sat there, and returned the gun” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2003: 23).

“So many young were killed” as a result (Interview 74, 12 November, 2011); “in Gagra, an Abkhaz boy fell into Georgian captivity,” an Abkhaz investigator reports based on witness accounts, “He said “I went to defend my motherland,” after which Georgians shot him dead and dug him into the ground” (Interview 88, 17 November, 2011).

The fact of selfless struggle by many Abkhaz at the outset of the war meant that there were immediate losses among the Abkhaz, and not only the young. As noted in Section 5.1.1, 13% of the entire Abkhaz population were injured or killed as a result of mobilization on the Abkhaz side (see fn. 228). Khodzhaa’s (2003; 2006; 2009) interview volumes record many Abkhaz deaths at the outset of the war. The first day of the war, Abkhaz fighters recall, “first Abkhaz Guard fighter died in the clash with the [Georgian] infantry” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2006: 153); “Tqvarchelians organized partisan groups and already had deaths” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 723); “a defence

volunteer group... defended the entry to Sukhum..., were taken captive, and all brutally killed” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 888). These losses support the normative motives of the Abkhaz. As a commander explains, “we did not attack to get others’ land, we defended our only motherland and therefore had a serious loss in human terms” (Interview 58, 9 November, 2011).

Masculinity is another norm that affected the mobilization of the Abkhaz in response to the Georgian advance. As Chapter 2 argued, boys are educated according to the norm of masculinity in Abkhazia. As an Abkhaz volunteer fighter says, “We prepared young people to be hunters, to know how to walk through the mountains and how to shoot well” (Interview 70, 11 November, 2011). This preparation was significant in the Abkhaz mobilization at the outset of the war. “We had many young men [who mobilized],” Abkhaz fighters explain, “All were taught from the childhood not to be afraid of rifles, to know hunting” (Interview, November, 2011); “Young boys can shoot starting at 14 [in Abkhazia], can hold weapons. This element of male upbringing played an important role in the war” (Interview, November, 2011). “The war exposed the masculine character, the level of responsibility” (Interview 53, 8 November, 2011). For example, an Abkhaz commander reports,

There were many landmines... It is difficult to notice them all in the short time that we had to get through the path. It is mountainous terrain. But I did not even think that I could be blown up on a mine... My sapper battalion... did great work. They were masculine, did not show fear (Interview 58, 9 November, 2011).

As a result, the Abkhaz say, “Miracles of masculinity were shown by both the young and the old..., without which we would not be able to... defend the land where we were born, lived, the land that historically was Abkhaz” (Interview 58, 9 November, 2011).

The following quote captures well the aspects of the latent normative framework activated at the outset of the war. Despite his young age, an Abkhaz fighter explains his decision to mobilize:

Not every generation has the privilege of defending the Motherland. I find that defending the Motherland is the honor and dignity of our generation. Every one of us must perform the duty to our people at this difficult time (Interview in Bebia, 2011: 345).

The quote points to the norms of intra-Abkhaz cohesion (reciprocity, honor, conformity to custom) and mobilization (patriotism, heroism, masculinity) and the Abkhaz understanding of their identity as comprised of their people and their motherland. These core aspects of the normative positioning of the Abkhaz were thus indispensable for their mobilization at the stage of civil war onset.

## **5.5 Variation in Mobilization Roles: Interaction between Threat and Norms**

Notwithstanding the support for the widespread presence of the relevant latent norms in the accounts and actions of the Abkhaz at the stage of mobilization for civil war, individuals and small groups in Abkhazia adopted varying mobilization roles when the war started. The variation in these mobilization outcomes, I argue, is shaped by the interaction between the threat perception and the latent norms. Given the development of the latent normative framework for action, individuals and small groups assume different roles at the outset of the war depending on whether their perception of the threat posed by the crisis situation is directed toward the individual or their collectivity.

The threat perception toward the individual is straightforward. Where potential mobilizers gather from the micro-, meso-, and macro-level threat-framing that they should fear for their own security, they are motivated primarily by self-preservation concerns, rather than the norms toward the collectivity, including the duty to defend their people and the motherland discussed above. In these situations individuals and small groups adopt no-to-low risk mobilization roles. Indicators of these mobilization roles include attempts to escape the threat or join the stronger side in the war.

In other words, in cases where individual security is seen as paramount potential mobilizers will attempt to flee, often with their family. If unable to do so, they will join the fighting on the side that will potentially provide most security (Kalyvas, 2006; Kalyvas and Kocher, 2007). As a result, their commitment to the fighting on the stronger side will be low. If they join their own group, this will differentiate them from fighters who mobilize motivated by the latent norms, or concerns with

the collectivity.<sup>260</sup> Importantly, potential mobilizers who flee or collaborate with the other side may view the situation as threatening to both themselves and the collectivity, but will not have the latent norms or related sense of belonging or duty to their group necessary for the mechanism to work.<sup>261</sup>

The threat perception toward the collectivity is more complex and multilayered. Collective threat can be seen at the different levels of group aggregation. At the macro level, the threat can be perceived toward the group as a whole, a state or a nation, for example. Abkhazia as a whole, with its full population, or the Abkhaz nation in particular can be framed by the macro, meso, and micro level triggers as being threatened. At the meso level, one's city, town, or village or a subsection of these meso-level units can be perceived as threatened. For example, the entire mixed-group village of Mokva or its Abkhaz households can be seen as threatened. Lastly, the threat at the micro level is not solely individual, per discussion above. It can as well be seen toward quotidian networks, such as family and friends. This distinction is critical to understanding the variation in the adopted roles.

As opposed to the individual-oriented threat perception, individuals and small groups adopt higher-risk roles on the mobilization continuum when the group as a whole, at the macro-level, its meso-level subset, for example, one's village, and/or a micro-level set, such as family and friends, are seen as threatened. Moreover, mobilization can be immediate, individuals can join later in the course of the war, or not join at all. If the collectivity is seen as threatened, and an individual views herself as its integral part given the latent norms, immediate mobilization to fight will follow where it is feasible. Those who initially do not believe in the reality of the threat may be persuaded later and will join the fighting later in the war if and when persuaded. If, however, the individual is seen as threatened, no mobilization will follow.

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<sup>260</sup> Weinstein's (2007) two types of recruits, "consumers" and "investors," parallel this notion. I argue that both types can be present in an armed group.

<sup>261</sup> Locating individuals who *could have* but did not mobilize to fight is difficult (Wood, 2003). Of my interviews 49% are with non-fighters. Yet, most of these respondents were involved in the mobilization effort in varying capacity, from support for the battlefield to active battlefield duty. The argument relates to and is supported by those who were not.

While acknowledging the broader spectrum of mobilization roles, I focus on these two ends of the mobilization continuum in order to illustrate the argument. That is, I look at those individuals who escaped the threat, thus not risking their lives in the fighting, and those who mobilized to fight, either immediately or later in the course of the Georgian advance into Abkhazia. Examples below demonstrate the differences in the Abkhaz mobilization roles adopted at the outset of the war.

As Section 5.2 established, a proportion of Abkhaz fighters mobilized to resist the Georgian forces immediately with the Georgian advance into Abkhazia. This immediate mass mobilization included not only SRIF regular soldiers and reservists, but also ordinary Abkhaz civilians. Some of these military men and volunteer fighters met the Georgian forces on their route to Sukhum/i from the east and Gagra from the west, either by virtue of being positioned along the main road or having been informed of the advance in their cities, towns, and villages. Other fighter groups immediately mobilized in their home places, if they were already there, or went to their home places to mobilize with the other residents, relatives, or friends once they were informed of the Georgian advance.

I argue that these individuals both perceived the Georgian advance as the threat to Abkhazia and the Abkhaz, impacted by threat-framing triggers at the macro, meso, and/or micro levels of the social structure, and were driven by the strong latent norms and understandings of their duty toward Abkhazia and identity as the Abkhaz. The following Abkhaz fighter's explanation of his decision to immediately mobilize for the war is representative of the responses of immediate mobilizers. "It was clear from the first days that the war would be brutal, that this was a truly Patriotic war for the freedom of Abkhazia. I could not do otherwise... and joined a fighter group" (Interview in Bebia, 1997: 47). Bebia (1997: 47) interprets this as "an oath of loyalty" to the fighters' threatened home.

Moreover, many Abkhaz immediately mobilized to defend their cities, towns, and villages. For example, Abkhaz fighters born and raised in Sukhum/i perceived the threat specifically toward

the city within which they were embedded and mobilized to hold the Georgian forces at the entry to Sukhum/i at the outset of the war. As one of these fighters explains, “For us Sukhum was not just a city, but our shared native home. We knew all its streets..., were one with it. As soon as I found out that the war began, I got my hunting knife. We did not have weapons. Still we went to the Red Bridge” (Basaria, 2006: 115). Other fighters’ reports reiterate this explanation.

The perception of the threat toward one’s village and the duty to defend it and its people is strongly conveyed by Abkhaz fighters who immediately mobilized to fight in their villages both in the east and west of Abkhazia. As Chapter 3 (99) argued, the Abkhaz population was concentrated in rural areas due to the demographic changes that historically unfolded in Abkhazia. Most Abkhaz were thus deeply embedded in the villages. As Abkhaz fighters report, “We knew that every village had to *defend* itself” (Interview 64, 9 November, 2011); “When Georgians occupied Abkhazia, we immediately formed a Pitsunda unit. We were 15 boys from the village... Other villagers started to join... We only had 12 rifles and a grenade launcher... [but] guarded bridges along the Bzyb River [to not allow the Georgian forces in]” (Interview 33, 3 November, 2011); “Everyone defended the village” (Interview 73, 12 November, 2011); “We made a decision to defend the village, including the Georgian population... We all live in one village and all our women, children, elders live in this village” (Interview 117, 28 November, 2011). As an Abkhaz respondent captures it well,

We couldn’t not have raised against this aggression that was presented to us from the air, from the sea, from all the roads. This building was bombed. Shells got into all our gardens. We did not let them into Bzyb. They stayed at Kolkhida (Interview 65, 9 November, 2011).

In contrast to these immediate mobilizers, other individuals and small groups, mainly those who were outside of Abkhazia at the time, often joined later in the course of the Georgian advance. This outcome can be explained by the weakness or inaccessibility of the micro-, meso-, and macro-level threat-framing triggers in their location at the time. Since these individuals and small groups

returned to Abkhazia to fight, however, we can assume that their norms and understandings of duty and identity were present. Yet, they did not perceive the threat toward their land and people at the outset of the Georgian advance. Instead, they joined the fighting on the Abkhaz side if and when they were persuaded that Abkhazia and the Abkhaz, including the macro-, meso-, and micro-level subsets were indeed threatened, and required mobilization in response.

As many others, an Abkhaz respondent did not believe the Georgian advance was in fact a war and that it would last. As it began, he left to study in Moscow. He returned and joined a defence group when he found out that “people were dying in our Motherland... I could no longer study and remain away” (Interview in Bebia, 1996: 29). While the media triggered his threat perception at the macro level, micro- and meso-level triggers were most common for late mobilizers. Some were informed by parents. “We were in Rostov when the war started... and returned to fight” (Interview 5, 27 October, 2011); “My son was in Rostov, but returned to defend” (Interview 80, 15 November, 2011); “Everyone was defending their families, the elders and children” (Interview 12, 31 October, 2011). Others’ threat perception was triggered by their friends. “Having left for Russia, Slavik and Aslan came back in five days, saying that soon there will be an attack by the Abkhaz and they will participate in it” (Interview 22, 2 November, 2011); “My family was in Moscow in 1992. We came back through the mountains of the North Caucasus for the war” (Interview 41, 4 November, 2011).

In contrast to the immediate and late mobilizers, many Abkhaz did not mobilize to fight on the Abkhaz side. This aspect of the variation in mobilization is the most difficult to approach given the sensitivity of this problem discussed above. However, my and other researchers’ interview data and the materials of the Abkhaz Ministry of Defence indicate that three options were pursued by the Abkhaz who did not mobilize to fight on the Abkhaz side or did not provide other forms of support to the Abkhaz.<sup>262</sup> Some of these individuals and small groups remained in Abkhazia and attempted

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<sup>262</sup> Here I am referring to those Abkhaz who were able to fight on the Abkhaz side but chose not to.



holding neutrality. Others fled. Yet others, in rare cases, collaborated with the Georgian side. I find that these potential mobilizers either did not have the strong norms and understandings<sup>263</sup> or did not perceive the threat toward their collectivity. If the threat was perceived, it was so toward their own security and at times their family members, rather than the higher levels of group aggregation. The primary motivation behind their actions, therefore, was ensuring their own security.<sup>264</sup>

Holding neutrality was not easy in the Georgian-Abkhaz war. However, it was possible at the outset of the Georgian advance, especially in the east of Abkhazia, where the Georgian forces immediately established control, but did not require collaboration of the local Abkhaz population. Hence, most Abkhaz residents of the village of Merkula in eastern Abkhazia, for example, did not believe that a war started and did not mobilize as a result. “On the first day of the war the Georgian soldiers came in and out of our village... It was quite and calm for a month and no one organized village defence” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2003: 123). In most cases such as this one (e.g. in Labra), the Abkhaz began their mobilization later in the course of the war, once they realized the threat.

Others, even though they were physically able to fight, fled, fearing for their lives. “Some who were afraid ran” (Interview 85, 16 November, 2011); “I am in Moscow hoping for my children to flee” (Interview in Cherkezija, 2003: 105); “a scientist with his two children holed up in Moscow ... waiting to return to freed Sukhum” (Basaria, 2006: 111-112). The Abkhaz say these individuals evaded the duty to defend their motherland and their people. In contrast, when offered to flee, many rejected. “How can I leave my city and the people I have worked with closely for many years, now

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<sup>263</sup> In general most respondents I interviewed discussed their socialization into the norms and emergent understandings of history and identity and cited these normative motivations in explaining their decisions to mobilize in support of the Abkhaz cause, despite the potential risks, across the conflict cycle. Yet, it is conceivable that some individuals escaped this socialization. This is particularly true of those who did not live in Abkhazia for long periods of time. My interviews support this argument.

<sup>264</sup> Personal security was an issue for most Abkhaz who were in Abkhazia at the time of the war, especially in the areas controlled by Georgia and in fighting against the disproportionately stronger Georgian forces. That some individuals mobilized to fight despite these security concerns indicated that their motivation was not solely security-based. On the other hand, individuals who could have but did not mobilize to fight on the Abkhaz side followed the security-seeking logic and had personal security as their primary concern.

that they are in danger?” (Interview in Cherkezija, 2003: 105); “God forbid I become a father who escaped the war that my sons fought” (Interview in Brojdo, 2008: 62); “You are most dear to me,” one fighter said to his wife, “But my motherland is dearer” (Interview 104, 23 November, 2011).

Finally, the Abkhaz who collaborated with the Georgian side are known by name and seen as traitors by the Abkhaz. Of under 100 SRIF regulars, only two fled and three defected (Khodzhaa, 2006: 190-192). The latter are considered deserters (Pachulija, 2010: 32-33). For example, “when a Georgian tank approached, our battalion commander... [deserted]” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2006: 58); “deputy commander... betrayed [us], giving in part of our personnel” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2003: 45). Those who sided with the Georgian forces generally did so immediately at the war onset.

In contrast, most Abkhaz worked to not be known as traitors during the war even when their health was in danger. “Both sons were sick, but both were not sent [to be treated in Moscow] not to be seen as traitors” (Interview 102, 23 November, 2011). An Abkhaz commander thus concludes,

People died voluntarily for [Abkhazia]. It wasn’t that someone sent them. They could leave for Russia. [Thus] there are no deserters, traitors in the Abkhaz army. There are fighters and everyone else. The fighters fight, everyone else helps (Interview 127, 1 December, 2011).

This quote and the discussion above capture the differences between the Abkhaz who mobilized to fight, whether immediately or later in the course of the war, and stayed in the emergent Abkhaz army during the war (discussed in detail in Chapter 6) and those who in general immediately fled or collaborated with the Georgian side. The former mobilized voluntarily, driven by the strong norms toward Abkhazia and the Abkhaz and realizing that these essential components of their identity—their motherland and their people—were threatened by the Georgian advance. On the other hand, the latter understood the threat posed by the Georgian advance as being directed toward their own security. Personal safety was paramount for these individuals, which was reflected in their mobilization decisions.

## 5.6 Summary of Findings

This chapter looked closely at the immediate mass Abkhaz mobilization in response to the Georgian advance to Abkhazia on 14-18 August, 1992. The Abkhaz, I found, had more organization than commonly assumed, although they were not prepared for a war *per se*. Particularly, the 1989 inter-group violence in Abkhazia significantly influenced the norms and emergent understandings of history and identity among the Abkhaz, increasing the intra-Abkhaz cohesion and organizational capacity, reflected in the uniting of the Abkhaz population in the general strike, and aggravated the inter-group relations in Abkhazia to the level of a polarized and militarized society, in which public institutions split along the conflict lines and armed groups formed on both sides in the conflict. One such group, the Abkhaz Guard, offered the initial resistance to the Georgian advance in 1992 along with spontaneously mobilized local defence volunteers. I argued that mass mobilization of this joint force in the conditions of a sudden attack by the disproportionately stronger Georgian forces, even in the areas where they immediately established control, cannot be fully explained with cost-benefit calculations. Potential mobilizers' social and normative positioning needs to be understood as well.

I used the second part of the latent normative framework activation mechanism—activation of latent norms—to explain this puzzle of immediate mass mobilization. I showed that at the onset of civil war, when immediate decision-making is necessary absent sufficient information, actors at the micro, meso, and macro levels of the social structure trigger threat perception and mobilization in potential mobilizers. Yet, threat perception, on its own, does not explain *high-risk* mobilization. Individuals driven solely by the fear for own security are unlikely to risk their lives fighting on the weaker side in the war. Latent norms toward the collectivity are as well critical. Given these norms, I established, individuals mobilize to fight on the weaker side if they perceive the threat as directed toward their collectivity rather than themselves. This provides the initial test of the latent normative framework activation mechanism. The next two chapters look closely at its continued importance.

## **Chapter 6: Retention and Civil War Outcome**

In October, 1992, we freed Gagra. From this moment on, we were a real army. We learned as we went, had failed attempts from lack of knowledge, but the spirit remained. Why did we win? Because we are loyal to our motherland. We fought for every scrap of our land. The whole population fought and won.

- Abkhaz fighters

Chapters 3-5 analyzed mobilization at the pre-war and civil war onset stages and traced the phases of the latent normative framework activation mechanism—formation and transformation of the normative framework for action (Chapters 3-4) and its activation through threat-framing at the stage of civil war onset (Chapter 5). The following chapters demonstrate the sustained effect of the latent normative framework on mobilization after the stage of civil war onset is over. I argue that at each conflict stage, the normative framework for action transforms based on the preceding cycle of mobilization (as discussed in Chapter 2), which in turn impacts subsequent high-risk mobilization.

This chapter informs how the normative framework continues to affect mobilization during the war through the puzzle of retention of fighters and asymmetric victory. I find that organized and spontaneous mobilization at the war onset (Chapter 5) and consolidation of the Abkhaz norms and emergent understandings that preceded it (Chapters 3-4) are critical to an explanation of this puzzle. In particular, the Abkhaz force that mobilized at the war onset transformed into a regular army in the war. Through army formation the Abkhaz achieved retention of fighters and victory in the war. The Abkhaz side remained militarily weaker relative to Georgia even as it turned into an army. Yet, it engaged in front-line fighting in Abkhazia's west, with irregular warfare in the east, and achieved conventional victories, which culminated in the final Abkhaz offensive of September, 1993, ending the war in Georgia's defeat. The latent framework served as a normative foundation of this process: the emergent understandings of history and identity legitimized army formation at the macro level; the intra-Abkhaz norms motivated fighters to undertake high-risk action key to the Abkhaz victory.

I support this argument with my interviews with fighters and respondents whose immediate family members fought on the Abkhaz side. Fighters comprise 51% of my interviews. This group is broken down into spontaneous (41%) and organized mobilizers (10%) at the war onset (Ch. 1: 29). All fighters shifted to the organized category as the Abkhaz army formed in the course of retention. Individuals whose family members fought constitute 12% of my respondents. They offer a check on the fighter interviews, along with Khodzhaa's (2003; 2006; 2009) interview volumes, archives, and secondary materials. The interviews are distributed across Abkhazia's east, center, and west—the areas of differential Abkhaz and Georgian territorial control—and across the categories of retention I identify. These categories include immediate mobilizers who continue to fight on the joined side, many of whom engage in high-risk front-line fighting, and mobilizers who join in the course of the war.<sup>265</sup> My interview respondents across these categories provide strong support for my argument.

My argument highlights the evolving nature of civil war parties and challenges a static view of actors in civil war, irregular character of insurgent forces, and shared sovereignty at the outset of hostilities. While civil wars are typically defined as armed conflicts within the territory of sovereign states and war parties are thus viewed as state or insurgent forces, the latter assumed to be irregular, I find that sovereignty can be understood differently by the sides in the war and this understanding shapes their nature. When both sides claim sovereignty over a territory, accordingly, both can build regular armies, seen as legitimate by their respective supporters, to defend their claim. This was the case in Abkhazia, where the Abkhaz army was built by the Abkhaz part of the government and seen by the Abkhaz and other non-Georgian segments of the population as a state force formed to defend Abkhazia, rather than an insurgent, separatist force. This argument contrasts with a view adopted in many studies of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict of the Abkhaz side as irregular and separatist and its victory as determined by external factors. These factors alone could not produce such an outcome.

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<sup>265</sup> Retention, furthermore, involves the continued support of non-fighters, which I do not explore in this dissertation.

The sections below, first, position the Abkhaz case in the literature on the nature and tactics of civil war actors. This civil war case with segmented (west and central Abkhazia) and fragmented (east) territorial control shows that the rebels can turn into regular forces, supported by a perception of ownership and belonging, or sovereignty over their territory, and gain battlefield victories. I then look at how these perceptions shaped the processes of retention and victory through army building.

## **6.1 Actors and Tactics in Civil War Research**

In the literature on civil war, civil wars are commonly defined as “*armed combat within the boundaries of a recognized sovereign entity between parties subject to a common authority at the outset of hostilities*” (Kalyvas, 2006: 17, emphasis in original). As Sambanis (2004: 816) argues,

The main distinction... [drawn] between civil (internal or intrastate) war and interstate or extrastate (colonial and imperial) war [i]s the internality of the war to the territory of a sovereign state and the participation of the government as a combatant.

The primacy of sovereignty and authority, or government, to the definition of civil war entails that armed combat characterizing the civil war process aims at altering sovereignty. Sovereignty in the course of civil war is thus segmented “when two political actors (or more) exercise full sovereignty over distinct parts of the territory of the state” and fragmented “when two political actors (or more) exercise limited sovereignty over the same part of the territory of the state” (Kalyvas, 2006: 88-89).

A dichotomy of actors participating in civil war is often assumed in the common definition. As armed contestation in civil war aims to alter sovereignty, “[t]he parties to the conflict may be... seeking to capture the state or to divide it” (Kalyvas, 2006: 18). This does not mean that merely two (sets of) political actors can be engaged in civil war or that these actors are internally unified. On a contrary, a multiplicity of actors and fragmentation among them is recorded in civil wars (Bakke et al., 2012; Pearlman and Cunningham, 2012). Yet, this definition entails that the parties in civil war are usually separated into incumbents and insurgents, the state and the rebels. As Gates (2002: 111) says, “[c]ivil war is fought between two political organizations, the state and a rebel group.”

With the exception of civil wars fought by equally strong actors, as in conventional wars, or equally weak actors, as in symmetric non-conventional wars, in most (irregular) civil wars the state is assumed to be stronger militarily, have a regular army, and privilege conventional warfare, while insurgents are in general associated with relative military weakness and irregular tactics (Kalyvas, 2005; Kalyvas and Balcells, 2010). “Conventional warfare,” Kalyvas (2005: 90-91) clarifies,

entails face-to-face confrontations between regular armies across clear frontlines... [and] requires a commonly shared perception of a balance of power... [I]rregular war is a type of warfare that requires a choice by the strategically weaker side... to refuse to match the stronger side’s expectations in terms of the conventionally accepted basic rules of warfare.

Hence, we see counter-posing of “highly disciplined regular troops” with “insurgent irregulars” in accounts of civil war (Kalyvas, 2006: 73). Kalyvas’ (2006: 67) stylized description of the civil war process suggests that due to the military asymmetry between the parties in (irregular) civil wars,

the state (or incumbents) fields regular troops and is able to control urban and accessible terrain, while seeking to engage its opponents militarily in peripheral and rugged terrain; challengers (rebels or insurgents)... rely... on harassment and surprise, stealth and raid.

Due to this power asymmetry, rebel battlefield victory is not usually expected in (irregular) civil wars. As Kalyvas (2005: 90) argues, “[i]n the absence of some kind of mutual consent (which entails some reasonable belief in future victory), no conventional battle can take place.” As a result, (irregular) civil wars “turn into wars of attrition, with insurgents seeking to win by not losing, while inflicting incessant pain on incumbents” (Kalyvas, 2006: 67). The literature on asymmetric conflict captures this argument in the cases where the power asymmetry is most pronounced. In asymmetric wars, where due to the major power asymmetry “insurgents can pose no direct threat to the survival of the [opponent],” their victory can result primarily from the withdrawal of the exhausted stronger party (Mack, 1975: 181). As Mack (1975: 195) argues, “victory for the insurgents could only come about as a consequence of the destruction of the [opponent’s] political capability to wage war.”<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> The Abkhaz case is a civil war involving local Abkhaz and Georgians, Georgians from Georgia, foreign fighters, and Russian support to both sides (Section 6.3.4). This argument applies to the second aspect of the Georgian-Abkhaz war.

One of the central contributions of this chapter is to challenge these assumptions about the nature of actors and tactics embedded in the common definition of civil war and establish that even if they are relatively weaker militarily not only can the forces understood as insurgent be regular or turn regular in the process of civil war, but they can also achieve military successes as significant as civil war victory in the conventional sense of the term, by facing their opponents on the battlefield. Most critically, however, I argue that actors and tactics in civil war need not be fixed or one-sided. Instead, they can transform in the course of the war and combine both regular and irregular aspects.

As Sanín and Giustozzi (2010: 836) demonstrate, “challengers [in civil wars] can be placed in a continuum constituted by two opposed polar types, army like and network associations.” These two types broadly correspond to the regular and irregular features of actors and tactics in civil war. Sanín and Giustozzi (2010: 837) outline the defining characteristics of the two types as follows:

The army maximizes its separation from civilians, physically (placing its members in separate camps and locales), symbolically (by using insignias, uniforms, etc.), and hierarchically (creating new structures that are independent of the natural ones encountered in the peasant world). The network maximizes its integration with civilians, adopting already existing hierarchies, and merging with them physically and symbolically.

It is the latter, network associations that are akin to Kalyvas’ description of challengers in civil war. Challengers, or insurgents, according to this description, integrate with and hide among the civilian population. They face “an acute identification problem... [in the sense that they] are vulnerable if they are identified” by the state forces (Kalyvas, 2006: 90). Insurgents thus require civilian support to overcome this vulnerability and must ensure that civilians “refrain from identifying the insurgent combatants who hide among them” (Kalyvas, 2006: 91). For such insurgent forces, as a result, “the condition of survival is the capacity to broaden their social base” (Sanín and Giustozzi, 2010: 837). Civilian support is also critical for army-like organizations, but their success has a different source. “For armies,” Sanín and Giustozzi (2010: 837) say, “the condition of survival is internal cohesion.” This argument strongly holds in the case of Abkhazia.



As Chapter 5 demonstrated, the Abkhaz force at the beginning of the Georgian-Abkhaz war combined both regular and irregular, army and network-like components. The chapter specified the different types of Abkhaz fighters who mobilized at the outset of the war. In particular, it separated the actors who had been organized prior to the war, that is, regulars and reservists of the SRIF, and local defence volunteers who mobilized spontaneously in response to the Georgian advance in both the east and west of Abkhazia. While the former resemble more the regular, army end of the Sanín-Giustozzi organization continuum, the latter generally mobilized along the irregular, network lines.

This complex interplay between the regular and irregular features of the Abkhaz force at the war onset is important to an understanding of the way in which the Georgian-Abkhaz war unfolded. As Section 6.2 will demonstrate, it is on the basis of these initial organized and spontaneous groups that the Abkhaz army was built in the course of the war. Yet, this complexity is rarely conveyed in other accounts of the Abkhaz mobilization for war. Most studies of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict problematically assume the Abkhaz force to be simply irregular throughout the war. For example, Fairbanks (1995: 21) characterizes the situation in Abkhazia, among other post-Soviet wars, as

full of armed men, some with weapons as large and sophisticated as tanks and armored personnel carriers, but many of these men do not belong to modern armies. They are not regular soldiers, but irregulars or militiamen. Their characteristic type of organization is not the modern military formation structured by impersonal commitment to the state and the chain of command, but rather a loosely bound group—often with a charismatic personality at the center—that one joins or leaves spontaneously.

Human Rights Watch (1995: 11) similarly describes the actors and tactics in the war in Abkhazia:

These fighters are not real soldiers in the professional sense. Typically, they serve in loose units... These are, significantly, armed formations without noncommissioned officers, the disciplinary backbone of professional armies. There are no sergeants in these ranks, no one to insist on discipline among the ordinary soldiers even of a strictly military, prudential nature—to sandbag positions, dig trenches... The result is a “disordered warfare” that is the analogue of the lawlessness of the fighters and the disinterest of their leaders in imposing restraint on their actions: high technology coupled with improvisation, weapons of great firepower which yet lack adequate control mechanisms.

The Abkhaz mobilization certainly had an irregular aspect, but these descriptions are vague and unhelpful for an understanding of the organization of these actors and their ability to engage in warfare. Who are these *armed men*? Why do they adopt *disordered tactics*? How did they mobilize in the first place? In his study of post-Soviet wars, Zurcher (2007: 216) comes closest to capturing one aspect of the process of the Abkhaz mobilization at the outset of the war detailed in Chapter 5:

It was a common pattern across the Caucasus [wars] that the organization of violence did not initially rely on an “impersonal” state bureaucracy but, rather, on densely knit, small-scale networks of interaction that facilitated trust and cohesion among their members. Some of these units were based on kinship, others on communal ties (villages and urban neighborhoods) or place of residence... Still others were formed around socioprofessional networks—research institutes, factories, or even schools formed their units.

Zurcher’s discussion of the organization of violence adds clarity to the ways in which the network-based aspect of initial Abkhaz mobilization for war unfolded. Even this account, however, does not incorporate the regular component of Abkhaz mobilization at the war onset. As Chapter 5 showed, it was not only spontaneous local defence volunteers who mobilized at the war onset. SRIF military men did as well and in fact were the first to resist the Georgian advance into Abkhazia in 1992.

This aspect of Abkhaz mobilization for war is missing from most accounts of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. So is the transition of the joint Abkhaz force into an army after its early successes in the war (see Section 6.2). As Fairbanks (1995: 26) states, “with the success of... insurgencies..., many militias turn into “armies”.” This transition, I argue, led the Abkhaz to victory, although they remained militarily weaker vis-à-vis Georgia (see Section 6.3).<sup>267</sup> As Arreguín-Toft (2001: 96) says,

[In] the roughly 200-year period covered in the Correlates of War data set, two related puzzles emerge... First, weak actors were victorious in nearly 30 percent of all asymmetric wars... Second, weak actors have won with increasing frequency over time.

Abkhaz mobilization in the Georgian-Abkhaz war illustrates one way in which this is possible—by building a regular army alongside the irregular tactics sustained due to the asymmetry of power.

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<sup>267</sup> This is in contrast to Georgian-Abkhaz studies that relate the Abkhaz victory to external factors (see Section 6.3.4).

Most importantly, the Abkhaz case problematizes the assumption of shared sovereignty at the outset of hostilities adopted in the common conception of civil war. In situations where there is a strong belief in potential mobilizers that sovereignty is not shared, this conception is problematic. “The armed contestation of sovereignty entails mutually exclusive claims to authority that produce a situation of *divided or dual sovereignty*,” Kalyvas (2006: 18) argues (emphasis in original). Such *mutually exclusive claims to authority* perceived by potential mobilizers put in question the shared character of sovereignty and authority at the outset of hostilities and the related separation of civil war actors into the state and the rebels. When both sets of actors in the war perceive their claims to sovereignty as legitimate within the framework of their understandings of history and identity, it is difficult to say that they “*subject to a common authority at the outset of the hostilities*,” just as it is unclear which party is incumbent and which is insurgent (Kalyvas, 2006: 17, emphasis in original).

The understanding of Abkhazia as part of the sovereign Georgian state was highly contested before the war. Abkhazia was an inseparable part of Georgia for the Georgian leaders and populace of Georgia and Abkhazia. For the Abkhaz it was a historically separate entity merged with Georgia. This view shaped in the Soviet period was acted upon by the Abkhaz leaders in their resolutions on “state sovereignty” and “statehood of Abkhazia” in 1990 and restoration of the 1925 Constitution. These documents were not recognized by Georgia. Yet, for the Abkhaz they implied a condition of dual rather than shared sovereignty at the outset of hostilities, supported by the separation between Georgia and Abkhazia in the double-tiered system of Soviet government.<sup>268</sup> While Kalyvas (2006: 18) argues that “[s]hared membership... does not require a subjective perception of belonging,” the perception of belonging made it possible for the Abkhaz leaders to *divide sovereignty* in the eyes of the Abkhaz population and be seen as the incumbent fighting against the Georgian aggressor. This bestowed legitimacy on the Abkhaz leaders to build the Abkhaz army that then led to their victory.

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<sup>268</sup> Georgian central authorities were placed in Tbilisi and seen as a repressive force contrasted with the Abkhaz leaders.

The remainder of the chapter focuses on these processes. The next section looks in detail at how the emergent understandings of history and identity, further advanced at the stage of the initial Abkhaz mobilization for war, facilitated the formation of the Abkhaz army in the course of the war, which, in turn, was significant for the retention of Abkhaz fighters. The final section then discusses the importance of intra-Abkhaz norms, strengthened in the preceding cycles of mobilization by the Abkhaz, for the Abkhaz victory in the war. I argue that these norms motivated committed fighters in the Abkhaz army and thus impacted the Abkhaz fighting and victory.

## **6.2 Abkhaz Army Formation and Retention**

The beginning of the historical process of the Abkhaz army formation can be traced back to the creation in 1991 of the Special Regiment of the Internal Forces (SRIF). Chapter 5 examined its development and importance for the Abkhaz mobilization in response to the Georgian advance into Abkhazia in 1992. This regular aspect of the Abkhaz mobilization for war was accompanied by the irregular mobilization of local defence volunteers (*opolchentsy*) in the east and west of Abkhazia. While this joint Abkhaz force had not yet constituted an official army structure, it formed the basis for the creation of the Abkhaz army that unfolded in the course of the Georgian-Abkhaz war.

This section analyzes the transition of the Abkhaz force into a regular army and shows how this process facilitated retention. I briefly discuss the nature of Georgian and Abkhaz armed actors at the outset of the war—neither can be seen as a regular army at the time. I then focus on the early steps taken by the Abkhaz leaders to transform regular and irregular groups formed at the war onset into an army. Built in the heat of battle, I argue, this emergent army lacked major aspects of military professionalism, which led to failed Abkhaz operations and posed a problem for fighters' retention. Learning<sup>269</sup> from these failures was key to overcoming the retention problem, along with the close-knit structure of army units. Learning was, furthermore, essential for the eventual Abkhaz victory.

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<sup>269</sup> I refer to learning here in the sense of military training and strategy, rather than normative learning (Checkel, 2001).

### 6.2.1 Armed Actors at War Onset

Earlier chapters established that by the time of the war in 1992 the society in Abkhazia was militarized. Armed groups were created on both sides in the conflict. The Abkhaz formed the SRIF. On the Georgian side, local armed formations established in Abkhazia were related to the Georgian paramilitary group Mkhedrioni. These local and Georgia-based Mkhedrioni units were involved in the war in Abkhazia from its onset along with the National Guard, the nascent Georgian army. Yet, neither Georgia nor Abkhazia can be said to have had regular armies when the war commenced.

Darchiashvili (1997) analyzes the process of the Georgian army formation and finds that it began in 1990 with the adoption by the newly elected government of Gamsakhurdia of the Law on Internal Troops-National Guards. Shortly prior, the Mkhedrioni units received their legal status as the Rescue Corps of Georgia. This early stage of Georgia's army building failed, however. Official and unofficial armed formations remained that often acted independently of each other and outside of government control. Some of these units were active in the overthrow of Gamsakhurdia in 1992.

The problem of subordination remained in the Georgian force as the Georgian-Abkhaz war began (Driscoll, 2009). While "the Mkhedrioni and the National Guard... were regarded at the time as the core of a future Georgian army," they were best characterized as the paramilitary rather than the regular army of Georgia (Coppieters, 2000: 21-22). As an Abkhaz fighter explains,

The Georgian forces that came to Abkhazia were not the same army that Georgia currently has. Today Georgia's army is well-trained..., equipped..., [while] those forces consisted of criminals... When they entered... they started robbing... It was the complete breakdown of the army itself. They did not subordinate to each other (Interview 72, 11 November, 2011).

Nodia (1998: 34) confirms the representation by Abkhaz fighters of the Georgian force in the war:

What was called a Georgian army [in the war in Abkhazia] was really a bunch of self-ruled (that is, quite unruly) poetically named "battalions" comprising both romantic patriots and thugs, whose activities were only loosely coordinated, and which were sometimes capable of heroic deeds but would not carry out orders they did not like.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> It is not the goal of this chapter to further discuss the Georgian army. See Darchiashvili (1997, 2003c, 2004, 2005).

On the Abkhaz side, too, the notion of an army had not yet been developed. Many Abkhaz fighters who mobilized at the outset of the war had military experience—and not only in the SRIF, but also in the Soviet army. Experience of service in the Soviet army figures prominently in my and other researchers' interviews with Abkhaz fighters, including a wide geographic and service range. The following quote of an Abkhaz fighter summarizes the Abkhaz responses: "Many [fighters had experience] in the Soviet army... Almost everyone served" (Interview 97, 19 November, 2011).

This experience was critical for the Abkhaz before and during the war. As Chapter 5 noted, the SRIF was formed as the Soviet Union collapsed on the basis of the Soviet battalions stationed in Abkhazia. Its contingent incorporated former Soviet officers and reservists mobilized from across Abkhazia. It was not only personnel, however, that related the SRIF to the former Soviet army. The organization within the SRIF was as well closely connected to the Soviet army experience. Military hierarchy and instruction of both regulars and reservists were structured on its basis. As an Abkhaz commander explains, "Those who served [in the SRIF] were typically younger. Those who already had experience in the Soviet army acted as mentors, officers" (Interview 47, 4 November, 2011).

At the beginning of the Georgian-Abkhaz war, experience of service in the Soviet army was central for the organization of initial resistance and first battles by the Abkhaz. Individuals with the Soviet army, particularly combat experience, immediately assumed leadership roles and guided the early stages of the Abkhaz resistance to the Georgian advance. As an east front fighter reports,

We did not have professional officers... But we almost all served in the army and with our knowledge began doing all that every one of us could do... [For example], I worked on the fortification of my village [and] formed a detachment (Interview 58, 9 November, 2011).

Brojdo (2008: 151) finds that "Afghanistan veterans played a special role in organizing the Abkhaz resistance, especially at its initial stage, as people with real combat experience." We have seen this in Mokva, for example, where former *Afganets* Kishmarija was elected commander of the village defence and played a crucial role in the formation of the Abkhaz force and the front line in the east.

Similar accounts characterize mobilization in the west of Abkhazia. As an Abkhaz fighter explains mobilization in response to the Georgian advance from the sea, “We had tankers, artillerymen who had served before. All this helped in our popular mobilization” (Interview 64, 9 November, 2011).

The following account sums up the importance of individuals with army experience on both fronts,

There were not enough experienced people, but there were individuals who had experience in Russia, served in the USSR, in Afghanistan. Sergey Dbar became the head of the General Headquarters [in the west]. He had great experience in the Soviet Union. Merab Kishmarija commanded the east front. He fought in Afghanistan (Interview 78, 15 November, 2011).

Even with this experience, however, the Abkhaz did not have a regular army at the outset of the war. Fighters commonly say: “There were subdivisions. We said “coy,” “battalion,” “brigade.” But really at first we did not have a regular army” (Interview 78, 15 November, 2011); “There was self-organization on the Abkhaz side—groups here, groups there. Mostly these were civilians, not a regular army. It was simply popular mobilization” (Interview 140, 13 December, 2011); “We had a reservist contingent. But we did not have a regular army at the time” (Interview 77, 15 November, 2011); “We were very weak: we did not have a regular army” (Interview 118, 29 November, 2011). Hence, the armies, especially on the Abkhaz side, were built in the process of the war. As an ICRC (1999: v) report summarizes well the nature of actors at the outset of the Georgian-Abkhaz war,

The Georgian side... had few regular forces, and quickly supplemented them with National Guard members, paramilitaries and even released convicts. The Abkhaz side initially had no regular military, and thus had to organize its forces in the heat of battle.

### **6.2.2 Army Building “In the Heat of Battle”**

Officially, the process of the Abkhaz army formation began on 11 October, 1992, following the successful capture by the Abkhaz forces of the city of Gagra and the territory from Gagra all the way to Abkhazia’s border with Russia. This early success in the war on the Abkhaz side facilitated the creation of the Abkhaz army, along with the framing of the Georgian advance as an aggression and other emergent understandings developed by the Abkhaz in the preceding mobilization cycles.

These emergent understandings legitimized continued Abkhaz resistance to the Georgian forces in general and the formation of a regular Abkhaz state army in particular. Formed on the basis of close personal ties, the army formation, in turn, motivated the retention of Abkhaz fighters as part of this official structure. The discussion below focuses on these early steps in the Abkhaz army formation.

As Chapter 5 discussed, the Georgian forces entered Abkhazia from its east and west on 14 and 15 August, 1992, respectively. On 18 August, despite the agreements between the war parties, the Georgian side captured Sukhum/i and Gagra with surrounding territory. As a result, the Abkhaz base formed in Gudauta situated between these two cities. Two front lines were established leaving some central and eastern territories under the Abkhaz control (see Figure 21 below). One front line along the Gumista River separated the Abkhaz-controlled territory from Sukhum/i; the other along the Bzyb River separated it from Gagra, with a fighting position placed in Kolkhida, nearby Gagra. It is from the latter front line that the military successes on the Abkhaz side in the war began. As an Abkhaz fighter says, “When the front line was shaped, detachments were organized, commanders chosen, and the military command appeared. Some structure emerged. This is how the war started” (Interview 72, 11 November, 2011). While this was not yet the Abkhaz army, organization of what later transformed into the army began with formation of fighters groups to defend the front lines.<sup>271</sup>

On 18 August, the Abkhaz leadership issued a resolution “On the Establishment of the State Defence Committee,” with Ardzinba as Chairman.<sup>272</sup> The Committee issued orders to the military personnel enlisted in the SRIF, especially unit commanders. For example, commander of the SRIF Pitsunda unit received the Committee’s order to move the defence position from Bzyb to Kolkhida:

[When] the Georgian side entered Gagra..., I returned to Bzyb to organize defence... [but] an order came from the State Defence Committee to move the defence line beyond Bzyb... As a former officer of the Soviet Army, I understood what it meant to disobey orders of the commandship at the time of war (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 441-442).

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<sup>271</sup> Over 1,000 Abkhaz mobilized initially; after the Gagra operation and army formation the force grew to over 12,000.

<sup>272</sup> This and other documents of the war period are available in Pachulija (2010). See also Volkhonskij et al. (2008).



Figure 21. Territorial Control in the Georgian-Abkhaz War (18 August-6 October, 1992)<sup>273</sup>



Source: Based on UN map of Georgia, August 2004

The Committee, furthermore, placed under its direct command military personnel that was present in Abkhazia but not related to the SRIF. This included staff of the basic military structures, such as the military enlistment office, subordinated to the Abkhaz government prior to the war and officers of the Soviet army outside of the SRIF structure. The Committee thus appointed and sent a military commissar of the Gudauta region and a major of the Soviet Army to organize the front line along the Bzyb River (Pachulija, 2010: 79). These and other officers arrived to the headquarters at Bzyb on 18 August and thereafter to form, fortify, and adjust the Gagra front line (see Ch. 5: 188).

<sup>273</sup> This map demonstrates segmented territorial control, with the Abkhaz forces controlling central Abkhazia as the Georgian forces firmly controlled the west. Fragmented control is observed in the east, as the Georgian side instantly gained control over the area, but could not consolidate it in the mountainous part of the area held by the Abkhaz side.

Hence, the newly formed State Defence Committee immediately established authority over the SRIF and other military personnel in Abkhazia. Through subordination it was able to retain this personnel and its related regular fighters, including the SRIF and groups formed or appropriated by officers in support of the orders.<sup>274</sup> This was the regular aspect of the future Abkhaz army. Yet, the Committee lacked organization and time to structure the rest of the Abkhaz force as a regular army. Retention of existing volunteer fighters through volunteer unit formation was mostly self-organized and led by fighters with previous army experience. A commander involved in the process explains:

We needed to self-organize; no one would come from the outside to organize us. Therefore, our territorial units transformed into structural units. Large urban units transformed into coys. Cities transformed into battalions. No one was appointed, we gathered and chose who we could rely on to be responsible... This way the popular force (*opolchenie*) was formed that took the weight of the first days of the war (Interview 117, 28 November, 2011).

Other Abkhaz fighters confirm this account. “Depending on the level of armament,” fighters recall, “at first groups [were formed], then in a month platoons, then coys in time for the freeing of Gagra” (Interview 47, 4 November, 2011); “Gagra was already occupied. At that point we began gathering, forming platoons, coys, battalions” (Interview 58, 9 November, 2011). The use of military terms to establish the size and properties of Abkhaz units indicates the effect of the Soviet army experience.

#### **6.2.2.1 The Gagra Battle: October, 1992**

While initial army-like units emerged, it was after the Gagra offensive that the Abkhaz army formed. At first Abkhaz activity at the Gagra front line was defensive: “We defended the Kolkhida position, so that [the Georgian forces] would not move further” (Interview 49, 4 November, 2011); “We held the Bzyb defence boundary, tried keeping them, so that they did not advance to Gudauta” (Interview 36, 3 November, 2011). The same was the case at Gumista: “Prior to 18 August 1992 I managed to gather up to 35 local defence volunteers... The day after we started digging trenches all the way from the sea along the river..., [o]rganized daily duty” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 45).

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<sup>274</sup> There was very little defection on the Abkhaz side. Only a few officers fled or sided with Georgia (see Ch. 5: 222).

However, a number of factors prompted the Abkhaz to plan an attack on Gagra. Encircled by the Georgian forces, the Abkhaz were devoid of access to outside support, especially volunteers. Although some mountain passes were still open, the Georgian control of the Russian border largely prevented the flow of volunteers to Abkhazia. Likewise, the Abkhaz who were outside of Abkhazia when the war began could not return to fight or bring in weapons so needed by the Abkhaz. In these conditions, the Abkhaz were unable to strengthen their base in Gudauta or continue fighting for the areas under Georgia's control (see Figure 21 above). As an Abkhaz commander captures it well,

Abkhazia was encircled. Only mountain passes remained clear. Our communications went through them. The sea route, too, was controlled by Georgia... We could not get support or weapons from the sea, only through mountain passes... Closer to the fall, as the first snow fell in the mountains, we realized that the situation was worsening. We could find ourselves in a blockade during the winter with closed mountain passes. Thus we had to, at any price, break out of that circle of blockade and free Gagra (Interview 117, 28 November, 2011).

There was great fear that the Georgian forces would break through the defence line and gain control of central Abkhazia, the main Abkhaz-held territory. As Abkhaz fighters and non-fighters confirm,

They entirely closed Kolkhida, so that no Abkhaz could leave, put up concrete structures to block off the area... It was so scary... What would happen if they had broken through our Kolkhida block posts and gotten right away into Bzyb? (Interview 83, 16 November, 2011);

"I thought they would kick us out. We had too few weapons. We prepared to live in the mountains, lead partisan war" (Interview 72, 11 November, 2011). The fears were strengthened by the ongoing Georgian offensives even after the 3 September, 1992, Agreement on a Ceasefire and Separation of Forces.<sup>275</sup> Hence, the Abkhaz Defence Committee decided "to undertake offensive actions to break out of the [Georgian] blockade" (Pachulija, 2010: 85). The operation under the code name Storm to capture Gagra and the territory all the way to the border with Russia started on 1 October and lasted until the establishment of control by the Abkhaz side over western Abkhazia on 6 October.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> See Outcome Document of the Moscow Meeting in Volkhonskij et al. (2008: 244-246). The Agreement had to come into effect on 5 September. However, armed actions continued thereafter (Pachulija, 2010: 84; Avidzba, 2008: 191).

<sup>276</sup> For the details of the Gagra operation, see Pachulija (2010: 77-91); Billingsley (2013).

All Abkhaz fighters groups formed to defend the Gagra front line, together with volunteers from the North Caucasus who managed to arrive in Abkhazia by then, participated in the operation. As Abkhaz fighters say, “We all participated in the freeing of Gagra, as one group” (Interview 87, 17 November, 2011); “It was summer, so volunteers were able to cross [through the mountains] and join” (Interview 97, 19 November, 2011); “200 [Abkhaz] were sent into the attack to free the city... At the same time more groups of volunteers were flowing in” (Interview 20, 2 November, 2011).

These fighters groups had some preparation for the operation. Fighters commonly say: “We attempted attacks..., but they were not organized very well and failed. Then former [army] officers who lived across Abkhazia began preparing the attack to free Gagra according to military strategy” (Interview 72, 11 November, 2011); “By the end of September, we started preparing the operation to go on Gagra. [For example], I met [a former officer who] was preparing a reconnaissance group” (Interview 61, 9 November, 2011). From the strategic perspective, the offensive was well-planned.

The operation, however, demonstrated the general unpreparedness of the Abkhaz force. It was supposed to start on 30 September, rather than 1 October, but had to be postponed “due to the unpreparedness of military equipment and personnel” (Pachulija, 2010: 85). Participating fighters report: “We had to withstand from talking, smoking, and attack once we heard a shot from the tank, but it stalled!” (Interview 61, 9 November, 2011); “A group was dispatched at the Cold River. The main forces were supposed to attack Kolkhida at that time, but something went wrong. The attack was temporarily postponed. Georgians used this and pressed the group from all sides” (Interview 22, 2 November, 2011); “The communications systems were very poor. It was the first attempt at an organized attack” (Interview 20, 2 November, 2011). Hence, Abkhaz fighters conclude, “the first operation to free Gagra was carried out by sloop” (Interview 72, 11 November, 2011); “It was unorganized. We decided which positions to take by ourselves. On the second, third attempts, we managed to enter Gagra” (Interview 73, 12 November, 2011). An Abkhaz fighter captures it well:

I joined the Pitsunda battalion. It was spontaneous, unprofessional, with no regular army... We thought, whatever the older men do, we should do, too. They told us to join the Pitsunda battalion, go into the attack to free Gagra, and we went (Interview 41, 4 November, 2011).

Therefore, the Abkhaz suffered significant casualties. 108 fighters died as a result of the operation, of which 15 were foreign volunteers (Pachulija, 2010: 91). For a small nation with a small fighting force, “This was a big loss,” a participant commander explains (Interview 61, 9 November, 2011).

Despite these problems, the operation ended in the military success for the Abkhaz side. On 2 October, the Abkhaz forces captured the city, followed in the next four days by the establishment of control all the way to the border. A number of factors are involved in this outcome. Two have to be emphasized for our purposes here—fighters’ understanding of the significance of the operation, affected by the emergent understanding of history and identity, and their resulting cohesion.

In the perception of Abkhaz fighters, the Gagra operation was closely related to the survival of Abkhazia and the Abkhaz. This view was based on the record of the Georgian-Abkhaz relations and the framing of the Georgian advance as an aggression at the war onset. “If Abkhazia was to survive,” fighters repeatedly say, “we had to free Gagra and get to Psou [at the border with Russia]” (Interview 20, 2 November, 2011). The dangers of Georgia’s encirclement come out strongly from their interviews: “we were squeezed from two sides..., separated from everyone” (Interview 72, 11 November, 2011). The Abkhaz thus view “The freeing of Gagra [as] the freeing of Abkhazia [as a whole]” (Interview 60, 9 November, 2011). This is because open border means access to “produce, everything” (Interview 60, 9 November, 2011). It, furthermore, means freedom from the Georgian invader, indicated by the framing of the Gagra operation as the battle to *free, liberate* Gagra and the Abkhaz force as the *liberation* force. As fighters commonly report, “what happened [in Gagra was] a definition of [Abkhaz] groups as national liberation fighters” (Interview 129, 5 December, 2011); “This was the people’s liberation army. All had to participate” (Interview 41, 4 November, 2011).

The understanding of the Gagra operation as the battle for survival of the Abkhaz, given the significance of the open border with Russia and certainty in Georgia's brutality against the Abkhaz, and of Abkhaz fighters as the liberation force against the Georgian aggressor added to the cohesion developed by the Abkhaz in the preceding mobilization cycles and served as an important unifying factor for fighters groups participating in the operation. As fighters often report, the operation was implemented "on big enthusiasm" (Interview 72, 11 November, 2011); "unity saved us" (Interview 129, 5 December, 2011). This cohesion was critical to overcoming technical problems and lacking skills, reflected in poor communication noted above, and proceeding with the operation.

A significant indicator of the Abkhaz cohesion is the participation of many Abkhaz fighters together with their fighters units despite the unavailability of arms. Over 600 immediate mobilizers and new joiners participated in the operation (Pachulija, 2010: 91). Most were supplied with small arms. However, a part of fighters had only hunting weapons, if at all. We could expect these lightly armed and unarmed fighters to attempt to escape or evade battle. Nonetheless, they went into battle together with their units. As participating fighters confirm, "Many went to free Gagra with sticks... We went to necessarily free the city. This helped" (Interview 72, 11 November, 2011); "We passed one rifle back and forth with my cousin. Gagra was freed" (Interview 73, 12 November, 2011).

The Abkhaz cohesion is observed most clearly in the implementation by Abkhaz fighters of the strategy assigned by army officers. The initial aspect of the strategy, for example, involved the risky capture of the high ground around Gagra before the offensive. As a participating fighter says,

A week before the beginning of the liberation of Gagra... I went to the Gagra front line with up to seven of my familia members... We had only three Kalashnikov. Our position was far from the main Abkhaz defence line. We were too close to the Georgians... [But] front line commander often came to us, [h]elped with cartridges (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 198).

By 2 October the Abkhaz "held all the strategic heights" (Billingsley, 2013: 150). The inter-fighter support and the persistence of Abkhaz fighters in such positions of danger indicate group cohesion.

Similar accounts characterize strategy implementation throughout the Gagra operation. For example, the city capture involved “a three-pronged attack... One group followed the coastline... The other two... fought their way through the city along... the old and new highways” (Billingsley, 2013: 150). These units followed strategy and moved as ordered. As a participating fighter reports, “Sergey Dbar [commander of the Gagra operation] gave an order to get through tomorrow. We demined the area, made dugouts, and neutralized the opponent following this strategy” (Interview 20, 2 November, 2011). Therefore, Billingsley (2013: 156) says, “[Abkhaz] cohesion on an individual- and group-level was... illustrated so clearly at Gagra.” This cohesion in both ideas and actions was critical for the rest of the war. Abkhaz fighters were prepared to go on with it. As a fighter explains, “[We] had such a spiritual uplifting in the days of the liberation of Gagra and the Gagra region that if only [we] had an order, [we] would all go to free Sukhum” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 198).

This Abkhaz cohesion contrasts with the inability of the Georgian forces to act in union. As fighters recurrently say, “they underestimated us, relied on their tanks, rifles. They began robbing” (Interview 78, 15 November, 2011); “Georgians had much, but they... were only looting here, and when the people stood up... they ran” (Interview 53, 8 November, 2011); “They dropped it all and ran away through Psou, the mountains. Karkarashvili [the Georgian commander] was evacuated by helicopter” (Interview 47, 4 November, 2011); “They ran away, left everything” (Interview 70, 11 November, 2011); “As we reached the Cold River we found a column of heavy equipment pointing toward Gagra. Georgians ran away! Even a cigarette was left to burn out on the ground. They left so many weapons, tanks behind” (Interview 61, 9 November, 2011). The military capacities of the Georgian forces should not be underestimated. As Billingsley (2013: 151) suggests, “[t]here were dedicated [Georgian] units.” Yet, their looting, unpreparedness for an Abkhaz attack, and resulting escape from Gagra and the strategic border region indicate poor cohesion on the Georgian side.

### 6.2.2.2 From First Success to Army Formation

The success in the Gagra operation, particularly the establishment of control by the Abkhaz forces over the border with Russia, constituted one of the most significant developments in the war for the Abkhaz side. “It is difficult to overestimate the importance of the Gagra victory for fighting Abkhazia,” an Abkhaz fighter says retrospectively, “It not only unblocked the road of life, but also contributed to the formation of the Abkhaz army” (Enik, 2002: 62). Indeed, the official process of the Abkhaz army formation began after the Gagra operation, with the opportunities created by this first Abkhaz success and the subsequent strengthening of the Georgian forces on the Gumista front.

The capture of Gagra and the border region by the Abkhaz forces was indispensable for the Abkhaz. “In many ways,” Billingsley (2013: 156) confirms, “the battle for Gagra was the battle for Abkhazia itself. Once in control of the border and port-facilities..., supplies and manpower [c]ould get through.” With the capture of Gagra, Abkhaz fighters explain, “The main danger disappeared” (Interview 20, 2 November, 2011); “We had a common peaceful corridor with Russia, got produce from there” (Interview 61, 9 November, 2011). The Abkhaz success at Gagra, furthermore, solved the problem of weapons of the Abkhaz (Pachulija, 2010: 91). “After the freeing of Gagra,” Abkhaz fighters say, “we had plenty of weapons” (Interview 20, 2 November, 2011); “This is when the first trophy weapons appeared” (Interview 72, 11 November, 2011); “we got many trophies” (Interview 47, 4 November, 2011); “Heavy equipment, automatic guns” (Interview 50, 9 November, 2011).

In turn, this outcome was a great loss in the war for the Georgian side. As an Abkhaz fighter suggests, “That the Russian border was now controlled by the Abkhaz was a disaster for Georgia” (Interview 20, 2 November, 2011). “Georgia could only hope for a break-out on the Sukhum front” (Billingsley, 2013: 156). Hence, Georgia fortified its forces beyond Gumista. As an Abkhaz fighter confirms, “the enemy significantly strengthened its Sukhum military forces” (Arshba, 2002: 27).



The formation of the Abkhaz army was associated with these outcomes of the Gagra battle. The opportunity to strengthen the Abkhaz base in Gudauta created by the breaking of the Georgian encirclement, the preparation by the Georgian forces for further fighting on the Gumista front, and an understanding by the Abkhaz that cohesion was not enough to withstand the dominant Georgian force prompted the Abkhaz to take concrete steps to build the Abkhaz army. The following account summarizes well the state of the Abkhaz force at the stage of the Gagra operation, discussed above, and the need to form an army in order to persist in the war:

As much as we prepared for the liberation of Gagra, we could not say that we had an army. Those who led the people were mostly leaders in the society, not professional military men. They were called commissars, but went on naked enthusiasm, rather than knowledge. Enthusiasm does not lead to good. You can win a battle but not a war with enthusiasm. A war is won with military professionalism (Interview 126, 1 December, 2011).

As one such commissar explains his efforts to ensure retention and cohesion in the Gagra operation,

I was appointed assistant to the commander of the coy, a commissar—a person responsible for the ideological aspect, the moral psychological spirit of the unit. The fighters were from my village. I knew them all as I grew up with them, it was a relative environment. My tasks involved the support of the mood, explanation of what was happening. I did not let anyone doubt that we were right, that we would certainly win (Interview 117, 28 November, 2011).

This Abkhaz cohesion based on inter-fighter support and spirit did not prevent Abkhaz failures and losses, especially at the outset of the Gagra offensive. Now that Georgia was actively preparing and fortifying its forces for future fighting, such failures could lead to much more dramatic losses and, importantly, retention problems on the Abkhaz side. An efficient army was needed to avert that.

Hence, immediately after the Gagra operation, on October 11, 1992, the Abkhaz leadership adopted resolutions On the Armed Forces of the Republic of Abkhazia and On the Formation of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and General Headquarters (GH) of the Armed Forces.<sup>277</sup> These decrees were aimed precisely at “the organization of the efficient army” (Arshba, 2002: 28). The GH was to “plan armed actions, staff, deploy and train the army, and create new formations” (Pachulija, 2010:

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<sup>277</sup> See documents in Pachulija (2010: 248-250).

250). The MoD was to complete general mobilization of the population by 18 October and start the formation of armed forces.<sup>278</sup> The MoD address to the population in support of its tasks captures its macro-level retention strategy. It called on all population to “provide comprehensive assistance in the establishment of the regular army” (Pachulija, 2010: 248). Specifically for fighters, it appealed to the Abkhaz understanding of Abkhazia as their motherland in need to be defended and the intra-Abkhaz norms of patriotism, masculinity, and heroism. “The armed forces,” the MoD declared,

are a part of the people and must defend the interests of *independence of our Motherland*... [We] are certain that the personnel will demonstrate *discipline, masculinity, and heroism* in the implementation of goals... Every fighter must feel the responsibility and pride for the trust, afforded by the people,—to defend the independence of our motherland, its honor and freedom (Pachulija, 2010: 249, emphasis added).

The language of the address thus drew on the understandings of history and identity that emerged in the earlier cycles of Abkhaz mobilization and were shared among the Abkhaz. The framing of the Georgian advance as an aggression and occupation by an invading force and the first success in the Gagra battle by what was seen as a liberation force substantiated the ideas conveyed in it.

The address along with the resolutions passed by the Abkhaz leaders further legitimized the Abkhaz resistance to the Georgian forces and afforded it an official status as part of a state structure in the eyes of the Abkhaz. As fighters confirm, “There is a big difference between separatists and a national liberation movement. We are the latter” (Interview 7, 27 October, 2011); “If in 1991 there were armed forces of the Soviet Union..., in 1992 the Abkhaz army was formed” (Interview 44, 4 November, 2011); “Ardzinba created our army” (Interview 14, 1 November, 2011); “This was an official structure” (Interview 129, 5 December, 2011). The official status of the Abkhaz army as the state force of Abkhazia was constantly emphasized by fighters and reinforced in the actions of the Abkhaz. For example, an Abkhaz fighter recalls, “following the liberation of the Gagra region from the aggressor, the flag of Abkhazia... was raised at our state border at Psou” (Enik, 2002: 58).

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<sup>278</sup> It is at this point that most new joiners mobilized on the Abkhaz side.

Hence, Abkhaz fighters associate the beginning of the real, state war with the success of the Gagra operation and the formation of the Abkhaz army that followed. As fighters say, “Gagra was freed and then we got weapons. We began truly fighting with the weapons of our enemy..., of those people who ran away” (Interview 58, 9 November, 2011); “Then the real war began with all further action” (Interview 72, 11 November, 2011); “Then we had enough weapons, everyone who wanted to fight for the motherland [now] had the weapons to do so” (Interview 70, 11 November, 2011).

It was not only the availability of weapons that differentiated the Abkhaz force that existed before the creation of the official army from the one that emerged thereafter. As an Abkhaz fighter explains, “After the freeing of Gagra there were lots of weapons, so we could form army units: the artillery, etc.” (Interview 97, 19 November, 2011). As the process of general mobilization went on, the MoD thus began gradually structuring army units and separating fighters accordingly. Different services emerged, including the artillery, tank and engineer troops, the navy, and air force (Arshba, 2002: 29; Pachulija, 2010: 248-344). The regular army structure was being introduced. As fighters say, “there were no such structures as battalions prior to the freeing” (Interview 78, 15 November, 2011); “When Gagra was freed a serious preparation for the war began. The army was created with subdivisions, garrisons, battalions—the [overall] structure” (Interview 78, 15 November, 2011).

Particularly important for regular fighters was the structuring of battalions to which fighters then generally belonged throughout the war. “After the freeing of Gagra the formation of battalions began” (Interview 61, 9 November, 2011). For example, “The Pitsunda battalion [we know now] had not been formed yet. It was formed only after the freeing of Gagra” (Interview 44, 4 November, 2011); “After the freeing of Gagra the battalion of Bagramian was created, by an official decision” (Interview 78, 15 November, 2011). As a result, “the Gagra, Tsandrypsh, Bzyb, Ldzaa and Marshal Bagramian battalions were formed at this time,” an Abkhaz fighter concludes (Enik, 2002: 62).

The units within these battalions were typically formed on the basis of regular and irregular fighters groups organized and spontaneously formed at the outset of the war (see Chapter 5). As an Abkhaz fighter says, “After the freeing of Gagra the formation of battalions began. Our group Abra where we were 27 fighters joined a larger battalion” (Interview 61, 9 November, 2011). Chapter 5 established that SRIF fighters had been organized into units before the war and generally mobilized with their units in reaction to the Georgian advance. Mobilization of spontaneously formed fighters groups was commonly based on the micro- and meso-level familial and communal networks at the outset of the war. It was very important for the retention of Abkhaz fighters that they remained with their initially formed groups when the official Abkhaz army units were formed. A commander says that for this reason “it was necessary to keep the core of defence volunteers and [SRIF] guards who were under my command” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 441).<sup>279</sup> Both SRIF and volunteer fighters confirm this argument. As a SRIF reservist explains the transformation into the regular army,

We all knew each other in the military unit that I joined. First, we went to free Gagra with my coy. Then we formed a battalion with three coys... [When army units were formed] we became part of the provision platoon responsible for the provision of clothing, food, etc. At first we also bought and exchanged things for weapons, later this became the responsibility of the center (Interview 13, 1 November, 2011).

The following account stresses the importance of relatives, specifically families, for the process:

People in Abkhazia live by neighborhoods... There are no clans in Abkhazia but families... If someone has my last name, even if I do not know them, it automatically means that I will protect and help them if something happens... People follow each other by familia and by friendship. So when the war came, people reported to the army with their friends to fight together. Those who could not fight helped otherwise (Interview 4, 25 October, 2011).

An Abkhaz defence volunteer who mobilized with relatives and friends at the war onset confirms:

Defence volunteer groups were made of close family and friends. The war was the common struggle of close ones. We were 17 and called each other to go to the war together... There were two fronts, one at Bzyb, the other at [Gumista]. The Georgians occupied all territory beyond these points. We went to the Bzyb front and there found commanders who assigned us, altogether but with the addition of other men, to fight (Interview 5, 27 October, 2011).

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<sup>279</sup> Not all fighters remained with their initial fighters groups. Some were reappointed. However, it was not as common.

Hence, new fighters, including foreign volunteers arriving to Abkhazia, merged with these groups formed at the outset of the war and transformed into regular army units or formed new ones. As Pachulija (2010: 45) says, “[v]olunteers merged with the Abkhaz armed units. Some of them... had a good field training. To create a unified military structure, separate battalions were formed on their basis.” New army units created in the process of the army formation and Abkhaz fighters who arrived to Abkhazia after the war began and had not been part of the initial mobilization for war as well merged with the existing fighters units. As an Abkhaz fighter recalls, “We had a battalion, the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion; we were merged with the new mountain infantry coy and the Gudauta reconnaissance platoon and were approximately 500 people [in the end]” (Interview 72, 11 November, 2011). A fighter who came back to Abkhazia and joined later in the war confirms: “I returned to Gudauta..., joined a group of 30 defence volunteers that they formed” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2003: 202).

As a result, a commander says, “The Abkhaz army was formed on the basis of location and friendship ties” (Interview 47, 4 November, 2011). Familial and communal structure of the official army was a key factor for fighters to remain in the army and continue to fight. It figures prominently in fighter responses. For example, “I was in the Sharatyn. Everyone knew this [folk ensemble]. We went abroad to perform together. During the war, we went to fight and stayed together” (Interview 6, 27 October, 2011); “We met three years before the war. We then stayed together in the trenches, in the unit, in the battalion” (Interview 48, 4 November, 2011). The official status afforded to these closely-knit groups by the army formation added a layer of formal subordination to the retention of fighters. Abkhaz fighters constantly refer to it as another factor in their continued mobilization:

The Abkhaz population of Gagra had no structure when the war began. We formed around close ones. Once we freed Gagra, we started to form units, battalions. We now had criminal subordination. I was part of the mountain infantry coy and participated in all our operations (Interview 75, 13 November, 2011);

“We had a chain of command..., subordination to... Gudauta” (Interview 60, 9 November, 2011).

The formation of the official army structure was not limited to the west of Abkhazia, where this regular aspect of the Abkhaz force was most clearly pronounced. It also took place in the east, in the area around the city of Tqvarchel/i blockaded by the Georgian forces, but held by the Abkhaz. As Chapter 5 demonstrated, self-defence groups that mobilized in this area at the outset of the war quickly transformed into the guerrilla force able to maintain the Abkhaz control of the territory and disturb the Georgian forces located around it. In particular, this Abkhaz force in the east carried out sorties to first obtain weapons from the Georgian side and then obstruct a further Georgian advance into the area. While the irregular aspect of the Abkhaz east front fighting mostly endured due to the continued Georgian control of this part of Abkhazia and a significant asymmetry of power between the sides, Abkhaz guerrilla groups were officially incorporated into the emergent Abkhaz army.

With the beginning of the Abkhaz army formation after the first Abkhaz success at Gagra, “the process of the transformation of the partisan movement into an organized armed force” started in the east of Abkhazia (Arshba, 2002: 29). Similarly to the developments in the west, the regular army structure was introduced in the east. Battalion formation followed the same pattern. Fighters groups formed at the war onset were sustained and integrated into larger battalions. The following excerpt from an east front commander interview captures well the developments discussed in this section as they unfolded at the east front, including the regular character of the emergent Abkhaz army, the patterns of the army unit formation, and the military subordination in the war process:

By an order of the Defence Council of Pokvesh [village] I went to Gudauta to report on the situation at the east front... Minister of Defence proposed the formation of a battalion from the Ochamchira and Tqvarchel/i region residents... A seal was made and given to me with an inscription—Mechanized Infantry Battalion of the East Front. This group integrated the [existing] groups [such as] Sharatyn (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 580-581).

While the process of the Abkhaz army formation continued thereafter, with the incorporation of the east front formations into the regular army, the basic structure of the Abkhaz army was established.

### **6.3 War Process and Asymmetric Victory**

The previous section analyzed the early steps in the formation of the Abkhaz army. Here I turn to the record of this transforming force in the war process. Formed *in the heat of battle*, I argue, the emergent Abkhaz army at first lacked essential aspects of military training and skills, reflected in a number of failed operations with heavy losses on the Abkhaz side. The first part of this section looks at two of these operations in January and March, 1993. I find that learning from these failures was critical for further retention and the Abkhaz victory, as the last Abkhaz operations in July and September, 1993, demonstrate. These operations are discussed in the second part of the section.

#### **6.3.1 Emergent Army and Failed Battles: January and March, 1993**

As Section 6.2 showed, the first military success of the Abkhaz in and around Gagra and the formation of the official Abkhaz army associated with it greatly raised the spirit of Abkhaz fighters and engendered a confidence in their prospective victory in the Georgian-Abkhaz war. In the words of an Abkhaz fighter, these processes “instilled in people an unshakable belief in the inevitability of the cherished victory, proving once again that a nation defending its freedom and independence is invincible” (Enik, 2002: 62). These qualities, however, were not enough for the continued success.

That the Abkhaz army was built in the war, rather than in preparation for it, had implications for military professionalism and combat capacities of Abkhaz fighters. Military training, needed for successful implementation of operations, was not available for fighters, which translated into battle losses and potential problems for retention. Past army experience helped. Yet, it was insufficient to produce immediate military socialization or create a well-functioning military body (Wood, 2008). In consequence, the emergent Abkhaz army lacked in essential military skills as the war protracted. The failed Abkhaz military operations in early 1993 discussed below reflected these shortcomings and demonstrated the significance of training and professional strategy for the retention of fighters. These factors constituted the basis of retention along with the close-knit structure of the army units.

Abkhaz fighters in the newly created units of the Abkhaz army began training immediately upon unit formation. As west front fighters report, “those we could find through personal files who were former tankers, sappers organized training to seriously prepare the resistance” (Interview 78, 15 November, 2011); “The Ministry of Defence was created 11 October... We formed a regiment, started teaching people how to fight” (Interview 61, 9 November, 2011); “The front line was our position while we were preparing, training” (Interview 47, 4 November, 2011). A military training center was created for the preparation of fighters. As an Abkhaz commander says, “A training coy was created with the communications battalion to prepare operators from the number of conscripts during the war. This training center was located in Tsandrypsh in the Gagra region. Basic military training was also taught there” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 917-918). Such training was as well commenced in the east of Abkhazia, as units formed there. An east front commander, for example,

was tasked with the reformation of semi-guerrilla units of the front into army structures. He had to form brigades from [scratch]. Within three months people were organized, equipped with weapons, communications, uniforms. Preparatory training activities were carried out with the battalions (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 435).

However, this training could not be adequate in the conditions of continued fighting. As an Abkhaz fighter says, “A serious prolonged war went on” (Interview 78, 15 November, 2011). Thus military failures of the emergent Abkhaz army began right after the Gagra operation, as the regular army structure was only beginning to be introduced. Following the successful capture of Gagra, on 7-13 October, 1992, Abkhaz fighters took the strategic height Tsugurovka above the Gumista front line in preparation to capture Sukhum/i. The stronger Georgian side attacked and dealt losses to the Abkhaz, forcing them to retreat (Pachulija, 2010: 108). Similarly, in the Ochamchira operation of 26 October, despite the training prior to the operation, the marines did not appear to support ground troops. “We trained for landing... [but] the weather changed... [and] we stopped by Ochamchira... waiting for an order to land... One of the engines stalled” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 930).



The factors leading to these failures include the predominance of the Georgian forces, poor Abkhaz communications, equipment, and training for holding positions in the face of an attack, and random factors such as weather change. In a word, any obstruction at this early stage of the Abkhaz army formation could produce a failure. Furthermore, not all Abkhaz fighters realized the nature of the transformation in the Abkhaz force and acted accordingly. As an Abkhaz commander explains,

the army was being formed in the course of armed actions. Enormous work was done over three months. Not everyone understood what was happening. Sometimes we had to explain to each platoon or coy commander why they are no longer in the fifth battalion..., [why] the platoon now has 21 soldiers rather than 50 militias (Interview in Zantaria, 2008: 46).

These early failures may be associated with the initial stage of the Abkhaz army formation. Hence, we could expect the emergent Abkhaz army to improve its record with time. Yet, the most dramatic and representative failures on the Abkhaz side took place in the operations of January and March, 1993, when the Abkhaz army was well into the process of development.

In January, 1993, as the Georgian forces were strengthening their offensives in the east of Abkhazia, the Abkhaz attempted to divert the Georgian side from the east front with an attack from the Abkhaz-controlled territory beyond Gumista (Pachulija, 2010: 132-133). Abkhaz fighters were informed by the Headquarters in advance of the operation. As a fighter reports, “3 January 1993 we received an order from the Headquarters on the 5 January attack and preparation for it” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 62). Battalions participating in the operation “had already been formed in time for the operation” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 83). Two battalions were to fortify the lower and upper bridges across Gumista and take defence and attack respectively. The third battalion had to take battle (Pachulija, 2010: 134). However, the Georgian forces opened fire at the lower and upper Gumista, preventing most Abkhaz units from crossing the river. As participating fighters say, “we sat in ice-cold water for seven hours... under cross sniper fire” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 48). Hence, the Abkhaz incurred losses, including 35 killed and dozens injured (Pachulija, 2010: 139).

Some units, furthermore, did not appear at their assigned locations or were late. Of the 130 fighters of one platoon, for example, only a third were found at their positions in the course of the operation, half of whom were killed by Georgian fire (Pachulija, 2010: 136). As a coy commander admits, “We had to fortify the river at four in the morning... [but d]ue to the lateness of one of my unit [fighters] we went... at nine” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 91). The few units that managed to cross the river thus did not get the necessary support, although they did harm the Georgian forces in the process. The harsh winter weather conditions and the deficit of equipment were as well listed among the problems characterizing the operation. Overall, the January operation failed. As Abkhaz fighters say, “We received an order to retreat and take previous positions” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 338); “the operation was cancelled” (Interview 40, 4 November, 2011).

The following March operation ended in a similar outcome, and more significant losses on the Abkhaz side. The Abkhaz consider this operation to be one of the darkest episodes in the war. The operation was to follow a pattern of attack along the lower and upper Gumista axes, but with a much stronger force on the Abkhaz side. This time commanders had to sign the receipt of the order so that they would not be able to evade responsibility later. As an Abkhaz commander explains, “I was present. All orders were signed by all commanders of battalions, at what time one would cross the Gumista River, who would go through the top” (Interview 64, 9 November, 2011). Similarly to an earlier operation, however, the attack was postponed by a day due to communications problems. As an Abkhaz fighter says, “Originally we had to begin the offensive on 14 March 1993, but by an order of commandship the operation was deferred” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 338). Abkhaz commanders later agreed that it “affected the troops negatively..., broke the morale” and could be detrimental for their retention (Pachulija, 2010: 155). The postponement, furthermore, meant that by the time the operation began many units had already moved too far from the Gumista front line.

Hence, some units once again did not show up when the offensive commenced on 15 March or were late with their assignments in its course. As an Abkhaz commander explains the strategy, “It was a shuttle method. One group from the battalion crosses the river, takes the trenches through battle and sits there. Then the others cross the river. But the others did not come” (Interview 64, 9 November, 2011). Abkhaz fighters confirm: “We went to Gumista in March. There was no support, no communications” (Interview 50, 4 November, 2011). The Georgian side was again able to force some Abkhaz units to retreat through counter-attack. As a participating fighter recalls, “The March attack was the most difficult. They took control of heights, bombed us” (Interview 36, 3 November, 2011). Most Abkhaz units, in consequence, were unable to implement their assigned military tasks.

Nonetheless, a number of units broke through the Georgian defence line and moved toward the city. As a participating fighter remembers, “Our assault battalions infiltrated and entrenched on the side where the enemy was. This caused panic in the ranks of the Georgian army” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 50-51). Most Georgian units ran, but were stopped by local Georgian fighters and together forced the few Abkhaz units left without support back. As an Abkhaz commander says, “if [support] had come, Sukhum would be freed that same day. Half the Georgians ran away already” (Interview 64, 9 November, 2011). The consequences for the Abkhaz were dire. 222 fighters were killed (Pachulija, 2010: 175). One Abkhaz unit, for example, lost half of its contingent. As a fighter says, “the unit was encircled” (Interview 93, 18 November, 2011). The unit’s commander explains: “we went 31 people and came back 15. 16 remained there injured and dead. When we retreated, we could not take everyone” (Interview 53, 8 November, 2011). Overall, an Abkhaz fighter concludes,

the March offensive [is] one of the most tragic pages in the history of the Patriotic [W]ar of Abkhazia. Then, due to the lack of coordination of actions by various military units and the army leadership, some went into the attack, yet others “never received” an order to cross the front line. Clearly, the consequences could only be dire (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 46).

“The attack failed. Many died. We could not bring them home” (Interview 36, 3 November, 2011).

### **6.3.2 Learning and Victory: July and September, 1993**

Although the January and March operations of the emergent Abkhaz army failed miserably and produced significant losses on the Abkhaz side, they were key for the Abkhaz to gain necessary military training and skills that regular armies generally develop prior to combat. Commanders and fighters alike drew lessons from the failed battles as the war progressed. A commander thus reports, “We participated in all the attacks—January, March—the unsuccessful ones. Many died. We drew implications and prepared otherwise” (Interview 70, 11 November, 2011). Fighters confirm: “we learned fighting on the battlefield” (Interview 114, 28 November, 2011); “we learned constantly in battle” (Interview 126, 1 December, 2011). This eased the fighting and was thus key for retention.

The learning included basic aspects of fighting. For instance, the Abkhaz explain, “At first, our boys did not even make trenches” (Interview 101, 20 November, 2011); “when shooting started they ran up the mountain, instead of finding a hole and digging in. We did not know anything then” (Interview 100, 20 November, 2011). The same went for commanders. As an Abkhaz fighter says, “Before each military task, commanders got an order and were supposed to open the envelope at a specific time. But there was inconsistency among commanders. Many were inexperienced, did not implement orders. Not everyone opened their orders on time” (Interview 97, 19 November, 2011).

Not only commanders and fighters, but also support personnel, such as doctors, nurses, and journalists learned in the war process. For example, an Abkhaz nurse says, “If someone was injured by the river, we went on the emergency, in white robes, slippers, with the little white flag. We were shot at. Some nurses were killed... After that we started to wear military uniform and have security with us” (Interview 101, 20 November, 2011). A war reporter similarly explains that “when Gagra and Sukhum were taken by the [Georgian] side, we showed... how much flour we had. [It was used by Georgia.] This was such a mistake. We learned from that” (Interview 120, 29 November, 2011).

The learning, furthermore, included aspects of military strategy and training for operations structured by the General Headquarters. The secrecy of operations was an important element in the process. As Abkhaz fighters joke, “Even Adler [nearby town in Russia] taxi drivers knew about our attacks!” (Interview 41, 4 November, 2011); “You could go to the market and hear where and when an attack was going to take place, who goes where with whom. We learned to keep secrets and have disinformation where necessary..., took care of the secretive aspect differently” (Interview 70, 11 November, 2011). Strategic planning of military operations changed as well. Already in the March offensive fighters said that “we could not pass frontally, our road should be through the mountains. We have to take the heights” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 46). Hence, a commander summarizes, “In January we went right to the front of the enemy. Then we used other tactics, started utilizing the heights” (Interview 47, 4 November, 2011). With experience came knowledge of the terrain and its potential. As a fighter notes, “Here we have mountainous terrain and heavy equipment will not get through everywhere. Mobile platoons are more important” (Interview 60, 9 November, 2011). The fighters’ tactics in these specific conditions were thus reconsidered. As fighters commonly explain,

When we had a task to take an object, we let a couple of battalions in as cannon fodder. But we should not have done it this way. We could only send under 50 people. That would be enough. But people could not be stopped. If there was an offensive, everyone rushed there (Interview 97, 19 November, 2011);

“Everyone burst to fight” (Interview 101, 20 November, 2011); “At first we had a wild division. We did not know. This is why so many young died. They had too much spirit... Only then came caution and knowledge” (Interview 48, 4 November, 2011). The following excerpt captures well the lack of military professionalism and the need for apt military training in the emergent Abkhaz army:

We did not have a trained force, had few weapons, disorganization, even if I do not want to say that. There was no experience. Commanders may have been experienced, but it was not that easy to organize fighters. Sometimes the commander said one thing, while the boys did another (Interview 101, 20 November, 2011).

These considerations intensified and changed the nature of training of Abkhaz fighters. As a commander says, “We held trainings, planned operations, learning from failed battles” (Interview 47, 4 November, 2011). Some of these trainings were with Russian instructors. “We had gatherings with Russian military instructors. There our Abkhaz army was really prepared. We were no longer some militia... This helped a lot” (Interview 81, 15 November, 2011). A fighter further clarifies,

For us, the new things were the preparation by Russian instructors. They prepared us really well. The training that they held built in the success. Fighting on a horse with a saber... was not feasible in our conditions. The tasks we got could be easily implemented in twos, threes. This helped in the planning, preservation of battalions (Interview 81, 15 November, 2011).

In particular, Abkhaz fighters were being trained to attack the Georgian forces through the strategic heights in preparation to capture Sukhum/i. “I was assistant commander for military preparation. I had experience,” an Abkhaz commander says, “In preparation for the freeing of Sukhum we trained for storming. We have everything here for it: the sea, the mountains” (Interview 70, 11 November, 2011). “Since the end of March... our battalion, as other battalions of the Gumista front, started to undergo tactical military training,” a fighter corroborates (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 460-461).

Moreover, for successful implementation of future operations, the Headquarters altered the army unit organization. In particular, the brigade structure was introduced. “We began preparing a motorized infantry brigade,” an Abkhaz fighter reports (Interview 81, 15 November, 2011).<sup>280</sup> For coordination purposes, battalion commanders had to ensure that everyone in the brigade knew each other. As Section 6.2 showed, a number of initially formed groups were merged in battalions. This meant that fighters knew each other closely within their initial groups but not beyond. A result was the common lack of coordination between groups within battalions. Hence, a commander explains,

after the March attack... [we realized that] many [fighters] did not know each other. Those who did pulled each other out. There was psychological support. We realized that we had to make it so that fighters knew one another, so that there was coordination (Interview 53, 8 November, 2011).

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<sup>280</sup> See 29 March MoD order №130 “On the Formation of the Motorized Infantry Brigade №1” (Pachulija, 2010: 186).

With this learning process at the fighter/commander and headquarters levels, the operations of the emergent Abkhaz army that followed were planned and implemented successfully. Both July and September operations were held in secret until the beginning of the offensives and carried out by specially trained units through the strategic heights rather than the Gumista front line, given the specificities of the terrain and the relative strength of the Abkhaz forces. Together, these operations resulted in the Abkhaz victory in the war. As fighters explain, “Those who prepared us always said “You have to fight not with the number but with the skill.” Because the numbers in our army were not high the skill brought all the success” (Interview 60, 9 November, 2011); “The [two] operations that led to the success were prepared with military strategy” (Interview 70, 11 November, 2011).

The July operation was a large-scale offensive undertaken by the Abkhaz on both west and east fronts. As Abkhaz units attacked along the Gumista front, west front marines landed on 1 July in the eastern Tamysh village and together with east front units captured the Sukhum/i-Ochamchira part of the main road (Pachulija, 2010: 188-189). Abkhaz fighters report that the preceding training was central to the success of the operation. As one of the marines says, “marines underwent active training... Instructors taught disembarking from barges... The last landing and storming trainings-rehearsals gave [us] positive combat mood” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 386-387). The Gumista fighters as well comment on the importance of training. As a fighter of a motorized infantry brigade says, “After the formation of the brigade structure... [w]e began military training..., were tested on all military norms, taught how to fortify a river and fight in the city” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 452). Abkhaz units, therefore, came into the operation with the necessary training and skills, while the strategy was carefully planned to prevent previous failures. For example, prior to the operation,

a maneuver was performed... for the purposes of secrecy, as if our battalion was preparing to cross to the east front through the mountains... We were told about the landing location on the day of departure... This was secret information (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 581).

The Abkhaz army did not capture the capital at the time as the negotiations between the war parties continued in Russia. However, as a result of the operation, the Abkhaz side tested its trained forces and realized its capacities for future operations, in case the negotiations failed to produce an outcome suitable for the Abkhaz. As the fighting yet again continued despite the Sochi Agreement on a Ceasefire and Mechanism of Control, the Abkhaz planned their final operation to capture the capital and thereafter the rest of Abkhazia.<sup>281</sup> The September offensive was thus initiated at the time of the ceasefire when the Georgian forces did not expect it. The Abkhaz army prepared for it in this period. As fighters say, “we had a small truce [which] gave us a break” (Interview 64, 9 November, 2011); “Prior to the September offensive we had various military training, got instructions... and a week in advance my platoon and I studied the area, firing lines, location of heavy equipment of the enemy” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 80). The Georgian side likewise strengthened its positions, according to the Abkhaz. “During the cease fire,” Abkhaz fighters explain, “they managed to gain a foothold, strengthen their positions... It was impossible to break through them, only with aviation, but not tanks” (Interview 60, 9 November, 2011). Hence, the only way for the Abkhaz to attack was through the heights over the Gumista front. As an Abkhaz fighter explains, “We had to capture the heights..., take Tsugurovka then Shroma ..., fortify Gumista” (Interview 81, 15 November, 2011). It was not an easy task, given the preparation of the Georgian side. As a participating fighter says,

The first day of the fighting in Shroma our battalion had 40 people killed and 110 to 140 injured. A combat-ready battalion lost its strength in a day. It had to be restored. Again, the success in the Sukhum direction was the village of Shroma. It was impossible to pass the river Gumista, the Gumista front from [the lowlands] (Interview 60, 9 November, 2011).

The preparation on the Abkhaz side helped, however. As another participating fighter corroborates,

By this time everything was organized normally, coys, platoons, not like at the beginning... We were dropped into the mountainous area by helicopters: into Shroma, the villages above Sukhum. We freed three villages there and stood at the position to then get equipment there for the attack on [Sukhum] (Interview 72, 11 November, 2011).

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<sup>281</sup> See document text in Volkhonskij et al. (2008: 257-258).



Other lessons of the past operations were as well implemented. The secrecy of the operation was top priority. As an Abkhaz fighter reports, “Our battalion received the task at the Headquarters right before the offensive” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 80). The Abkhaz avoided frontal attacks. “We went over the mine fields to get into the rear of the enemy,” a commander says, “Shroma was thus fully freed” (Interview 81, 15 November, 2011). Moreover, attacks were taken on both fronts. The level of coordination between fighters and subordination to commanders was as well checked. Instead of rushing into the attack in defiance of commanders’ orders, as in the past operations, “we waited and only then attacked in the last offensive. We knew, if we freed the capital, the war would be over at that. Getting into Sukhum meant a free country” (Interview 97, 19 November, 2011).

As a result, the operation unfolded as planned. It began on 15 September. All Abkhaz forces were involved. With great difficulty, assigned units were able to establish control over the strategic heights on the Gumista front. As fighters say, “by September we captured most heights” (Interview 47, 4 November, 2011). Other west front units moved through the lower and upper Gumista bridges into the capital. At the same time the Abkhaz gained control over the Sukhum/i-Ochamchira part of the main road on the east front, as in the July operation, thus blocking support to the Georgian side from the border with Georgia. This panicked the Georgians and helped the Abkhaz enter Sukhum/i.

As Abkhaz units broke into the capital on 27 September, the fighting continued in the city. “When we got to Sukhum,” Abkhaz fighters say, “for two days there was fighting” (Interview 64, 9 November, 2011). Georgian units were gradually weakened and fled. On 29 September Abkhaz west front units united with those of the east front in eastern Abkhazia. The Abkhaz then forced the remaining Georgian units and civilians to escape the territory of Abkhazia and on 30 September put up the Abkhaz flag at the Ingur/i River. The outcome of the operation was the victory in the war on the Abkhaz side. “We had casualties, but kicked out the enemy” (Interview 47, 4 November, 2011).

### **6.3.3 Norms and Fighters' Commitment**

How did the Abkhaz, a significantly weaker side at the outset of the war, manage to win the war against their disproportionately stronger Georgian opponent? The importance of the emergent Abkhaz understandings of history and identity in this regard was noted in the section above. It is the understanding of Abkhazia as the motherland rightfully inhabited and governed by the Abkhaz that legitimized the creation of the Abkhaz army as the official state structure by the Abkhaz leadership. As this section established, the transformation of the joint Abkhaz force that initially mobilized in reaction to the Georgian advance into a regular army was key for the retention and Abkhaz victory. While the Abkhaz did not have the necessary training that regular armies undergo prior to combat, they drew lessons from failed operations and learned in the course of the war. This learning enabled the Abkhaz to effectively plan and implement their offensives against the stronger Georgian forces.

As critical as they are, however, military training and skills are only a part of the story. The fighters' commitment to the struggle motivated by their normative positioning is as well crucial. As an Abkhaz commander says, "The conditions for the victorious conclusion of the war were created by the experience of combat conduct accumulated by fighters and commanders and the high moral-patriotic spirit of the personnel of the Armed Forces of Abkhazia" (Enik, 2002: 63). It is the latter aspect of the Abkhaz victory that I briefly consider now. The intra-Abkhaz norms toward Abkhazia and the Abkhaz were exhibited by many fighters in their adoption of high-risk roles in the course of the war. Fighters' commitment to the Abkhaz victory was the key factor given the weakness of the Abkhaz side. As a commander says, "The outcome of the war was decided by fighters who saw the freedom of their Motherland as their meaning in life" (Kobakhija, 2013). Yet, "Not everyone acted heroically, although everyone has a medal nowadays" (Interview 97, 19 November, 2011). I argue that it is the intra-Abkhaz norms that motivated committed fighters in the Abkhaz army.

The basic Abkhaz norms of reciprocity, honor, and conformity to custom were expressed in the course of fighting. As Chapter 3 argued, at the heart of intra-group reciprocity lies mutual help. Mutual help, or inter-fighter support, in the course of fighting is a strong indicator of reciprocity of fighters. Aspects of inter-fighter support were discussed above, specifically the assistance provided to fighters by their commanders. As assistant commander for military preparation says, “We often accompanied soldiers, to see how they lived during training. We also participated in all the attacks together with them” (Interview 70, 11 November, 2011). Other commanders corroborate. “The war unites quickly. When you go, everyone is your protection... Us commanders we were always at the front... All this united us” (Interview 53, 8 November, 2011); “you can stay at the command point and give orders, but we went in front of the battalion, knowing that there were mines..., stomped the ground to check for mines to make passes for our fighters” (Interview 60, 9 November, 2011).

Reciprocity was demonstrated not only by commanders, but also by fighters. The strongest indicator of fighters’ reciprocity toward one another is the risking of one’s life to save others from the battlefield. This was especially important in failed operations. For example, many injured were brought back in the unit that was surrounded as a result of the failed March operation. “Those who knew each other,” the unit’s commander explains, “pulled each other out. There was psychological support” (Interview 53, 8 November, 2011). The Abkhaz systematically report attempts by fighters to save their comrades despite the danger of being injured or killed. In the failed January operation, for example, “our fighters occupied Georgian positions... [and] managed to get out only due to the brave act of the fighter... [who] went up the railway track and with direct fire eliminated the sniper who was shooting at us” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 49). Another fighter “died a hero, rescuing a wounded soldier... [He] went to bring [the soldier] to a safe place... and was killed” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 65). “We did not leave our injured fighters” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 91).

These acts of Abkhaz commanders and fighters in support of their comrades in the battle as well indicate heroism and masculinity, reflected in self-sacrifice and fighting prowess respectively (Ch. 3: 14-15). The importance of these intra-Abkhaz mobilization norms comes out strongly in the implementation of the highly risky tasks by small selected groups of Abkhaz fighters. For example, fighters of the Novyy Afon battalion “particularly distinguished themselves on 5-6 January 1993... They crossed almost to the middle of the [Gumista] river under the enemy fire and returned to their positions only after an order to retreat” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 49). Fighters of the battalion were selected to implement highly risky tasks in further operations since they were known for their record of self-sacrifice and fighting prowess. “After the failed January operation... [f]ighters of the battalion... were given a status of the Special Forces unit under direct command of Ardzinba” and tasked with the capture of strategic heights in September, 1993 (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 84).

In the course of fighting, these fighters, moreover, acted in line with the norms of honor and conformity to custom. Indicators of these norms include going out of one’s way, by risking life, to follow accepted rules and customs (Ch. 3: 10-11). Choosing admirable death over disreputable life is a common example of actions consistent with the norm of honor. Injured fighters, for example, preferred to continue fighting rather than leaving to treat the injury and were often killed as a result. “I sent my son to be treated in Moscow... As soon as he got better, he got a ticket and rushed back. He died [in the war]” (Interview 102, 23 November, 2011); “When [my brother] got an injury, he... went back again and was killed” (Interview 12, 31 October, 2011). The necessity to bring back the dead after fighting evidenced conformity to custom. “It is worse than death in our culture: you have to bury the dead” (Interview 144, 13 December, 2011). Fighters thus carried home those injured or killed even in the course of the fighting. Shame was associated with leaving them behind. Hence, a fighter “ran under heavy enemy fire to pull out... those killed” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 62).

Most importantly, fighters tasked with riskier assignments were known to be motivated by strong norms toward Abkhazia as the motherland, particularly patriotism.<sup>282</sup> Chapter 5 (212-214) explored its effects on war mobilization by the Abkhaz. The norm of patriotism, or the struggle for the land to which one feels belonging, continued to be critical at the stage of protracted war. As an Abkhaz fighter says, “We were fighting: both of my brothers, me, and the motherland” (Interview 97, 19 November, 2011). As Chapter 5 argued, the young were reported to have acted fearlessly in the name of the motherland. In the Novyy Afon battalion, for instance, a fighter “seventeen years of age implemented combat tasks under the enemy fire despite his youth and inexperience” (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 91). So many young fighters died as result. “The young died more because they were not afraid; they were brave” (Interview 49, 4 November, 2011). Thus the seventeen-year-old whose actions in the January operation are noted above was killed in the March operation.

As a result, the stakes in the war were perceived differently by fighters on the Abkhaz side. The view of the war as the struggle for the Abkhaz people and land against the aggressor moved the Abkhaz to take great risks to succeed in the war. After the Sochi Ceasefire Agreement, as Georgia

did not move their weapons from Sukhum, Ardzinba asked if we should separate Abkhazia into two parts and leave the eastern part to Georgia... If once again we had a failed attack, we would be declared political criminals and killed, but otherwise the war would go on for Abkhazia. We decided to fight, breached the agreement, and freed Sukhum in two weeks... Shevardnadze's forces were demoralized and ran away (Interview 61, 9 November, 2011).

The Abkhaz thus fought until the last operation for the survival of their people and land, while the Georgian forces fought for territorial integrity, a vague concept that not many fighters could deeply relate to. Abkhaz fighters thus say, “Every people who fights for their victory believes in victory” (Interview 72, 11 November, 2011); “We will inscribe on the graves of our boys. “They died for the Motherland.” What will the Georgians write?” (Interview in Brojdo, 2008: 71); “When a Georgian died, he did so for territorial integrity” (Interview 48, 4 November, 2011). These different positions

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<sup>282</sup> Frontline fighters constitute 10-15% of my respondents. Khodzhaa (2009) supports their normative motivation.

on the meaning of the war and the norms behind them distinguished the forces on the two sides and among the Abkhaz. A Georgian leader thus admits, “against the background of unity and discipline characteristic of the Abkhaz, the Georgian side was enveloped in chaos” (Khaindrava in Achugba, 2003: 216). These qualities were exhibited by committed fighters on the Abkhaz side during of the war. An Abkhaz intellectual and core activist in the Abkhaz movement captures the argument well:

We compensate[d] for what we lack[ed] with our unity, dedication, pervasive mobilization capacity, and strength of our spirit... Wars are won not only with the power of weapons, but also that of spirit. These qualities were shown by those fighting at the frontline (Gogua in Achugba, 2003: 233).

#### **6.3.4 A Comment on External Factors**

My explanation of the Abkhaz victory contrasts with the emphasis on external factors in the Georgian-Abkhaz research. I briefly consider these factors here. As Baev (2003: 139) argues, “[t]he key factors determining the outcome of the war were to be found outside Abkhazia.” Mobilization of the North Caucasus fighters and Russian support for the Abkhaz are common among the factors. Baev (2003: 139) finds that “[t]he main source of military support to Abkhazia was the republics of the North Caucasus, where volunteers were openly recruited.” “[T]he Abkhaz felt strengthened by outside support,” Cornell (2000: 171) adds, “Georgian forces were pushed back, with the assistance of Russian units to the Abkhaz side.” Zverev (1996: 3/4) as well stresses “the Abkhaz leadership’s reliance on hardline forces in Russia, and the... movement in the North Caucasus.” “Georgia’s aim in the conflict,” he clarifies, “was unattainable because the Abkhaz made use of the potential of the North Caucasus... and, by extension, Russia” (4/4). Goltz (2009: 25) thus summarizes the common view of the structure of actors involved on the Abkhaz side in the Georgian-Abkhaz war as follows:

Georgia was not only fighting the “Abkhaz,” but rather, found itself fighting a strange coalition of local Abkhaz men (and women)..., volunteers both from the Russian North Caucasus and the wider Circassian Diaspora in Turkey and the Middle East, but also Cossack freebooters and other Slavic soldiers of fortune. Finally, and most ominously, it became clear that Georgia was also fighting against shadowy elements of the Russian military who supplied the motley Abkhaz forces with weapons, logistics, and even aviation.

In addition to the North Caucasus and Russian assistance provided to the Abkhaz side in the war, the lack of discipline and morale among the Georgian forces is as well attributed responsibility for the Abkhaz victory. As Billingsley (2013: 155) says, “[Georgia’s] troops did indeed outnumber Abkhazian personnel but were so ill-disciplined that the Abkhazian victory... should have come as no surprise.” Zurcher (2007: 138) confirms: “[a]lthough the pool of sympathizers, which could be mobilized when necessary, was far larger, they were untrained and undisciplined weekend soldiers, with a general motivation for looting.” Chapter 5 noted this looting by Georgian units at the outset of the war and animosity of the local population that it produced. As Billingsley (2013: 147) says,

[Throughout the war the Georgian] forces were never able to become a cohesive fighting machine... A lack of unit and individual discipline not only cost them on the battlefield, but it also made the [Georgian] troops exceedingly unpopular amongst the local inhabitants.

“This was total irregularity and lack of discipline” (Interview 160, 20 April, 2013). Chirikba (1998: 50) thus concludes that “the war was lost by the undisciplined and poorly trained Georgian army.” Combining these external factors, Coppieters (2000: 25) captures the view of the Abkhaz victory:

Convinced of the military superiority of the Georgian troops, [Georgia’s leadership] hoped to crush the numerically inferior Abkhazians in a “small victorious war.” The Georgian military operation failed. The Abkhaz received military support from volunteers from the Northern Caucasus and from the Russian army stationed in the autonomous republic. Due to this support, and to the low morale and military qualities of the Georgian troops, the Abkhaz were able to oust the Georgian military.<sup>283</sup>

The external factors were undoubtedly important to the Abkhaz victory. Chapter 5 showed how critical access to the Russian weapons was for the Abkhaz resistance to the Georgian advance, at least at the outset of the war. Mobilization of the North Caucasus volunteers was as well decisive. “Almost immediately, North Caucasian volunteers started organizing and were in Abkhazia within weeks” (Cornell, 2000: 348). This showed to the Abkhaz that there existed “support for the Abkhaz cause” and “a platform of solidarity with Abkhazia,” which motivated the Abkhaz at the time when

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<sup>283</sup> See also Coppieters (2008: 240); Cornell (2000: 347-352); Nodia and Scholtbach (2006: 12); Zverev (1996: 3-4/4).

such motivation was needed the most—as the Georgian forces captured the capital of Abkhazia and the region of Gagra, cutting off the strategically important border with Russia (Zverev, 1996: 4/4). Participation of the North Caucasus volunteers in the capture of Gagra was vital for the Abkhaz.<sup>284</sup>

Abkhaz fighters strongly support the importance of the North Caucasus volunteers for their mobilization to fight. “They came in four-five days through the mountain passes, by foot,” Abkhaz organized and spontaneous mobilizers commonly report, “They played a decisive role in the war—elevated our spirit, brought weapons, and helped us till the end” (Interview 47, 4 November, 2011); “Volunteers who came gave us strength” (Interview 130, 6 December, 2011); “raised our spirit. It affected the mood of an already determined people” (Interview 97, 19 November, 2011); “hope appeared that the war would not last too long, that we were not alone in this world, that there were people on this and other sides of the border who supported us” (Interview 72, 11 November, 2011).

Yet, as important as these external factors were, I argue, they are best viewed as facilitating or enabling rather than determining the Abkhaz victory in the Georgian-Abkhaz war. It was not the external forces, but Abkhaz military personnel and defence volunteers who formed the core of the Abkhaz force and resistance to the Georgian advance to Abkhazia. Fighters often say: “Volunteers raised our spirit but mainly the Abkhaz fought” (Interview 102, 23 November, 2011).<sup>285</sup> Foreign volunteers merged with this core Abkhaz force in the process of the Abkhaz army formation. As an Abkhaz commander confirms, “I had to take command and 67 volunteers went with me” (Interview 53, 8 November, 2011). Moreover, foreign fighters were present on both sides in the war. Abkhaz fighters consistently report: “We had volunteers from the Urals, the Cossacks, migrant Abkhaz. Georgians, on the other hand, had mercenaries from West Ukraine, the Baltics” (Interview 44, 4 November, 2011). Zverev (1996: 4/4) confirms participation of foreign fighters on both sides:

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<sup>284</sup> According to Tsushba (2000: 10), “rapid conquest of Abkhazia... was disrupted by Abkhaz and foreign volunteers.”

<sup>285</sup> Foreign fighters “made up about 10% of the total manpower of the Abkhaz army” (Lakoba, 2001: 96). Casualty data support this estimate. Of 108 fighters killed in the Gagra operation, for example, 15 were foreign (Pachulija, 2010: 91).



Mercenaries and volunteers were active on both sides. On the Abkhaz side, these were the Russian Trans-Dniester guardsmen... On the Georgian side, there were the sportswomen snipers from the Baltic states who came to fight for mercenary reasons, and the volunteers from the extreme nationalist Ukrainian... organization, motivated by anti-Russian feeling.

Russian assistance was likewise provided to both sides in the war. Different segments of the Russian government and military variously supported the Abkhaz and Georgian sides in the course of the war. As Chapter 5 showed, most weapons of the Soviet Transcaucasus Military District were transferred to Georgia as part of the Tashkent Agreement on the eve of the Georgian-Abkhaz war. The chapter also demonstrated that at the outset of the war the Russian forces stationed in Abkhazia sold and voluntarily provided Russian weapons to the Abkhaz side. As Chirikba (1998: 51) argues,

all weapons on both sides were, after all, of Russian origin. The difference was that while Georgia was getting huge amounts of weaponry and ammunition from the former Soviet Army free (in accordance with the CIS Tashkent Agreement, and via many other, non-official, channels), Abkhazia had to buy weapons from elements of the Russian army.

Importantly, the weapons used by the Abkhaz came not only from the Russian forces, but were also gained in battle. The trophy weapons were critical at the outset of the war when the Russian support to the Abkhaz was indeterminate. Throughout the war, too, this support was split between the sides in the conflict, although some suggest that it leaned toward Abkhazia. As Zurcher (2007: 141) says,

Officially, Russia was endeavoring to find a peaceful settlement in Abkhazia and denied any involvement in the war. But its policy of divide and rule included military support to both sides..., which, over the course of the conflict, increasingly favored the Abkhaz.

Zverev (1996: 4/4) confirms the double-sided support provided by the different subdivisions of the Russian military to the war sides: “[I]n line with a consistent Russian policy of supplying both sides in a conflict..., at a time when Russian-supplied warplanes were bombing Georgian-held Sukhumi, other Russian units continued to supply the Georgian Army.” As Baev (2003: 139) clarifies,

One part of the Russian military, particularly the Command of the Trans-Caucasus Military District, supported Georgia and supplied it with heavy weapons and ammunition. Another part of the Russian military, first of all the forces based in Abkhazia around the airbase in Gudauta, directly supported the Abkhazian side.

Chirikba (1998: 51) thus concludes that “Russian military assistance to the Abkhazians should not be overestimated.” It was the Abkhaz force, not the Russian military, who fought on the battlefield.

My core argument here is that external factors, on their own, are insufficient to transform a population unprepared for the armed attack into a coherent force with fighting abilities, or produce a war victory. Looking closely at the social dynamics of fighting by the Abkhaz, on the other hand, demonstrates that it is the development of the internally cohesive regular army that to a large extent allowed the Abkhaz to win the war against the disproportionately stronger opponent. In his analysis of the capture of Gagra by the Abkhaz side in October, 1992, Billingsley (2013: 147) thus argues:

Abkhazian units surrounding Gagra were filled with outside volunteers but still managed to be much more cohesive. Though outnumbered, they were able to find common cause and make better use of their limited resources. These factors, repeated as they were for the duration of the war, had a telling effect on the outcome of the conflict.

Summarizing the factors behind the war outcome, Cheterian (2008: 3) goes as far as to say that

The Russian intervention was not the major cause of the Georgian defeat—or the Abkhaz victory! It was the incredible disorganization on the Georgian side which contrasted with a much more disciplined and determined fighting force on the Abkhaz side.

The transition of this fighting force into an army and its conventional victory in the war were based on a strong normative foundation. On the one hand, the Abkhaz understandings of Abkhazia as the motherland that the Abkhaz people belong and have a right to, separate from Georgia, legitimized the army formation founded on the organized and spontaneous groups formed at the war onset. On the other hand, the Abkhaz norms toward their motherland and collectivity were demonstrated by the adoption by many fighters of high-risk mobilization roles, decisive for the Abkhaz victory. The Georgian-Abkhaz literature rarely considers these social and normative processes. As a result, the emphasis on external factors comes from the omission of the central aspects of the Abkhaz force—its combination of regular and irregular features at the outset of the war and transformation into a predominantly regular army in the course of the war informed by the latent normative framework.

## 6.4 Summary of Findings

This chapter looked at the puzzle of continued mobilization of fighters in the course of civil war and asymmetric victory on the weaker side in the war. I established the nature of Georgian and Abkhaz actors at the outset of the war and argued that neither can be defined as regular at the time. I then traced in detail the process of transformation of the Abkhaz joint regular and irregular force that mobilized at the war onset into a regular army. The Abkhaz emergent understandings of history and identity legitimized the transformation, while army building facilitated retention by structuring army units around close-knit groups formed at the war onset and imposing formal subordination. This discussion problematized a static notion of the nature of actors and tactics in civil war.

The remainder of the chapter demonstrated that the emergent Abkhaz army did not have the required military training and skills to successfully engage in combat. The failed operations on the Abkhaz side serve as an indicator of these shortcomings. These failures, however, were important for the Abkhaz to learn and adapt to the process of the war, leading to the successful offensives that encouraged continued mobilization of fighters and brought about victory in September, 1993. The intra-Abkhaz norms of patriotism, masculinity, and heroism differentiated committed fighters in the Abkhaz army whose high-risk actions in Abkhaz operations were key to the Abkhaz success. In this way the dimensions of the latent normative framework for action affected retention and victory.

The chapter thus established that the Abkhaz force is best seen as an emergent army, rather than an irregular, separatist actor. It is this largely regular army that won the Georgian-Abkhaz war. As Pachulija (2010: 186) sums up, “it is possible to win against an enemy with superior forces only with the formation of a combat-capable disciplined army.” The official status of the Abkhaz army helped justify this victory and the emergent Abkhaz state built on its basis among the Abkhaz. The following chapter looks closely at these features of the post-conflict stage, when the Abkhaz had to continuously defend their victory in the war and the emergent *de facto* statehood associated with it.

## Chapter 7: Post-War Mobilization and Protracted Violence

Now that we freed Abkhazia, we had to defend it.

We stayed at our state border. We never planned operations to cross into Georgia. Our only aim was to defend ourselves and keep untouched our land that we freed in the war.

We were not paid for that... This is the motherland. You have to defend it.

- Abkhaz fighters

This chapter explores the continuing influence of the latent normative framework for action on post-war Abkhaz mobilization by looking at the puzzle of mobilization of fighters and protracted violence after civil wars.<sup>286</sup> This post-war stage starts with the end of the civil war in victory, peace agreement, stalemate, or low activity—in my case, the Abkhaz victory in September, 1993 (UCDP, 2013). This victory dramatically altered the demographic composition of Abkhazia and the context of high-risk mobilization. Up to 240,000 Georgians fled Abkhazia and only over 40,000 returned in the post-war years.<sup>287</sup> The Georgian-Abkhaz border emerged along the Ingur/i River—a natural line separating Georgia from Abkhazia and an administrative border in the Soviet time.<sup>288</sup> The Abkhaz, however, were unable to control parts of this border, especially lower Gal/i and upper Kodori (see Figure 22 below). Following Kalyvas (2006: 196), I characterize these areas as areas of contested control, Gal/i primarily controlled by the Abkhaz side (zone 4) and Kodori primarily controlled by the Georgian side (zone 2). Systematic patterns of low-scale violence formed in these areas in 1993-1994 and protracted thereafter, escalating into large-scale episodes of violence in 1998 in Gal/i and 2008 in Kodori, when the Abkhaz established control over all of Abkhazia. This chapter focuses on the period of contested control (1993-2008) when post-war mobilization and violence took place.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> It is not my intention to examine aspects of state-building by the Abkhaz. On the aspects of post-war state-building in Abkhazia, see Garb (2000b); Akaba (2000); Lakoba (2001); Arshba et al. (2003); Shamba (2003, 2007); Skakov (2002, 2013); Naumkin (2008); CR (2008); Ó Beacháin (2010); ICG (2010).

<sup>287</sup> See Trier et al. (2010: 21, see especially comparative demographic charts on pp. 178-189). The term “refugees,” or those who flee by crossing borders, is used in Abkhazia, yet “internally displaced persons,” or those who move within their own country, is preferred in Georgia. I adopt Walker’s (1998: 11) term “displaced persons” that integrates both.

<sup>288</sup> I use the term “border” to indicate “the emergence of a new border zone [where] the cease fire line has turned into a de-facto border” (Weiss, 2012: 216). The term “state border” is used in Abkhazia, “administrative border” in Georgia.

<sup>289</sup> This dissertation does not address the developments following Russia’s recognition of Abkhazia in 2008.

I argue that the latent normative framework for action, as it transformed in the earlier cycles of mobilization, was central to Abkhaz post-war mobilization. The understanding of Georgia as an aggressor and the Abkhaz army as a state liberation force from long-lasting Georgianization shaped the Abkhaz view of their victory. The victory was seen as a just outcome of the war, although it led to the expulsion of almost the entire Georgian population of Abkhazia. It justified post-war Abkhaz state-building and the need to defend the emergent *de facto* Abkhaz statehood from future Georgian attacks. Inter-group norms were reshaped by the evolution from pre-war animosity and low-scale violence to large-scale violence and expulsion of Georgians in the war. After the war the norms of inter-group conflict and violence were cemented in Abkhaz interaction with Georgians who fought against the Abkhaz, were prohibited from returning, and were at the center of post-war violence. A new practice of strategic collaboration emerged with non-fighter Georgians who returned to Gal/i.

My argument is supported in interviews with Abkhaz men who guarded the border after the war. This category comprises 42% of my interviews and includes reservists (31%), or Abkhaz army fighters who guarded the border in 1993-1994 and partook in key operations, and the police (11%), permitted as border guards by international agreements after 1994. The guards were mostly regular, organized by macro-level structures, yet some mobilized irregularly through micro- and meso-level structures. Both groups are represented in my interviews. Archival and secondary data, including the original news dataset and a focus group with displaced Gal/i residents, are used for verification.

My argument contrasts with the view that the end of civil wars marks the onset of the peace process. Post-war violence in this view is expected to subside with time and efforts to halt it through international intervention and negotiations—the macro-level political developments that constitute the focus of most post-war studies. I, however, find that the processes of post-war mobilization and violence unfold on the ground despite and in parallel to the macro-level political developments. An analysis of their normative and social structure, I argue, helps understand these post-war processes.

The following sections briefly situate the problem of post-war mobilization and violence in the literature. I then establish the patterns of protracted violence that developed after the Georgian-Abkhaz war in the border area between Georgia and Abkhazia. The rest of the chapter explores the normative and social structure of mobilization for violence in this area and reflects on the need to look closely at the local processes on the ground to understand post-war mobilization and violence.

## **7.1 Post-War Mobilization and Violence in Civil War Research**

Mobilization and violence that unfold after civil wars have rarely been a subject of research on civil war and conflict in general. Three strands of relevant literature—on civil war, recidivism, and post-conflict settlement—address aspects of the problem, yet most do not systematically study variation in post-war mobilization and violence in single cases or comparatively.<sup>290</sup> Studies of civil war dynamics analyze processes that unfold during civil wars, including mobilization and violence, but rarely look beyond this allegedly bounded period (Ch. 2: 42-46). Studies of post-war processes within the civil war dynamics strand look at economic, political, social, and psychological legacies of civil wars, but not post-war mobilization for violence.<sup>291</sup> Research on recidivism focuses on civil war recurrence specifically, but rarely investigates violence short of war.<sup>292</sup> Lastly, the literature on post-conflict settlement addresses international involvement in post-war cases, but rarely considers the dynamics of violent mobilization after wars (Autesserre, 2010).<sup>293</sup> Research on the post-war period in general concentrates on the macro-level political developments, driven by the assumption that the peace process immediately and logically succeeds civil wars. Suhrke (2011: 1) captures the criticism: “[t]he end of a war is generally expected to be followed by an end to collective violence, as the term ‘post-conflict’ that came into general usage in the 1990s signifies.”<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Boyle’s (2014) mixed-methods comparative study of strategic post-war violence is an important exception.

<sup>291</sup> See, for example, Collier et al. (2003). For a review, see Blattman and Miguel (2010: 37-44).

<sup>292</sup> See Quinn et al. (2007); Elbadawi et al. (2008); Walter (2010); Toft (2010); Kreutz (2010); Mason et al. (2011).

<sup>293</sup> See, for example, Miall et al. (1999); Ramsbotham (2000); Stedman (2001); Stedman et al. (2002); Walter (2002); Paris (2004); Fortna (2008); Call (2012). Exceptions include Jarstad and Sisk (2008); Berdal and Suhrke (2012).

<sup>294</sup> I do not use the term “post-conflict” as I argue that conflict continues after wars. Instead, I use the term “post-war.”

The relevant literature thus focuses either on the processes that take place during civil wars, or on the recurrence of full-scale war and macro-level political developments in the post-war stage. This means that important gaps exist in our understanding of the nature, dynamics, and sources of post-war mobilization and protracted violence, especially low-scale violence short of war.<sup>295</sup> What patterns of mobilization and violence are observed after civil wars? What accounts for variation in these processes? How do they relate to mobilization and violence during civil wars? Boyle (2009: 213) summarizes this critique of the post-war literature by arguing that “[t]o date, there is no stand-alone theory that explains the emergence of strategic violence after civil wars.”

Recent studies thus started to unpack the question of post-war strategic violence. I build on these studies here. As Suhrke (2012: 1) establishes, “various forms of deadly violence continue and sometimes even increase after the big guns have been silenced.” Boyle (2009: 209) corroborates:

Civil wars rarely end neatly. In their aftermath, a wide range of threats to public order can emerge... [V]iolence after civil wars is fairly common... [with] significant variation in the type and severity of attacks, as well in the geographic and temporal incidence within cases.

The World Development Report (2011) identifies broad patterns of variation in full- and low-scale post-war violence across cases of civil war. It finds that civil war recidivism has increased since the 1960s and particularly in the 2000s. “[E]very civil war that began since 2003 was in a country that had a previous civil war” (WDR, 2011: 3). Moreover, violence short of war often overlooked in the literature has characterized most post-war countries. As the Report (2011: 53) succinctly captures,

The tendency to see violence as... major civil war obscures the variety and prevalence of organized violence... includ[ing] local violence involving militias or between ethnic groups, gang violence, local resource-related violence and violence linked to trafficking (particularly drug trafficking), and violence associated with global ideological struggles... This violence is often recurrent, with many countries now experiencing repeated cycles.

Post-war Abkhazia is not an exception. War recidivism and violence short of war, including low-scale armed clashes, localized guerrilla warfare, and organized crime, have marked the border

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<sup>295</sup> Studies exist on aspects of low-scale post-war violence (e.g., Moser and McIlwayne, 2003; Bateson, 2012, 2013).

area between Georgia and Abkhazia established as a result of the war (see Section 7.2). The process of violent mobilization continued long into the post-war period despite efforts at conflict resolution and expectations for it to wane with time. However, the literature on the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict has overwhelmingly focused on the macro-level political developments, including the formal talks and other peace initiatives.<sup>296</sup> Since these developments have not resulted in significant change over time, the conflict has often been characterized as *frozen*.<sup>297</sup> As Nodia (2004: 1) defines the concept,

These are cases where there has been relatively recent violent conflict over secession, with the secessionist parties being militarily successful, having established effective control over specific territories and setting up *de facto* state institutions. However, this military outcome is recognised neither by the military losers—the central governments, nor by the international community. Therefore, the conflicts are not considered resolved.

The sections below demonstrate, in contrast to the common perception and characterization in the literature, that the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict since the end of the 1992-1993 war has not been *frozen*. While the macro-level negotiations *froze* on a number of occasions, “events have developed dynamically” on the ground and dramatically affected actors involved in the conflict (Lynch, 2005: 192). Combatant and civilian casualties have been regularly incurred from the border violence. The population displaced at the end of the war has been forced to move back and forth across the border. The end of the war in Abkhazia, as a result, has not immediately transitioned into the peace process. The formal talks began at the macro level, but the situation on the ground has been defined by the persistence of violent mobilization. Table 13 (below) presents a snapshot of the interaction between macro-level developments and micro-level violence. Nodia and Scholtbach (2006: 12) thus update the notion of the *frozen*-ness of post-war zones: “there is no final settlement, and a precarious peace is occasionally interrupted by episodes of low-key violence.” I demonstrate below that in Abkhazia these episodes were systematic and offer an explanation for the persistence of violent mobilization.

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<sup>296</sup> On the formal talks, see, for example, Cohen (1999); Coppieters et al. (1998, 2000); Akaba and Khintba (2011). On other peace initiatives, see especially Garb (1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008).

<sup>297</sup> See, for example, Cornell (2000: 2); Lynch (2000: 12); Darchiashvili and Nodia (2003: 17).



Table 13. Snapshot of Interaction between Macro-Level Talks and Micro-Level Violence (30 November, 1993-26 November, 1994)<sup>298</sup>

Date	Event	Actor	Mobilization
1993			
30 Nov	Memorandum of Understanding commits sides to non-use of force (S/26875, annex, 1993)	Abkhaz, Georgian representatives	Negotiations
18 Dec	<i>Abkhaz Ingur/i posts fired upon on. Georgian guerrillas cross, pushed out</i>	Abkhaz, Georgian armed forces, Georgian guerrillas	Cross-fire, guerrilla warfare
1994			
13 Jan	Geneva talks commit sides to “ensure the safety of refugees, displaced persons, and personnel” (S/1994/32, annex: para. 4)	Abkhaz, Georgian representatives	Negotiations
20 Jan	<i>Abkhaz detonate the Ingur/i Bridge to prevent passage of Georgian guerrillas</i>	Abkhaz armed forces, Georgian guerrillas	Defence, guerrilla warfare
3 Feb	Georgian-Russian Treaty of Friendship, Neighborliness and Cooperation acknowledges Russia’s commitment to Georgian territorial integrity, promises assistance to Georgian army building	Georgian, Russian leaders	Negotiations
6 Feb	<i>Abkhaz Ingur/i posts fired upon on. Abkhaz “cleaning” operation pushes out Georgian armed actors, results in 500 killed, 800 houses burned, 3,000 civilians again displaced</i>	Abkhaz, Georgian armed forces, Georgian guerrillas	Cross-fire, counterinsurgency, guerrilla warfare
9 Feb	Georgia and Russia call for return of <i>all</i> displaced persons, deployment of peacekeepers <i>across</i> Abkhazia. <sup>299</sup> Abkhaz proclaim Abkhazia’s independence from Georgia. Talks deadlock	Georgian, Russian leaders	Negotiations
24 Mar	<i>Abkhaz and Georgian troops clash in Gal/i, Abkhaz capture Lata in Kodor/i</i>	Abkhaz, Georgian armed forces	Cross-fire, clashes, offensive operation

Macro-level talks      *Micro-level violence*

<sup>298</sup> This table is based on the original local and international news archive gathered during fieldwork in 2011-2014. The table highlights relevant events in macro-level negotiations and representative episodes of micro-level violence.

<sup>299</sup> Full repatriation meant a return to the pre-war demographic balance that favored Georgia; peacekeepers’ deployment across Abkhazia could help gain control over the territory. However, the Abkhaz insisted that those who fought in the war against them not return and rejected full-scale deployment to maintain control over Abkhazia beyond the border.

Date	Event	Actor	Mobilization
4 April	Declaration on Measures for a Political Settlement commits sides to formal ceasefire (S/1994/397, annex I). Quadripartite Agreement on Voluntary Return accepts Abkhaz restrictions on return of displaced Georgians who fought against the Abkhaz in the 1992-1993 war (S/1994/397, annex II)	Abkhaz, Georgian representatives	Negotiations
14 Apr	<i>Georgians guerrillas cross to Gal/i, followed by another crossing and clashes</i>	Abkhaz armed forces, Georgian guerrillas	Guerrilla warfare, clashes
14 May	Agreement on a Cease-fire and Separation of Forces commits sides to observe ceasefire (S/1994/397, annex I)	Abkhaz, Georgian representatives	Negotiations
late May-Jun	<i>Georgian guerrillas ambush Gal/i officials. Abkhaz Ingur/i posts fired upon on recurrently. Abkhaz and Georgian armed groups clash in Gal/i and Kodor/i</i>	Abkhaz, Georgian armed forces, Georgian guerrillas	Cross-fire, clashes, guerrilla warfare
late Jun-Jul	Peacekeepers initiate unsanctioned return of displaced persons. Talks deadlocked	Peacekeepers, displaced persons	Unsanctioned return
13 Sep	<i>Georgian guerrillas ambush and kill two peacekeepers</i>	Georgian guerrillas, peacekeepers	Guerrilla warfare
14 Sep	Peacekeepers initiate unsanctioned return as displaced persons block the Ingur/i Bridge	Peacekeepers, displaced persons	Unsanctioned return
6 Aug	<i>Georgian guerrillas ambush and kill six Gal/i officials. Land mine deaths increase.<sup>300</sup> Abkhaz “cleaning” operation to purge Gal/i of Georgian armed actors kills 4 guerrillas, seizes weapons stockpiles</i>	Abkhaz armed forces, Georgian guerrillas	Guerrilla warfare, counterinsurgency
late Aug	Geneva talks. Draft document on conditions for return, finalized in mid-September. Return begins on 12 October	Abkhaz, Georgian representatives	Negotiations
25 Oct	<i>Abkhaz Ingur/i posts attacked. Clash results in casualties, burned houses. Talks postponed</i>	Abkhaz, Georgian armed forces, Georgian guerrillas	Cross-fire, counterinsurgency, guerrilla warfare
26 Nov	Abkhazia adopts new constitution as sovereign state. <sup>301</sup> Talks deadlocked	Abkhaz leaders	Political decision

Macro-level talks      *Micro-level violence*

<sup>300</sup> There were “75,000 to 150,000 mines... [and more] still being laid” (S/1994/1160, para. 6).

<sup>301</sup> It is the first constitution of Abkhazia of the kind. Past constitutions recognized Abkhazia as part of a larger structure, such as the Soviet Union and Georgia.

## **7.2 Mobilization and Violence in Post-War Abkhazia**

This section outlines the process of development of the patterns of post-war violence in the Georgian-Abkhaz border area. I isolate two stages in this process—formation in 1993-1994 of the patterns of violence that protracted until 2008 and large-scale armed fighting aimed at establishing control over two contested areas of Abkhazia, namely the Six-Day War in the Gal/i region in May, 1998, and the 2008 Kodor/i operation by the Abkhaz. I then draw on this analysis to establish the normative and social foundations of post-war mobilization and protracted violence.

### **7.2.1 Stage I: Formation of the Patterns of Violence (1993-1994)**

Chapter 6 left off at the capture by the Abkhaz forces in September, 1993, of Sukhum/i and the territory of Abkhazia up to the Ingur/i River. In the first year after the war systematic patterns of low-scale violence emerged in this contested border zone (see Figure 22 below). The armed actors included Abkhaz reservists, the police, and a small number of irregular fighters who did not belong to the Abkhaz army or the police. These actors were mobilized through macro-, but also micro- and meso-level structures to guard the border from Georgian attacks and intrusions and push Georgian armed actors beyond the border territory largely controlled by the Abkhaz in case of infiltration. On the Georgian side, the actors included reservists, the police, and a substantial number of guerrillas, mainly Georgians who fought in the war. These actors mobilized to attack and infiltrate Abkhazia. Hence, the Georgian and Abkhaz regular armed forces located on the two sides of the Ingur/i and in the Kodor/i engaged in frequent crossfire. Georgian guerrillas led guerrilla warfare, particularly in the lower part of the Gal/i region. These regular and irregular activities were met with crackdowns in Abkhaz counterinsurgency operations.<sup>302</sup> These patterns of low-scale violence protracted until 2008 and evolved into large-scale episodes in the course of the post-war period (see Section 7.2.2).

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<sup>302</sup> Organized crime known as “nut racket” developed as well but is not addressed here. See Kukhianidze (2003); Kukhianidze et al. (2004). Violent events also took place beyond the border areas, in western and central Abkhazia, but they were isolated. Examples include attempted explosions in Pitsunda, Bzyb, Gagra, and Sukhum/i after the war.

Figure 22. Post-War Patterns of Mobilization and Violence (1993-2008)



Source: Based on UN map of Georgia, May 2009

I argue that the process and outcome of the war greatly affected the patterns of violence that emerged in post-war Abkhazia. First, the war was fought for control over Abkhazia. As the Abkhaz established control over the territory except for the border area, this area became the center of post-war violence. Second, the war involved regular and irregular aspects that carried over into the post-war stage in the form of the clashes by the regular armed forces and guerrilla violence respectively. Lastly, the Abkhaz mobilized their war efforts around a regular army and succeeded in establishing the Abkhaz state. Abkhaz counterinsurgency operations at the post-war stage reflect this transition. I demonstrate these points by discussing how the patterns of post-war violence formed in Abkhazia in 1993-1994.

The termination of the Georgian-Abkhaz war in September, 1993, was marked by the wave of mass displacement of the Georgian armed forces and civilians from the territory of Abkhazia. It was immediately followed by the violence against the Georgian population remaining in Abkhazia by the Abkhaz. The crossfire between the regular Georgian and Abkhaz armed forces and Georgian guerrillas activated shortly after. Hence, when the Abkhaz army advanced into Sukhum/i at the end of the war, Georgian leader Alexandr Kavsadze argued that “[i]f, at the price of shedding enormous amounts of blood..., the Abkhaz troops do manage to take the city, the territory of Abkhazia will become an arena of permanent war” (Urigashvili, 1993). This prediction was not far from the truth.

As the Abkhaz captured Sukhum/i, a mass of Georgians fled Abkhazia through the Amtkel-Lata escape corridor toward Georgia’s Svaneti region (see Figure 22 above). A Russian journalist confirms: “The Georgian population ran in panic when Sukhum was taken” (Interview 140, 13 December, 2011). The rest of the Georgian population escaped across the Ingur/i when the Abkhaz approached the border area (see Figure 22 above). As Abkhaz analysts argue, “The population ran as a result of the military actions” (Interview 128, 1 December, 2011); “while only some Georgians from the Gal region fought..., all ran away after the war” (Interview 149, 14 December, 2011). As a result, the border area became “almost entirely depopulated” (S/26795, annex, 1993: para. 36).

However, not everyone escaped. As an Abkhaz expert notes, “It is a myth that all Georgians left Abkhazia in 1993. Many stayed: those who were protected by the neighbors, who asserted they were not involved [in the war against the Abkhaz], and who had mixed families” (Interview 107, 25 November, 2011). Many, furthermore, returned soon after the capture by the Abkhaz of the border area. As an Abkhaz human rights advocate suggests, “There was a wave of people who left the Gal region and then returned right away” (Interview 134, 6 December, 2011). “People came back to the border villages right after the war,” a Gal/i displaced person confirms (Focus Group, 2 May, 2013).

The immediate result of the Abkhaz victory was the violence by the Abkhaz forces against the remaining and returning Georgian population. Georgians who stayed behind were often killed, primarily if “pointed out as collaborators of the Georgian forces” (S/26795, annex, 1993: para. 19). “[A] wave of marauding” swept the capital (Chelnokov, 1993). “When the Abkhaz took the city,” a Russian journalist recalls, “they started doing the same [as the Georgian forces at the outset of the war]: robbing everyone, looting Georgian houses” (Interview 140, 13 December, 2011). Similarly, in rural Abkhazia, “[b]ands of armed individuals... terroriz[ed] the population... [and generated] a permanent state of fear, preventing farmers from working in their fields” (S/26795, annex, 1993: para. 29, 25). This affected not only Georgians, but also other groups in the remaining population. An Abkhaz army man admits: “We stole things from each other. It was very difficult after the war” (Interview 5, 27 October, 2011). “We had rampant crime right after the war. There were robberies,” a Ukrainian resident of Abkhazia corroborates, “I was robbed, for example. Armed people who live here came in and took everything away while I was [at home]” (Interview 77, 15 November, 2011).

This immediate violence marked the first post-war year yet did not systematically endure in the post-war period and is not a focus of the analysis here. Both interview and news reports cite the general availability of arms in the conditions of post-war poverty and destruction as its source. The Abkhaz Ministry of Information and Press reports after the war: “The war gave rise to a completely new situation [with] numerous armed people... who lost everything... For many killing became a way to survive” (Apsnypress, 24 February, 1994). Interviews support this account: “Everyone had weapons... [and] everyone stole, here in Gudauta, in Sukhum” (Interview 5, 27 October, 2011). Criminal activity, however, subsided with time. The following quote of an Abkhaz fighter captures this argument: “In general, life was difficult. But in terms of crime, the most difficult time was the first year. Then, of course, the situation improved” (Interview 72, 11 November, 2011).

In contrast, regular and irregular violence that unfolded in the border area turned systematic over time. The Mingrel (Georgian)-populated Gal/i region, which enjoyed relative calm before and during the war, now became a “borderland buffer zone” (Zhidkov, 1996: 355). The regular Abkhaz and Georgian armed forces, replaced by the police after the 14 May, 1994, Agreement on a Cease-fire and Separation of Forces, were stationed on the two sides of the Ingur/i respectively. Low-scale localized armed clashes, with the sides frequently exchanging fire, escalated into a constant *small war* there. As an Abkhaz police officer explains, “After 1993, the war was still ongoing in the Gal region. Until recently, Gal was explosive” (Interview 24, 2 November, 2011). The tension between the sides in the border area along the Ingur/i continued long into the post-war period. As an Abkhaz official argues, “People were dying [in this area] since 1993 and until the recognition [of Abkhazia by Russia in 2008]. The threat of war was present until [then]” (Interview 27, 2 November, 2011).

Low-scale localized armed clashes between the regular Georgian and Abkhaz armed forces as well persisted in the Kodor/i Gorge. This area was more difficult to patrol; thus the regular army remained there despite the 1994 Agreement. The clashes in this area were more isolated, in part due to the nature of terrain and in part due to the control of the area beyond Lata retained by Georgia.<sup>303</sup> The mountainous geography and alpine climate restricted violent activities in the area in the winter and affected the proximity of the sides. If in the Gal/i region the sides were nearly positioned across the Ingur/i River, the mountain tunnels separated them in the Kodor/i Gorge. The clashes along the Ingur/i River were thus reported immediately after the war and continuously thereafter, yet the first major episode of fighting in the Kodor/i Gorge took place after the initial post-war winter in March, 1994, and recurred rarely. Abkhaz reservists confirm: “It is a mountainous area and is challenging in terms of terrain” (Interview 27, 2 November, 2011); “it was difficult for the Abkhaz to approach and easier for [the Georgian forces] to come down from there” (Interview 36, 3 November, 2011).

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<sup>303</sup> The Abkhaz forces captured Lata in March, 1994. Upper Kodor/i remained outside of the Abkhaz control until 2008.

Irregular violence characterized the border area along with regular clashes, especially in the Gal/i region. Georgian guerrilla units, called “partisan” in Georgia and “diversionist” or “terrorist” in Abkhazia, crossed the Ingur/i River to ambush Abkhaz personnel, peacekeepers, and Georgians collaborating with the Abkhaz, lay landmines, and destroy the infrastructure. Abkhaz reservist and police guards report: “We had infiltrations, attacks, ambushes” (Interview 34, 3 November, 2011); “The border is a little river. They ran over constantly, carried out ambushes, laid mines. They were terrorists, diversionists” (Interview 48, 4 November, 2011); “They called themselves partisans..., blew up our communications systems” (Interview 97, 19 November, 2011); “mined all roads, and not only roads, but also houses, strategic objects, [to cut off our] communications” (Interview 44, 4 November, 2011); “constantly set off explosions” (Interview 40, 4 November, 2011).

Kidnapping of the Abkhaz, international personnel, and locals was added to this repertoire of violence later in the post-war period.<sup>304</sup> As border guards and civilians report, “they kidnapped people to be paid in return” (Interview 70, 11 November, 2011); “Our boys..., my neighbors were kidnapped” (Interview 12, 31 October, 2011); “They kidnapped residents of Gal who were loyal to the Abkhaz” (Interview 121, 30 November, 2011); “People came to [Gal/i] to buy nuts to be sold at the Psou border [with Russia]. They kidnapped these people” (Interview 33, 3 November, 2011).

#### **7.2.1.1 Georgian Post-War Mobilization<sup>305</sup>**

Georgian post-war mobilization is closely related to the war-time composition of Georgia’s armed forces. Alongside the nascent Georgian army, irregular paramilitary formations, particularly the Mkhedrioni, participated on the Georgian side in the war. After the war Georgian regular forces sustained their mobilization at the border while guerrilla groups were formed based on the irregular component of the Georgian armed forces involved in the war. As an Abkhaz commander suggests,

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<sup>304</sup> The first episode of kidnapping at the border line is reported on 4 January, 1995. An Abkhaz police officer and four Abkhaz women were kidnapped in the security zone by the border (Apsnypress, 4 January, 1995; see Figure 22 above).

<sup>305</sup> Georgian post-war actors and violent tactics need to be considered to understand Abkhaz mobilization after the war.



“The Georgian army was restructured [after the war], but these groups were maintained to carry out terrorist, diversionist acts in Abkhazia” (Interview 127, 1 December, 2011). For example, leader of a war-time Mkhedrioni unit Boris Kakubava was reported to have formed “an expeditionary force composed of Georgian refugees in order to enter Abkhazia” following the war (Zverev, 1996: 4/4). Another Mkhedrioni fighter Dato Shengelia, later Minister of Internal Affairs of Abkhazia in exile, was likewise reported to have armed local Georgians to carry out guerrilla activities (Darchiashvili, 2003b; Mikalkanin, 2004). An Abkhaz guard confirms: “He was at the same time head of the police and diversionist groups” (Interview 44, 4 November, 2011). His Forest Brothers, along with the White Legion, constituted the umbrella organizations of guerrilla warfare in post-war Abkhazia.

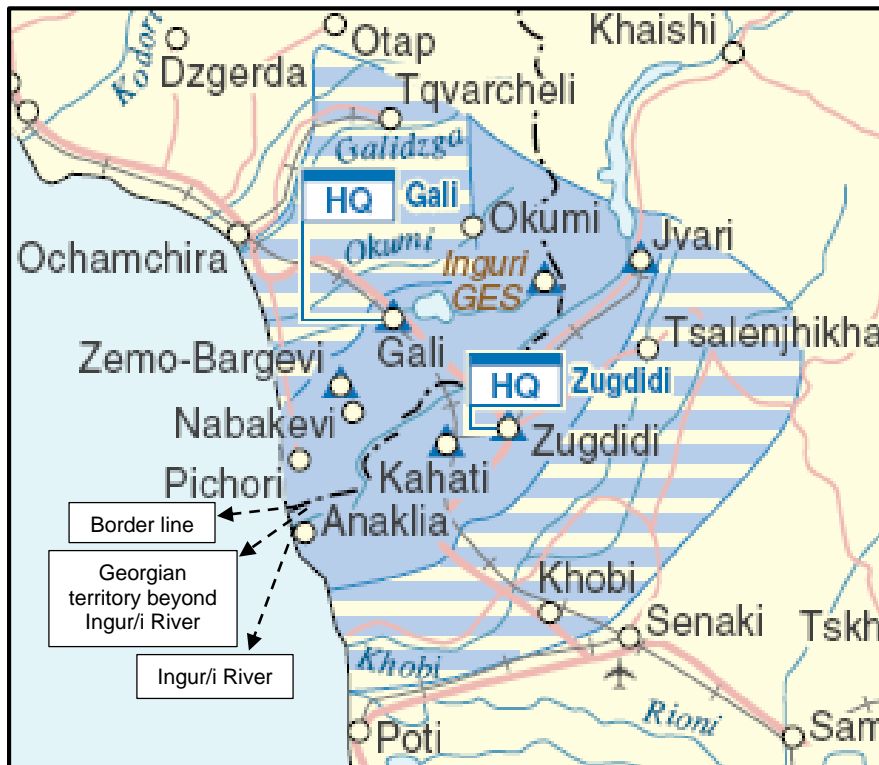
Mobilization into these groups of local Georgians who fought in the war is widely recorded. “Not all locals took our side. At night some changed into uniforms and went against us” (Interview 30, 2 November, 2011). Guerrilla groups, the Abkhaz say, “were formed from refugees who fought here and ran and the remnants of the Mkhedrioni... Those who ran understood they did not have an option to return peacefully and went into these groups” (Interview 131, 6 December, 2011); “Some were locals of Gal; some were from the Mkhedrioni” (Interview 48, 4 November, 2011). Of course, not all locals were directly involved as guerrillas. As an Abkhaz expert explains, “There were such who were civilians by day, diversionists by night, but these were few” (Interview 131, 6 December, 2011). However, many locals were implicated in the guerrilla war in other ways (see Section 7.3.2).

Due to the nature of their activities, guerrilla groups were small but generally connected to each other. An Abkhaz policeman who served at the border reports: “there were a number of groups active across the Gal region both in the upper area and lower by the sea. These were scattered small groups, 5-6 people in each, who nonetheless maintained contact with one another” (Interview 44, 4 November, 2011). “These were not large groups,” a leading Abkhaz journalist corroborates, “[their diversionist activities] would be impossible in large groups” (Interview 110, 26 November, 2011).

These activities were most easily carried out in areas with dense forests, marshes, and small rivers. The lower Gal/i region was such an area. An Abkhaz administrator of Gal/i explains: “It was very difficult in the lower part... It is a wide landscape. There are populated areas and forest/marsh areas” (Interview 148, 14 December, 2011). “Villages are far from each other,” an Abkhaz activist working in the area clarifies, “The roads are horrible and go through the forest” (Interview 150, 14 December, 2011). As Figure 23 (below) shows, the border does not go along the Ingur/i in this area. Georgian territory there stretches beyond the river. Abkhaz reservists say: “It is Georgian territory. The border there is not along the Ingur. The Georgian units control it” (Interview 126, 1 December, 2011); “In this part especially they controlled the situation” (Interview 60, 9 November, 2011). The area, lastly, was largely abandoned by the locals in the early post-war period. As Abkhaz reservists explain, “The Gal region was almost entirely empty after the war... Some people stayed closer to the border [but] almost everyone left the lower zone” (Interview 148, 14 December, 2011); “There were many abandoned houses. It was easy to hide. Then they would quickly leave to cross the river back. They did not want to clash. They had diversionist goals” (Interview 48, 4 November, 2011).

These factors contributed to the ability of Georgian guerrillas to freely operate in the lower Gal/i region. “Groups crossed all the time in the lower section,” Abkhaz reservists confirm, “They hid in the houses, the forest” (Interview 81, 15 November, 2011); “[guerrilla] formations had their base camps there, in the security zone” (Interview 126, 1 December, 2011). This area, therefore, is commonly differentiated from the rest of the border line. “The situation that characterized the lower zone was not the same in the rest of the Gal region,” an Abkhaz Gal/i administrator says, “The rest of the region was relatively calm in comparison” (Interview 148, 14 December, 2011). Overall, the Abkhaz argue, “this zone was huge and difficult to control” (Interview 20, 2 November, 2011); “It was the worst area. It was never calm there” (Interview 147, 14 December, 2011).

Figure 23. The Georgian-Abkhaz Border Line in the Lower Gal/i Region (1993-on)



Source: Based on UN map of Georgia, May 2009

Georgian guerrilla activities were thus constant along the border, but especially in this area. Abkhaz border guards and civilians summarize the scope and intensity of guerrilla activities: “They organized diversionist acts” (Interview 119, 29 November, 2011); “often crossed the border, above all in the Gali region” (Interview 58, 9 November, 2011); “Ambushes happened constantly. If a car passed, especially with one driver, they ambushed it” (Interview 34, 3 November, 2011); “almost every day at first” (Interview 70, 11 November, 2011); “They blew up cars, killed at night, two-three people per night. A mine could be in any puddle” (Interview 73, 12 November, 2011); “Until 1998, something happened every shift” (Interview 47, 4 November, 2011); thereafter, “explosions in Gal were two-three times a month” (Interview 147, 12 December, 2011); although ambushes and explosions subsided, “Intrusions through the border continued every day. They kidnapped people as hostages—anyone. Even now they still do this, but rarely” (Interview 30, 2 November, 2011).

The guerrilla war persisted long into the post-war stage. Peacekeepers' deployment in 1994 did not prevent irregular post-war mobilization and violence. Abkhaz border guards and civilians corroborate: "Russian peacekeepers were stationed at the border, but activities of the White Legion and the Forest Brothers went on" (Interview 19, 1 November, 2011); "Even after the peacekeepers' arrival there were sorties, ambushes, kidnappings" (Interview 33, 3 November, 2011). The Abkhaz forces incurred heavy casualties from irregular violence. Abkhaz border guards commonly report: "No less were killed after the war than in the war. We expected death on every corner" (Interview 81, 15 November, 2011); "We lost a couple of people every week from terrorist activity, [mainly] road mining" (Interview 27, 2 November, 2011); "many *militsija* [police] staff died" (Interview 33, 3 November, 2011). International personnel, including Russian peacekeepers and United Nations observers, and local Georgian civilians suffered as well. Respondents confirm: "They carried out a huge amount of terrorist acts, sabotage, kidnapping... Many peacekeepers died" (Interview 121, 30 November, 2011); "United Nations personnel were killed there, died together with us" (Interview 103, 23 November, 2011); guerrillas "vandalized the local population" (Interview 33, 3 November, 2011); "civilians blew up on mines" (Interview 102, 23 November, 2011). Overall, the regular and irregular post-war violence along the Georgian-Abkhaz border, Yamskov (2009: 168) summarizes, "took a considerable amount of human lives in Abkhazia, of both armed men and civilians."

#### **7.2.1.2 Abkhaz Post-War Mobilization**

In response to this violence by the Georgian side the Abkhaz organized *cleaning* operations with the aim of driving out the regular and irregular Georgian armed groups involved in the areas of contested control, Gal/i and Kodor/i. As an Abkhaz reservist says, "of course, when they infiltrated we carried out operations to push them out. We did not even say to destroy them, but rather to push them out" (Interview 70, 11 November, 2011). These operations were alternatively called "counter-terrorist" by the Abkhaz and closely resembled the state-like counter-insurgency strategies.

The Abkhaz operations typically involved *combing* through an area to locate and *neutralize* the Georgian armed groups by forcing them to flee beyond the border, killing, or seizing them. An Abkhaz reservist who participated in a number of *cleaning* operations explains the overall process:

We had maps marking where [Georgian fighters] could dig in [on the territory]. According to military strategy, the front group led, the side watch was at the sides, and the main group followed behind them. This is how we combed through the area... We gave them corridors to leave—to maintain some peace and not to harm our own boys... If someone appeared, we shot them. Avoiding combat, we moved further (Interview 70, 11 November, 2011).

Larger-scale operations of this kind against both regular and irregular Georgian forces did not take place often. In the early post-war period, examples of these operations included the *cleaning* of the lower Gal/i region in February, 1994, and the capture of Lata in the Kodor/i Gorge in March, 1994, involving both the counter-insurgency measures and an active attack on the Georgian armed forces positioned there. These two operations are briefly contextualized below (see Section 7.2.1.1).

These larger-scale operations could not be maintained and were not always successful with regard to the irregular Georgian groups. These groups could easily hide or continue their activities. The Abkhaz thus adapted their strategy against these groups. As an Abkhaz commander explains,

The first operation [in February, 1994,] was intended to take them by surprise and squeeze them. This did not happen. We then rarely held large-scale *cleanings* and moved to local measures, tracing particular individuals... who implemented [guerrilla activities]... When we changed the tactics, we had much greater success (Interview 127, 1 December, 2011).

Indeed, as an outcome of this strategy, Abkhaz Deputy Defence Minister argues, “we detained the first diversionist group from the Forest Brothers, five people. I spoke with every one of them. They told us where they were located, what the tasks were, who paid for it” (Interview 126, 1 December, 2011). “In one operation,” an Abkhaz police officer who took part in the operations confirms, “we caught 50 people without documents. We searched for them through tea plantations, in the houses; we had 30m between each other and went into the different directions” (Interview 24, 2 November, 2011). Low-scale operations of this kind carried out against the Georgian guerrillas were frequent.

Similarly to the Georgian forces active in these areas in the post-war period, the war-time composition of the Abkhaz forces affected their structure, mobilization patterns, and violent tactics after the war. The Abkhaz force at the war onset involved regular and irregular components, later transformed into a largely regular army, with irregular components sustained due to the asymmetry of power in the areas under Georgian control. These aspects of the war-time structure of the Abkhaz forces carried over into the post-war period. Border guards were mobilized through the macro-level structure of the Abkhaz army. This macro-level mobilization included both the standing force of up to a few thousand regular soldiers and the “estimated 15,000 to 25,000” reservist contingent (ICG, 2006: 14).<sup>306</sup> Reservists guarded the border in shifts: “we stayed at the border for 10-12 days, then shifts changed. It was under the umbrella of the Ministry of Defence” (Interview 27, 2 November, 2011). Regular soldiers participated in the *cleaning* operations along with reservists and the police.

After the introduction by the 14 May, 1994, Agreement of the 12 km security zone to each side of the border line (see Figure 22 above), the Abkhaz army was prohibited from operating in the area and the Abkhaz police (*militsija*) took over. However, some Abkhaz reservists did not observe the Agreement and mobilized through their micro- and meso-level networks with the police force: “As a reservist, I was not allowed [in the border area] often. The *militsija* was allowed there... But I changed into the *militsija* uniform and went with my friends” (Interview 87, 17 November, 2011). Even after this Agreement, the Abkhaz army joined for the *cleaning* operations, due to the inability of the police to contain Georgian armed activities. As Abkhaz Deputy Defence Minister clarifies,

The 12 km part there was the security zone. We were not allowed to enter this zone. Only the *militsija* was allowed. But the *militsija* was not always able to deal with the situation in that territory. The Georgian armed formations who carried out diversionist acts were located on the Abkhaz territory by the sea... In response, we carried out operations or individual actions. But the presence of the armed forces in this zone was prohibited and so most of the time [Georgian units] walked around freely (Interview 126, 1 December, 2011).

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<sup>306</sup> On the structure of the Abkhaz armed forces, see also Pachulija (2010: 248-244 on the war period and 358-506 on the post-war period); IISS (2005: 423); Matveeva and Hiscock (2003: 106).

In general, the patterns of post-war mobilization and low-scale violence that evolved at the Georgian-Abkhaz border over the first year following the war, namely the regular clashes between the Georgian and Abkhaz armed forces in the Gal/i and Kodor/i areas, the irregular violence carried out by the Georgian guerrilla groups, above all in the lower Gal/i region, and the Abkhaz operations to neutralize these regular and irregular Georgian armed groups, protracted in post-war Abkhazia. These low-scale events constituted the background of post-war violence. Later in the course of the post-war stage, these patterns of low-scale violence escalated into large-scale episodes of fighting. Particularly important in this regard are the events that took place in the Gal/i region in 1998 and the Kodor/i Gorge in 2008. Understanding these large-scale events is essential for the discussion of the normative foundations of post-war violence: they demonstrate that the purpose of Abkhaz post-war mobilization was to defend the Abkhaz war victories, rather than seize territory beyond Abkhazia.

### **7.2.2 Stage II: Large-Scale Fighting (1990s-2000s)**

The following discussion focuses on the large-scale episodes of violence that unfolded later in the post-war period, in particular the recurrence of fighting in Gal/i in the Six-Day War of May, 1998, and the Abkhaz Kodor/i operation of August, 2008. Other clashes took place as well, but did not change territorial control as the 1998 and 2008 episodes did and thus are not analyzed here.<sup>307</sup> I suggest that these episodes grew out of and correspond to the patterns of violent mobilization that formed in the early post-war period. At the core, they reflect the attempt by the Abkhaz to establish full control over the territory of Abkhazia. As contested control continued in the border areas, with the rest of Abkhazia firmly in the hands of the Abkhaz, these areas were a priority for the Georgian armed actors to challenge and for the Abkhaz to capture and hold militarily. The episodes of 1998 and 2008 reflect these different priorities of the armed actors on the two sides of the conflict.

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<sup>307</sup> For instance, in 2001 the Abkhaz clashed with Ruslan Gelaev's Chechen armed group that aimed "to head... toward Sochi, [Russia]..., seize Sukhum, [or] capture the strategic bridge across the Kodori River..., depriving the Abkhaz of access to, and control over, the southern half of their unrecognized republic," none of which was achieved (RFE, 2001).

### 7.2.2.1 Gal/i Recidivism (May, 1998)

After the war of 1992-1993 it was clear to Georgia's leaders that retaking the entire territory of Abkhazia was not feasible, at least for a period. The Georgian armed forces were almost entirely driven out from Abkhazia, except for the Kodor/i Gorge. Their local support base disappeared with the expulsion of the local Georgian population from Abkhazia. The focus thus shifted to the border area, where control was contested and some Georgians returned. The regular and irregular violence that unfolded in the area in essence represented the localized continuation of the Georgian-Abkhaz war in the post-war period. The Kodor/i Gorge was relatively strongly held by the Georgian forces, especially once the pattern of territorial control consolidated there with the capture by the Abkhaz of Lata in 1994 and the retaining of control by the Georgian armed forces over upper Kodor/i. The Gal/i region, as a result, became the central objective in the continued territorial fighting, in which the Abkhaz defended the territory they understood as their own and claimed militarily in the war.

Hence, immediately after the war, the Abkhaz began building defence structures, trenches, and weapon emplacements to fortify the Abkhaz side of the Ingur/i in the Gal/i region (Lolishvili and Pachkoria, 1993). The Georgian infiltration and the Abkhaz operations against it were part of this localized war. Large-scale violence took place in the context of these operations, of which the March, 1994, *cleaning* is an example. In May, 1998, such an operation—and the fighting over the Gal/i region that unfolded—turned into the Six-Day War.<sup>308</sup> Control over this contested area was the goal of both sides in these events. The Georgian side was yet again unsuccessful. Chairman of mothers' organization of Abkhazia explains: "sometimes Georgians organized clashes there to take the Gal region at least. They understood they could not take Abkhazia anymore and were trying to capture Gal. They tried in 1998, but did not succeed" (Interview 102, 23 November, 2011).

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<sup>308</sup> These events are not coded as a full-scale war in major datasets (see, for example, Uppsala Conflict Data Program). However, they are generally referred to as the Six-Day War in the literature on the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict (see, for example, Walker, 1998; Nodia, 2000) and viewed as war recurrence by the local actors who participated in the events.



A number of violent events in the Gal/i region were reported in the lead up to the Six-Day War. After a period of relative calm Georgian guerrilla groups were again active in the Gal/i region and their activities were reported daily starting in late April, 1998. Abkhaz security personnel were shot and killed in the village of Mziuri in upper Gal/i on 28 April. In another violent event in nearby Repo-Etseri on 2 May Abkhaz security personnel were ambushed and kidnapped. Similar guerrilla activities continued in the area throughout the first part of May, with widespread infiltration by the Georgian armed groups reported in the Abkhaz and international press alike. By 20 May “Georgian guerrillas from the so-called White Legion [and Forest Brothers were reported to have injured and] killed some 20 Abkhaz police officers” (Fuller, 1998a).

Abkhaz units were sent to gather the information in the area and reported that the Georgian side was preparing for a large-scale offensive. As an Abkhaz participant in the reconnaissance says,

We were dropped there, because we knew the language, to find out what the situation was. We reported that Georgians were engineering fortification structures in preparation for an offensive. We also had intelligence that the power structures of Georgia were participating (Interview 81, 15 November, 2011).

Abkhaz border guards clarify: “They were digging the defence line in the area under peacekeepers’ control. We had operational information and reported to our government that that Georgians were preparing for the operation to seize the Gal region” (Interview 126, 1 December, 2011); “We knew they were planning to attack” (Interview 23, 2 November, 2011). “You cannot make trenches in secret,” a leading Abkhaz journalist confirms, “One maybe, but fortification structures like that no. They used the whole lower zone for that” (Interview 110, 26 November, 2011). Peacekeepers did not avert the preparations. The Abkhaz media and military experts report: “On the eyes of Russian peacekeepers, Georgians crossed the river and built fortification structures. There was a sense that they closed their eyes to that” (Interview 110, 26 November, 2011); “Peacekeepers saw and put up with them. They did not report anything” (Interview 126, 1 December, 2011).

With this information, the Abkhaz intelligence concluded that “Georgian formations intend to take over Gali” (Imedashvili and Belov, 1998). Pachulija (2010: 368) sums up the Abkhaz view:

by the Independence Day of Georgia on 26 May the “White Legion” and “Forest Brothers” supported by the internal forces of Georgia intended to take the city of Gal by force, detach the Gal region from the Republic of Abkhazia, and place the government of the so-called Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia led by T. Nodarejshvili in Gal.

The Abkhaz media and military experts thus consistently report that “1998 was a Georgian attempt to introduce the structures of the Abkhaz government in exile into Abkhazia, create a foothold, and if possible detach the Gal region” (Interview 110, 26 November, 2011); “It was not a raid, it was an operation to capture the Gal region planned by Georgian commanders to form a defence boundary” (Interview 98, 19 November, 2011); “In 1998, Georgians had a task to occupy and cut off the Gal region from Abkhazia along the channel and establish their jurisdiction there” (Interview 126, 1 December, 2011); “May 26 is the Georgian Independence Day. They wanted to first detach the Gal region, at least get to the channel. If they had gotten to the city of Gal and occupied it, they would certainly move on to the Ochamchira region” (Interview 148, 14 December, 2011).

To prevent a grave outcome for the Abkhaz, the Abkhaz organized a *cleaning* operation of unprecedented scope in response. The Abkhaz army was put on combat alert on 19 May. That day the Abkhaz police undertook a low-scale *cleaning* operation, with partial success. “We did a house-to-house search after we had our reconnaissance,” a participating officer confirms (Interview 33, 3 November, 2011). Fighting between the Abkhaz police and Georgian units unfolded. “There were killed and injured” (Interview 98, 19 November, 2011). As it became clear that the police personnel alone were unable to fully manage the situation, the initial measures grew into a large-scale Abkhaz operation. An Abkhaz administrator of Gal/i explains: “Our *militsija* [police] went there. When we started to push Georgians out quietly, the fighting began... There were casualties on our side. The military events developed from there” (Interview 148, 14 December, 2011).

The large-scale operation began on 22 May. All three categories of Abkhaz border guards—the police, reservists, and regular soldiers—were mobilized for it at the macro level. Abkhaz police officers explain: “For three days we were fighting there, then the government remembered that this was serious and sent us support” (Interview 81 15, November, 2011); “First they sent us... then the army came” (Interview 23, 2 November, 2011). The interviews confirm mobilization of reservists and regular soldiers for the operation. “The army was not supposed to get involved,” reservists say, “Only police border patrol was supposed to be there... but, of course, because the police was there, we [reservists] were sent there as well” (Interview 64, 9 November, 2011); “The fighting lasted a few days. The army was stationed beyond the 12 km distance, but there it had to be incorporated” (Interview 98, 19 November, 2011). Hence, “Abkhaz forces armed with heavy artillery launched a counteroffensive against several Gali villages” (Fuller, 1998a). Reservists confirm: “We had strong artillery, and so [it] went forward. *Gray*, we called him, shot so hard that he almost destroyed their headquarters” (Interview 64, 9 November, 2011).

As soon as the army interfered, an Abkhaz commander explains, it was no longer a *cleaning* operation: “There is no such phrase *cleaning of the territory* in the army. It can be done by special units. But when the army is involved, it is theater of war. The second war, but localized” (Interview 60, 9 November, 2011). Military strategy developed by the Abkhaz command resembled war-time offensives (Pachulija, 2010: 370-373). As participants confirm, “our reserve group was sent to Gal, not just like that, but with specific tasks. We were given a particular piece of the territory and had to push Georgians out from it” (Interview 91, 18 November, 2011); “Our group was pushing them out along [the area], the other group went from the mountains” (Interview 70, 11 November, 2011). Of great importance were clashes by Saberio and the Ingur/i power station. “The fiercest fighting... was [there and]... posed a serious danger to Sukhumi: Georgia could shut off the electricity supply to Abkhazia at any moment” if the Georgian forces captured the station (Chania and Dvali, 1998).

As the fighting intensified, a cease-fire agreement was signed by the parties in Gagra on 26 May.<sup>309</sup> By signing the agreement, the Abkhaz say, Georgia's leaders recognized the involvement of the official Georgian structures. As Kvarchelia (1999: 32) writes, "Tbilisi, which had until then distanced itself from the 'partisans,' practically admitted its responsibility for the events by signing an agreement." Reports citing Georgian officials support the participation of official Georgia, to be exact the Abkhaz government in exile and regular forces. As Krutikov (1998) of *Sevodnya* reports,

Georgian Ambassador to Russia Vazha Lordkipanidze admits that responsibility for "the current exacerbation of the conflict lies in part with certain Georgian forces"... referring to the Abkhaz Supreme Council in exile... Georgian Minister of Internal Affairs Kakha Targamadze admitted that units of the Georgian internal troops had been sent into Gali.

According to some reports, "100 Mkhedrioni members took part in the... fighting" (Fuller, 1998b). On the Abkhaz side, the agreement is argued to have prevented their forces from advancing beyond the Abkhaz-controlled territory. "The agreement stopped us from going further," an Abkhaz Gal/i administrator reports, "but there was a desire to go and punish them because we knew that it would not stop there" (Interview 148, 14 December, 2011).

Despite the signing of the agreement, "hostilities continued for most of [26 May], with each side accusing the other of violating the cease-fire" (Fuller, 1998a). As a result, the Abkhaz "claimed to have expelled the last Georgian guerrillas from Abkhaz territory" on 27 May (Fuller, 1998a). Not only the guerrilla Forest Brothers and the White Legion, but also "[Georgian] internal [police] troops units sent out to assist them" were reported to have left (Krutikov, 1998). "Overall, the clash lasted over 10 days," Abkhaz reservists reflect on their success (Interview 81, 15 November, 2011); "The army repulsed the occupation and once again we got to the Ingur" (Interview 60, 9 November, 2011); "There were many casualties on the Georgian side" (Interview 148, 14 December, 2011).

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<sup>309</sup> Text of the Protocol on Cease-fire, Separation of Armed Formations and Guarantees on Inadmissibility of Forcible Activities, or Gagra Protocol, is available in Volkhonskij et al. (2008: 385).

Civilians as well suffered. There were casualties among the locals, houses were burned, and many were again displaced. As the Abkhaz say, “the Abkhaz burned houses because Georgians hid there. Many were forced to run to Georgia again” (Interview 131, 6 December, 2011); “Everyone ran away” (Interview 64, 9 November, 2011). The Abkhaz were, moreover, reported to have looted emptied houses. “Caucasus Press reported on 29 May that Abkhaz fighters were looting abandoned Georgian homes in the [Gal/i] villages” (Fuller, 1998a). As Fuller (1998a) summarizes the losses,

Estimates of casualties differ widely, but it appears that dozens of Georgian civilians have been killed, as well as a similar number of Abkhaz and Georgian combatants. In addition, 30,000-40,000 ethnic Georgian repatriates who returned to the homes in Gali... have again sought refuge on the other side of the border.<sup>310</sup>

As a result, a Russian journalist says, “after 1998 for two years Gal was a half-dead zone, especially in the lower part. Then people started to return again... About 70% returned, although many people there have brothers who partake in the partisan movement” (Interview 147, 14 December, 2011). “The Abkhaz were angered and could do something bad to the locals... But there was great help from peacekeepers to the local population” in this process (Interview 148, 14 December, 2011).

The outcome of the Six-Day War for the Abkhaz was the prevention of the alleged plan to cut off the Gal/i region from Abkhazia and the establishment by the Abkhaz of greater control over the area. As an Abkhaz commander says, “In 1998 they almost took the Gal part of the Ochamchira region” (Interview 60, 9 November, 2011). “Nonetheless, the operation was successful” (Interview 148, 14 December, 2011). While intrusions by Georgian armed actors persisted, the Abkhaz argue, “We managed to stabilize the situation” (Interview 148, 14 December, 2011). As Fuller (1998c) says, “Abkhaz forces... established control over the 12-kilometer security zone on the Abkhaz side of the border.” Following this success by the Abkhaz, there were no more attempts by the Georgian forces to capture the Gal/i region and the center of large-scale fighting moved to Kodor/i thereafter.

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<sup>310</sup> According to Georgian Prosecutor-General Djamlet Babilashvili, “35 Georgian civilians and 17 Interior Ministry troops were killed... and 1,695 Georgian homes burned” (Fuller, 1998c).

#### **7.2.2.2 Kodor/i Operation (August, 2008)**

While large-scale events of violence that unfolded before 2008, such as the Six-Day War of 1998, can be broadly seen as “attempts at military revenge” by the Georgian side and at holding by the Abkhaz of the territory they fully or predominantly controlled, the Abkhaz Kodor/i operation of 2008 marks a generally new stage of post-war large-scale violence in Abkhazia (Interview 123, 30 November, 2011). This offensive operation by the Abkhaz was to seize militarily the upper Kodor/i Gorge controlled by Georgia since the end of the war. As Zverev (1998: 4/4) says, it was “the only part of Abkhazia outside Abkhaz control.” Georgia’s control over this territory was critical for the prospective Georgian operations aimed at capturing Abkhazia, as the capital Sukhum/i is militarily open from its strategic heights. “If you stand there, you can see the Tsandrypsh region [by Russia],” an Abkhaz official explains (Interview 70, 11 November, 2011). Georgian troops and equipment, hence, were not withdrawn from the area after the 1992-1993 war and clashes between the regular Georgian and Abkhaz armed forces persisted there throughout the post-war period up until 2008.

Formally under the administrative authority of the Georgian government, the upper Kodor/i Gorge was not fully controlled by Georgia in the entire post-war period. Some armed actors in the area, for example, former Svan Kodor/i governor Emzar Kvitsiani’s Hunter unit, did not submit to Georgia, particularly during Mikheil Saakashvili’s presidency (2004-2013). Thus in 2006 Georgia carried out a joint army and police operation to reassert full control over the area. Kvitsiani and his followers were driven out as a result of the operation. “[F]or the first time in 13 years, [Georgia] has restored full control over the Kodori Gorge,” Saakashvili stated (Vignansky and Solovyov, 2006). The Abkhaz government in exile was based in upper Kodor/i thereafter. Georgia’s armed forces in the area were strengthened. A Russian peacekeeping commander reported following the operation that “more than 90 percent of the Georgian troops sent to the gorge remain there” (Fuller, 2006).

At the time the Abkhaz leadership did not take active steps against the consolidation of the Georgian position in the area. Many Abkhaz fighters did not approve of this passive reaction on the part of the Abkhaz leaders. “When they entered the Kodor Valley in 2006,” an Abkhaz commander says, “we fighters were upset—our government was passive about it” (Interview 127, 1 December, 2011). The strengthening of the Georgian armed forces in the area was generally concerning for the Abkhaz. Abkhaz fighters and civilians alike say: “Georgia’s forces crossed the border, captured the area” (Interview 47, 4 November, 2011); “They created a foothold there, it was a buffer” (Interview 131, 6 December, 2011); “They built their blue and pink houses there..., made Kodor their base” (Interview 110, 26 November, 2011). However, then the Abkhaz did not have the necessary means to weaken the increasing Georgian presence in Kodor/i. As Abkhaz Deputy Defence Minister says,

In 2006 they officially sent troops and stationed a garrison of 3,000 people there, lowered the number to 1,500 by 2008, and in 2008 yet again raised it to 3,000... These were people of the Ministries of Defence and Internal Affairs (Interview 126, 1 December, 2011).

“They had very strong fortification there,” a commander adds (Interview 74, 12 November, 2011). The defence line, which included trenches, weapons emplacements, and mine fields, was so robust that the Abkhaz forces could not approach it, while the air and anti-tank defence systems prevented the Abkhaz from effectively using their aviation and tanks in the area (Pachulija, 2010: 398).

The situation changed in 2008. On the one hand, the threat of the Georgian attack increased greatly. The Abkhaz had the information about Georgia’s plan to take Abkhazia and South Ossetia:

We knew that they were supposed to start from Abkhazia and then move to South Ossetia, but at the last moment they changed the plan and decided that South Ossetia could be taken quickly. As a result, there could be success that would inspire and moral support if that had happened. But it had not (Interview 70, 11 November, 2011).

As is well known, Russia’s armed forces crushed Georgia in South Ossetia in what turned into the Russo-Georgian War of August, 2008, and were ready to provide similar support to the Abkhaz.<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>311</sup> On the Russo-Georgian War, see Cornell and Starr (2009).

On the other hand, therefore, the Abkhaz operation for the establishment of control over the strategically important upper Kodor/i took place in the context of the August War, at the time when Georgia was militarily weakened and its forces were fully directed toward the struggle with Russia.

“We used this opportunity,” an Abkhaz commander explains,

This is our territory. If they had a situation with Russians in South Ossetia, how could we not use it to push them out from the Kodor Valley? We know our state borders... One must be a fool to not use such a situation (Interview 127, 1 December, 2011).

Hence, as the events unfolded in South Ossetia in the second week of August, the Abkhaz launched an offensive to capture the upper Kodor/i area with the assistance of the Russian navy and aviation.

Fear of another war was great among the Abkhaz. “It was horrifying for the population,” an Abkhaz journalist says, “We felt that the war would start again. My mother stood on the porch and said “I am not going to survive this one.” She stood there and counted tanks” (Interview 110, 26 November, 2011). The fear was largely motivated by the vulnerabilities the Abkhaz had and could not control on their own, particularly their exposure from the sea. As an Abkhaz journalist explains,

We did not even worry about the air. It could be controlled, including by the Russian forces. The sea, however, was vulnerable. One thing is land fighting, we understood it, but another thing is the marines. We did not have the marines (Interview 110, 26 November, 2011).

Indeed, Georgian military ships approached Abkhazia on 9 August, but the Russian navy sent them back. “People could exhale... when Russian ships appeared” (Interview 110, 26 November, 2011).

This was not the extent of Russian support. Indirectly, it was as well provided in the training of Abkhaz troops that carried out the operation. “I was trained by the Frunze Military Academy,” a participant corroborates, “a Russian team came and trained us” (Interview 70, 11 November, 2011). Directly, the Russian aviation was used to bomb the Kodor/i Gorge in the course of the operation. As an Abkhaz commander confirms, “Success there was with the help of the Russian aviation. No one could remain there because Russia used vacuum bombs” (Interview 60, 9 November, 2011).



As noted above, the upper Kodori is a challenging area in terms of terrain; simply attacking and fighting there would be unreasonable for the Abkhaz. As Abkhaz commanders say, “The place is high up in the mountains. It is difficult to reach, fight there due to the mountainous conditions” (Interview 47, 4 November, 2011); “There is simply no space to hold on when you start shooting” (Interview 127, 1 December, 2011). Strong aviation, on the other hand, would be successful there because “the Gorge is narrow” and protecting oneself against bombing is difficult there (Interview 74, 12 November, 2011). While the Abkhaz did not possess this capability, Russia’s aviation did.

Therefore, the Russian influence on the outcome of the operation in Kodori is vast. Russia’s assistance substituted for the weaknesses of the Abkhaz forces that prevented them from having an operation in the Kodori Gorge in 2006. “In 2008,” the Abkhaz say, “there was no doubt that Russia would help us” (Interview 131, 6 December, 2011). Russia’s aviation involvement in the offensive allowed the Abkhaz to break the Georgian defence in the area. As Abkhaz fighters who carried out the operation confirm, “Russia participated in the preparation” (Interview 70, 11 November, 2011); “Everything was done with Russia’s help before we had come” (Interview 40, 4 November, 2011).

However, mobilization for the operation was the Abkhaz effort, as in the 1992-1993 war. “I did not meet Russian soldiers there apart from a medical battalion,” participants confirm (Interview 98, 19 November, 2011). This included groundwork with fighters. “We prepared young people out of hunters, who knew how to pass through the mountains, shoot,” commanders say (Interview 70, 11 November, 2011); “2008 was easier. We knew the area, how to work with maps, had enough knowledge” (Interview 60, 9 November, 2011). As in the war, the Abkhaz effort involved effective macro-level mobilization of fighters. “President Bagapsh declared the alarm,” participating police and reservists corroborate (Interview 61, 9 November, 2011); “When the war began in Ossetia, [he] announced general mobilization and sent the army to the front zone for security” (Interview 24, 2 November, 2011). This Abkhaz contingent carried out the ground part of the Kodori operation.

Through this macro-level effort a group of Abkhaz fighters, including reservists and regular soldiers, was selected to enter the Kodori Gorge following the aviation, crush the Georgian forces, and create a foothold in the area. Micro- and meso-level mobilization was not permitted at the time. As fighters confirm, “I went in 2008, but they did not let me through” (Interview 99, 19 November, 2011); “Not everyone was taken. We were part of the operation, had 50 people from each region” (Interview 98, 19 November, 2011); “120 men were selected to pass through the mountains. As we went up, the goal was to follow the aviation, artillery, special forces” (Interview 61, 9 November, 2011); “We walked 28 km from the last Russian block post; a part was dropped off by helicopters at the top” (Interview 70, 11 November, 2011); “The army went by air; we went by foot” (Interview 44, 4 November, 2011); “I crossed the area with my platoon” (Interview 40, 4 November, 2011).

The Abkhaz gave the Georgian armed forces and locals a corridor to escape the area. Police and reservists confirm: “We gave them a warning three days before” (Interview 127, 1 December, 2011); “We gave them a corridor, warned that there would be a clash and bombing, shooting... so, please, civilians flee immediately, while the [Georgian] military leave for your territory” (Interview 70, 11 November, 2011). As a result, “locals left and with them the regular Georgian government” (Interview 44, 4 November, 2011). The bombing forced the remaining Georgian forces to flee as well. As participating fighters explain, “We used the aviation and artillery on the day the corridor expired” (Interview 44, 4 November, 2011); “Georgia got in touch with Russia and said they were leaving” (Interview 61, 9 November, 2011). The Abkhaz operation thus ended without resistance. “We were ready when the aviation went on, but further action was cancelled,” participants confirm (Interview 61, 9 November, 2011); “There were no battles after the Gorge was bombed” (Interview 98, 19 November, 2011); “We did not meet resistance anywhere... The whole operation took place without a shot. The Kodori Gorge was cleared over three days” (Interview 44, 4 November, 2011).

On 12 August the Abkhaz side established full control over the Kodor/i area. The Georgian armed forces fled and left the military equipment. “We pushed them out,” fighters report (Interview 74, 12 November, 2011); “Yet again they left everything” (Interview 61, 9 November, 2011); “left everything and ran” (Interview 98, 19 November, 2011). As an Abkhaz commander says, “It must have been psychologically difficult for them. They ran away after our warning, although they were very well armed” (Interview 74, 12 November, 2011). Abkhaz Deputy Defence Minister confirms:

For many, it is not significant. What difference does it make that the Abkhaz freed a part of their territory without a shot?.. In Kodor we fought not only with the weapons, but with the psychological methods of influence on the enemy (Interview 126, 1 December, 2011).

Since the Georgian forces escaped, the Abkhaz had very few casualties. One fighter was killed and seven were injured (Pachulija, 2010: 404). The Abkhaz captured the remaining armaments. “When they ran, we found so many weapons there” (Interview 131, 6 December, 2011); “We saw... a full house of armaments and weapons where a family lived” (Interview 148, 14 December, 2011); “The stockpiles were concentrated in Ajara... Many were destroyed” (Interview 44, 4 November, 2011). Almost all locals fled the area and only gradually returned thereafter (S/2009/254, 2009: para. 40).

The success in the operation was highly important for the Abkhaz. It greatly diminished the possibility of a future Georgian attack feared in Abkhazia. As a leading Abkhaz academic explains,

We were under the constant pressure and feeling of a direct threat of aggression by Georgia until 2008. This is not so much of violence, which was ongoing, but a threat of aggression. We were afraid that Georgia would once again not be able to avoid aggression, because in its political arsenal nothing remained but force (Interview 137, 7 December, 2011).

In 2008 “it has become more difficult to attack Abkhazia” (Interview 36, 3 November, 2011). Most significantly, however, along with Abkhazia’s recognition by Russia, which followed shortly after, the Abkhaz success in Kodor/i restored what the Abkhaz understand as the historical boundary of Abkhazia and the Abkhaz statehood associated with it. “We freed all the borders of Abkhazia,” the Abkhaz say, “As a result, we restored the Abkhaz statehood” (Interview 75, 13 November, 2011).

### **7.3 Normative and Social Structure of Post-War Mobilization for Violence**

The record of post-war mobilization and protracted violence in Abkhazia suggests that the latent normative framework developed in the earlier Abkhaz mobilization cycles remained critical in the post-war period. The Abkhaz victory in the war reflects the achievement of the decades-long struggle against Georgian domination discussed in this dissertation. The Abkhaz post-war defence of this victory around which post-war mobilization for violence was structured is placed within this historical trajectory of conflict. This section demonstrates the continued importance of the latent normative framework by focusing on the normative and social basis of mobilization for violence in post-war Abkhazia. I address the intra-Abkhaz aspect of the framework in the post-war period and then turn to the inter-group relations involved in post-war mobilization and protracted violence.

#### **7.3.1 Intra-Abkhaz Norms and Understandings in Post-War Violent Mobilization**

Chapter 6 argued that the intra-Abkhaz norms and understandings developed in the pre-war period toward Abkhazia as the motherland (patriotism, heroism, and masculinity) and the Abkhaz as the group (reciprocity, honor, and conformity to custom) with a historical right to it affected the retention of Abkhaz fighters during the war by legitimizing the creation of the Abkhaz army as an official state structure of Abkhazia. The outcome of the war was then viewed by the Abkhaz as the victory of the state liberation force against the aggressive Georgian invader. Given this victory, the Abkhaz began building their emergent *de facto* state, which had to be subsequently defended.

Post-war violent mobilization by the Abkhaz can thus be best seen as an effort to defend the aims embedded in the intra-Abkhaz norms and understandings of history and identity. I argue that in essence it reflects the continued struggle in defence of the victories gained in the earlier cycles of mobilization, including the establishment in the pre-war period of control over decision-making by the Abkhaz leadership and of territorial control over Abkhazia as a result of the war. As an Abkhaz activist captures it well, “Our struggle did not end in 1993” (Interview 131, 6 December, 2011).

In line with the intra-Abkhaz norms and emergent understandings toward Abkhazia and the Abkhaz noted above, the Abkhaz generally understand the outcome of the war of 1992-1993 as the restoration of control by the Abkhaz over their historical territory. Referring to the historical record of armed conflict and territorial control over Abkhazia, an Abkhaz commander explains,

We have always fought not for our language or our appearance, but for our territory. Arabs, Mongols, Greeks, Romans all invaded us and we always won. On the land that our people have lived for a thousand years, we cannot be defeated (Interview 78, 15 November, 2011).

The Abkhaz understanding of the Georgian-Abkhaz war as a struggle for this land is oft-noted. An Abkhaz academic cites war-time recollections of a Georgian fighter to demonstrate this point:

During the war I understood why Abkhazia is not Georgia as I saw how the Abkhaz fought for Abkhazia and how we did. I was not the only one to run, many did: Why fight if it is not our land? The Abkhaz went under the bullets and sang. They went to fight for their territory (Interview 137, 7 December, 2011).

This stylized description of combat is common among Abkhaz fighters (Chapters 5-6; Khodzhaa, 2003; 2006; 2009), as is their view of the territorial aspect of the Abkhaz victory. As a fighter says, “The freeing of Abkhazia was along the Ingur. This was our territory” (Interview 53, 8 November, 2011). Mothers of killed fighters consistently emphasize this aspect. “We are consoled only by the fact that our children fought for our land,” a mother explains (Interview 102, 23 November, 2011).

The clarity of the concept of *our* as opposed to *their* territory is reflected in the constant use of maps by Abkhaz respondents in the interview process. “These are Georgian villages. Here is our territory,” a city mayor demarcates the post-war Abkhaz border (Interview 60, 9 November, 2011). The Abkhaz understand this territory of Abkhazia won in the Georgian-Abkhaz war as the basis of their emergent state. As an Abkhaz commander confirms, “This is our territory. We know our state border” (Interview 127, 1 December, 2011). The Abkhaz contrast the freedom associated with their restored statehood with the infringement of their rights to this territory in the past. “Before we were hosts of our land,” an Abkhaz activist says, “but without rights” (Interview 64, 9 November, 2011).

The post-war period is, correspondingly, perceived by the Abkhaz as the period of both the restoration of their deeply cherished right to independent Abkhazia through their victory in the war and defence of this right from Georgia. Minister of Culture confirms: “After the war we were faced with the situation where we had to defend and save our culture” (Interview 15, 1 November, 2011). The need to defend Abkhazia from further attacks by Georgian armed actors in the post-war period comes out strongly from the interviews with fighters. “We could not fully control our territory,” the Abkhaz say (Interview 40, 4 November, 2011); “[The Gal/i region is] huge and difficult to control” (Interview 20, 2 November, 2011); “We did not control a part of the Kodor Valley, stopped in Lata due to the difficult conditions” (Interview 127, 1 December, 2011). As the earlier sections showed, Georgian infiltration into Abkhazia was, therefore, constant. Moreover, the threat of a new war was ever-present. “They just could not accept that Abkhazia is our territory,” reservists say (Interview 81, 15 November, 2011); “Georgians were always convinced that this was their territory. “We will return to win back this territory, we are many,” they threatened” (Interview 60, 9 November, 2011).

The Abkhaz thus often say: “The war ended in 1993, but our borders were still not safe. We sent our regular army and *militsija* [police] to protect them” (Interview 30, 2 November, 2011). The Abkhaz who guarded the border underscore the state status of the border and the ownership of the territory they protected after the war. “I went to guard the state border,” many report (Interview 44, 4 November, 2011); “Our function was to guard our territory” (Interview 24, 2 November, 2011). This refers not only to the ongoing low-scale activity at the border, but also large-scale fighting and potential renewal of war in the post-war period. Abkhaz social leaders confirm: “Every little piece of land that we have... is our territory... How can we give up the boundaries that we have protected for so long? We will not give up our territory” (Interview 76, 13, November, 2011); “It is our land. We have nowhere to go and will defend it until the last Abkhaz” (Interview 56, 8 November, 2011).

For the Abkhaz then, violence in the post-war period can be easily separated into the regular and irregular attacks by the Georgian side and the Abkhaz defence from these attacks. Respondents often say: “Georgians entered our territory, executed attacks, killings; the international community knew we had no fault in this—we were attacked and defended” (Interview 58, 9 November, 2011); “We did not do anything harmful to anyone, did not violate borders, did not carry out terrorist acts. Even when Chechens came [to the Kodor/i area in 2001] we defended” (Interview 65, 9 November, 2011). The Abkhaz *cleaning* operations and expulsion of the local Georgian population at the end of the war and after it are equally seen as measures of defence. The Abkhaz involvement in post-war violence from this perspective was aimed at freeing Abkhazia from Georgian armed elements, which included the locals who participated in the violence against the Abkhaz in both the war and post-war periods. Fighters involved in the operations and civilians commonly explain: “Those who did not fight [against us] during the war can return” (Interview 131, 6 December, 2011); “Those who fought, took up weapons, shot, robbed us, they then signed into [Georgian] armed formations after the war” (Interview 126, 1 December, 2011); “Our operation[s]... were to not let Georgian armed formations enter or stay on the territory of Abkhazia” (Interview 44, 4 November, 2011).

Defence measures undertaken by the Abkhaz in support of their normative commitment to Abkhazia and the Abkhaz and the victories they gained in the previous cycles of mobilization were clearly detrimental not only to Georgian armed actors, but also to the Georgian civilian population, as displacement and casualty figures among the locals demonstrate. However, two factors strongly indicate that the defence of their hard-won territory was at the core of mobilization for violence by the Abkhaz in the post-war period. First, the Abkhaz did not attempt capturing parts of Georgia in the course of their post-war military operations. Occasionally, they crossed into Georgia as a result of these operations. For example, in March, 1994, they occupied two villages in Georgia for a short

time as part of the *cleaning* operation. In August, 2008, they approached Georgia while driving out the remaining Georgian forces from the Kodori Gorge. Nevertheless, none of these areas remained under the Abkhaz control as the aim of the Abkhaz was not territorial advance, but rather protection of what they understood as the “only land they had” won in the war. Fighters and civilians confirm: “We did not have any other idea than freeing our territory” (Interview 58, 9 November, 2011); “We did not have any military actions beyond Abkhazia. This territory was Georgian” (Interview 127, 1 December, 2011); “in 2008 [president] Bagapsh was offered to join the war with South Ossetia and go on [Georgia’s] Mingrelia but Bagapsh rejected... We were defending from the aggression [and] are not an aggressive population that is clearing its nearby territories” (Interview 128, 1 December, 2011); “when we took Kodori we could cross the Ingur, but we said we could not accept that. Russia could do that, but not us... We defended our own territory” (Interview 110, 26 November, 2011). The raising of the Abkhaz flag after these operations in places where the Abkhaz saw the historical boundary of Abkhazia was both symbolic and defensive. As Kodori was taken, for example, “the Georgian flag was stripped down and the State flag of the Republic of Abkhazia was put up” there (Pachulija, 2010: 403). As a commander argues, “the main aspect of the state is the flag. Try putting a Russian flag here, no one will cross. Same with the Abkhaz” (Interview 60, 9 November, 2011).

The Georgian-Abkhaz post-war violence thus took place within the territory considered by the Abkhaz to be their own, concentrated in the border areas as Georgian armed actors did not have ready access to the rest of Abkhazia. As fighters and civilians argue, “Mostly this was contained at the border” (Interview 27, 2 November, 2011); “There was no diversionist activity on the territory of Abkhazia, only at the border” (Interview 77, 15 November, 2011); “they carried out diversionist activities in Gal, there was nothing like that in Sukhum, Gagra” (Interview 58, 9 November, 2011); “[The rest of Abkhazia] is far from Georgia” (Interview 119, 29 November, 2011).



The second important factor is that post-war mobilization and violence greatly subsided as the Abkhaz captured the whole of the territory that they considered to be historically Abkhaz, that is, the Kodori Gorge, and established greater control over this territory with the help of Russia. If post-war violent mobilization by the Abkhaz had not been for the defence of their land, the Abkhaz would continue to mobilize for violence even after their establishment of control over it. Yet, post-war violent mobilization by the Abkhaz diminished after 2008. As Abkhaz reservists say, “I was going to the border until 2008” (Interview 36, 3 November, 2011); “After 2008 I did not take part anymore” (Interview 49, 4 November, 2011); “After [2008] Russia sent their units to the border. Peaceful time began, though we still exist as a reserve brigade” (Interview 61, 9 November, 2011); “When we started guarding together with the Russian border forces in 2008, people felt protection and can lead their lives. Before that there were outbreaks [of violence], *cleanings* together with our peoples’ forces. These are now reserve soldiers” (Interview 58, 9 November, 2011).

The Abkhaz commonly report that the situation in the border areas calmed down after 2008. The normative goal of restoration of what the Abkhaz understand as their just rule on the historical Abkhaz territory was achieved by the establishment of control over the whole of Abkhazia in 2008. Georgian armed actors could no longer operate and this basis for violence by the Abkhaz vanished. My interviews strongly support this argument: “After 2008 it has become calmer” (Interview 30, 2 November, 2011); “there were no more outbreaks of violence” (Interview 36, 3 November, 2011); “it calmed down once we were recognized and became an independent Abkhaz state” (Interview 64, 9 November, 2011); “we were recognized 26 August. Every day before that we were provoked” (Interview 61, 9 November, 2011); “Russia is here now and [armed formations] will not be able to go on” (Interview 88, 17 November, 2011); “looting, marauding is no longer possible” (Interview 33, 3 November, 2011); “The security situation is better” (Interview 134, 6 December, 2011).

Hence, the taking of Kodor/i, which the Abkhaz refer to as the freeing of Abkhazia's whole territory, and the recognition that followed can be understood as a logical conclusion to the struggle for the right to Abkhazia that the Abkhaz have engaged in for many decades. Fighters and civilians confirm: "We are finally controlling all territory of Abkhazia" (Interview 148, 14 December, 2011); "We gained control over our territory" (Interview 58, 9 November, 2011). The Abkhaz understand the establishment of control over the whole of Abkhazia as an essential part of statehood, supported by Russia's recognition and further state-building by the Abkhaz. The violence before it, in turn, is viewed as a way to deny them this statehood. "It was done for Abkhazia not to be recognized. How can you recognize a state that cannot control its territory fully?" (Interview 40, 4 November, 2011).

The Abkhaz associate restoration of "the Abkhaz as the only legitimate power in Abkhazia" and the culmination of their struggle with Russia's 2008 recognition (Interview 119, 29 November, 2011). "Russia until the end did not want to recognize us," they suggest, "When they realized they could no longer be guarantors as they became a side in the conflict, they had no other option. They had to recognize us" (Interview 131, 6 December, 2011). The Abkhaz relate the recognition to the improvement of security and life in general: "The situation changed in 2008 with the agreement on friendship, cooperation, joint border protection. We started thinking of life, education" (Interview 134, 6 December, 2011). The following quote by a regular Abkhaz man who fought in the war and continued his mobilization to defend the border after captures the Abkhaz view of the recognition:

Life is much better now... We have elections of deputies, the president; there is opposition, power, people... We live on tourism. There is no production, but we can develop winter tourism..., good service, infrastructure... After the recognition, many turned their face to us. Before Georgia was in all the negotiations with Russia and the UN. They did not let us in (Interview 50, 4 November, 2011).<sup>312</sup>

Overall, decades of Abkhaz mobilization and latent normative framework evolution came together in this recognition of *de facto* Abkhaz statehood, largely ending norm-based violent mobilization.

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<sup>312</sup> New challenges as well arose with isolation and dependence on Russia cited most commonly. See, e.g., ICG (2010).

### 7.3.2 Inter-Group Social Relations in Post-War Violent Mobilization

While the Abkhaz post-war mobilization for violence is to a large extent motivated by what appears to be a righteous normative commitment to their motherland and the group that they belong to, it only negatively affected the Georgian population in the areas where the violence occurred.<sup>313</sup> Chapter 4 discussed in detail the deterioration of social relations between the Georgian and Abkhaz groups in Abkhazia and polarization of society as a result. Following the war the Georgian-Abkhaz social relations collapsed entirely. The Abkhaz expelled most of the population for fighting against them in 1992-1993. The situation was more complicated with returning Gal/i inhabitants: their war participation was not widespread. Yet, many had relations with Georgians who fought against the Abkhaz in the war and continued to engage in violence after. As sections above discussed, actors in post-war violence included former Georgian residents of Abkhazia. A complex picture of post-war relations emerged in this border area, consolidated in a new practice of strategic collaboration.<sup>314</sup>

Section 7.2 discussed in depth the composition of the regular and irregular armed actors on the Georgian and Abkhaz sides involved in post-war violence in the border areas. I now briefly turn to the social structure of violence in the contested areas between the armed actors to the sides of the border and the local population. As noted above, the Abkhaz were unable to fully control the border allowing infiltration by the Georgian guerrillas. As Abkhaz border guards say, “The border is long and we were few, there were gaps between us” (Interview 73, 12 November, 2011); “There are 80 km from the sea to the mountains, it was difficult to close it off” (Interview 47, 4 November, 2011). In this situation of contested control, both parties sought collaboration from the local population—the Abkhaz forces to keep control of the territory, the Georgian armed groups to challenge it. This collaboration made much of the post-war mobilization and violence in Abkhazia possible.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> Mingrels and Svans populate Gal/i and Kodor/i respectively. I use the term “Georgian” to combine both categories.

<sup>314</sup> Due to the lack of presence by the Abkhaz in Kodor/i, the Abkhaz did not engage with the local population there.

<sup>315</sup> This argument closely follows Kalyvas’ (2006) control-collaboration logic. See also Kalyvas (2012).

Early in the post-war period the Abkhaz terrified the locals who returned to the Gal/i region. “Georgians mobilized them to fight,” an Abkhaz commander admits, “As we came, we did horrors, too” (Interview 20, 2 November, 2011). Abkhaz fighters arriving to guard the border were poorly equipped and unpaid.<sup>316</sup> “They had no one to feed them, of course, they went into the houses asking for things. If not given, they took what they needed by force” (Interview 12, 31 October, 2011). “At first, relations with the locals were poor. Reservists were uncontrollable,” a commander concludes (Interview 20, 2 November, 2011). With time the Abkhaz attempted improving the relations. “We gathered the locals,” fighters say (Interview 20, 2 November, 2011); “Some ran away, not knowing what intentions we had, some welcomed us with bread and salt” (Interview 24, 2 November, 2011). Gal/i residents were hired into the Abkhaz political, economic, and social structures. “Mingrelians were made heads of their village administrations,” a Georgian expert corroborates (Interview 164, 24 April, 2013). However, the Abkhaz-built institutions, especially the rule of law, were very weak initially. “Even when the police [was] accessible, Gali residents [were] reluctant to turn to them because it [left] them vulnerable to retribution from Georgian armed elements” (IDMC, 2012: 62).

The Abkhaz sought information from the locals on activities of these armed elements. “The locals told us where someone crossed,” an Abkhaz commander reports (Interview 20, 2 November, 2011). “We got information from the locals that their commanders arrived and were laying mines” (Interview 33, 3 November, 2011). This information was key for the *cleaning* operations, but it was generally understood that “the population was not reliable” (Interview 20, 2 November, 2011). The Georgian guerrillas stayed and “hid weapons among the locals and in abandoned houses; the locals changed at night and participated in their activities” (Interview 32, 3 November, 2011). “The locals were punished for that,” the Abkhaz say (Interview 94, 18 November, 2011); “we went into houses, cleared them, created a mass psychosis among the population” (Interview 20, 2 November, 2011).

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<sup>316</sup> Most Abkhaz post-war mobilization took place in the conditions of poverty created by the economic blockade.

Fear experienced by the locals was only increased by Georgian guerrilla groups. While they were meant to fight for the interests of Georgia and Georgians in the area, “groups that crossed the river worked to keep the population in fear” (Interview 20, 2 November, 2011). The locals lived in the conditions of violence. The key targets were the Abkhaz, that is, the police and regular soldiers and reservists (prohibited in the 12 km security zone but partaking in all major Abkhaz operations). To defend Gal/i from infiltrations after the war, these Abkhaz forces traveled to the border in small groups for their shifts, each group guarding a part of the border at a time. As Abkhaz border guards explain, “We took shifts to go guard the border, went for 10 days, changed zones to cover the most vulnerable places” (Interview 36, 3 November, 2011); “I went with the team in January, 1994, and April, 1994, 10 days at a time, until the next shift came. We were in fear, too. We could have died” (Interview 42, 4 November, 2011); “We went for 11 days, arrived in shifts..., guarded a particular part to obstruct the infiltrations of the Georgian armed forces” (Interview 44, November, 2011).

When the assigned group drove to the border, it was easy to spot them along the main road leading to Gal/i. The Georgian guerrillas took advantage of this vulnerable position. As Section 7.2 noted, they laid mines along the road. “It was very dangerous to go to the border. There were mines everywhere” (Interview 34, 3 November, 2011). Explosions were common: “A bus and a car blew up, our boys were going to their shift. While the road is all soil, it is a dream of a diversionist to put a mine [since i]t cannot be seen there” (Interview 60, 9 November, 2011); “A group went to change the shift, head of the administration drove men... with provisions. They were blown up” (Interview 49, 4 November, 2011). This was not the only repertoire of violence used by the Georgian guerrillas against the Abkhaz targets. Ambushes were also widespread and followed “a typical scenario: our group left for the border. They waited by the road to ambush our car, then fired, threw grenades, and used machine guns. We fought back” (Interview 33, 3 November, 2011).

While the Abkhaz were the primary targets of the Georgian armed groups operating in the area, among those targeted were as well Gal/i residents. This was especially the case with regard to the locals who took official positions in the Abkhaz political, economic, and social structures noted above and collaborated with the Abkhaz in other ways, for example, by feeding the Abkhaz border guards and, most significantly, offering the information on the activities of the Georgian guerrillas. Georgian guerrilla groups actively sought the information on the Gal/i locals who provided support to the Abkhaz forces. As a Georgian official working on this issue reports, “People were punished by paramilitary groups for collaborating with the Abkhaz” (Interview 166, 26 April, 2013). Similar measures to those used against the Abkhaz were undertaken in response to this collaboration. The most common way to punish the targeted locals was laying mines where their vehicles passed. The July, 1994, explosions of cars of the Gal/i administration where many locals worked are examples. As a commander says, “Even the population was blown up” (Interview 20, 2 November, 2011).

Gal/i residents who did not necessarily collaborate with the Abkhaz, either officially or not, were as well implicated by the Georgian armed elements. A central aspect of the functioning of the Georgian guerrillas was their need for a support base among the population returning to Abkhazia in order to carry out their activities. As noted above, these groups were partially drawn from former residents of Abkhazia who fought against the Abkhaz in 1992-1993 and often had personal ties to the local population. The Georgian guerrillas utilized this population in a number of ways.

First, the very crossing of the border could be challenging for the groups lacking knowledge of the local terrain. The Ingur/i River is characterized by areas of varying difficulty for crossing and Abkhaz patrol. Some areas are shallower and can be easily crossed, others are not. Furthermore, the Abkhaz had gaps in their patrolling, but not everywhere. Local knowledge of the terrain, especially where the Ingur/i can be safely crossed and a hiding place found, was necessary for these groups to

go unnoticed by the Abkhaz border patrol. As an Abkhaz fighter who served at the border explains,

People who have lived in a particular area for over 30 years know all the paths. Even the river Ingur could be crossed without having wetted your knees. There were such places and also others where you could be washed away (Interview 44, 4 November 2011).

Gal/i residents were thus used as guides and for precise information on the Abkhaz patrol patterns.

“Without local guides, no one would be able to cross,” a leading journalist focused on the area says (Interview 147, 14 December 2011). The crossing was only one aspect of the guerrilla operations.

Second, to correctly time the mining of the road and plan the ambushes against the Abkhaz, the Georgian guerrillas required the information on when, where, and in what capacity the Abkhaz armed forces were located and could be acted upon. In these planning and reconnaissance tasks, the local knowledge was once again indispensable. As a Georgian official says, “[The locals] know by heart where they can pass, where the patrol stands, and at what time it will appear” (Interview 165, 25 April, 2013). A respondent in close service of Abkhazia’s first president Ardzinba corroborates:

How informed they were! Being [in Georgia], they knew everything. They knew who lived where, who remained, who was kicked out, who did what... As if they had plans of streets, their houses. Our boys who were kidnapped learned that (Interview 12, 31 October, 2011).

An Abkhaz commander adds: “They would infiltrate a man from the population to work in the local *militsija* [police], gain trust, and get the necessary information” (Interview 20, 2 November, 2011).

Finally, the Georgian guerrillas needed a hiding place before and after their planned action. As noted earlier, they often stayed in the locals’ houses, especially if they could not escape after an ambush or mine laying, and stockpiled weapons there. “Partisans were hiding in homes; they knew someone and used that, hid in the warm houses, then ran” (Interview 25, 2 November 2011); “They hid among the peaceful civilians” (Interview 87, 17 November, 2011); “The locals supported them, said no, but in reality they hid in their houses” (Interview 36, 3 November, 2011); “They would not be able to hide or stockpile their weapons without this support” (Interview 132, 6 December 2011).

It is not surprising then that the Abkhaz punished the locals for their collaboration with the Georgian armed actors. The Abkhaz counterinsurgency-like *cleaning* operations meant to clear the terrain and neutralize the Georgian armed actors directly responded to these collaboration patterns. In their house-to-house searches, the Abkhaz targeted not only the Georgian guerrillas, but also the locals suspected to be implicated in the guerrilla activities. As a result, both suffered. The Georgian guerrillas were often caught, with former residents of Abkhazia who fought against the Abkhaz in the war found among these groups. The locals were again displaced and their houses were burned. In March, 1994, for example, when the Abkhaz combed the lower zone in Gal/i, not only the armed groups were pushed out, but also houses were burned and thousands of locals once again displaced. Those suspected of collaboration with Georgian armed groups suffered the most. As UN observers say, “the Abkhaz were doing what needed to be done: rooting out the guerrillas with overwhelming force and depriving them of their base of support. That meant destroying the rebuilt homes of suspected guerrilla supporters” (Goltz, 2006: xxii). Former Gal/i residents confirm these reports: “Seven people were killed on 5 February, 1994. My father was there and died, but the Abkhaz said they only killed partisans... I escaped to Zugdidi, [Georgia], and watched our houses burn” (Focus group, 2 May, 2013). Deterring further collaboration was the goal, Georgian respondents argue:

Under the pretense of anti-partisan operations, they killed everyone. This way it was easier to hold the population in fear... If partisans stayed somewhere and it was found out, not only this house, but the whole street was burned (Focus group, 2 May, 2013).

Both sets of armed actors thus gained collaboration from the locals in post-war Gal/i. While some support was voluntary, by virtue of relation to the guerrillas or official position in the Abkhaz structures, most was coerced as the locals were targeted in both the Georgian guerrilla violence and the Abkhaz *cleaning* operations. Regardless, this support was vital for both sides—to hold and gain greater control over the territory for the Abkhaz and challenge this control for the Georgian forces.



Changes in the patterns of violence support the importance of local collaboration for violent mobilization in post-war Abkhazia. The situation in the area changed twice, with the establishment of greater control over the Gal/i region by the Abkhaz forces in 1998 and after the Abkhaz Kodor/i operation of 2008 and subsequent Abkhaz-Russian border fortification. After the events of 1998 in Gal/i, the patterns of violence shifted to the Kodor/i Gorge. Low-scale violence continued, but was more isolated, and there were no more large-scale episodes. These took place in Kodor/i thereafter. This was not only due to the increased Abkhaz presence in Gal/i, but also because the Georgian forces no longer received extensive collaboration from the locals there. The geography of violence changed, an Abkhaz official explains, “because we managed to establish order there and the local population turned their face to us. They stopped providing information to the Georgian side. And there no longer was such information that would surprise us” (Interview 70, 11 November, 2011). Greater local collaboration with the Abkhaz thus helped the Abkhaz consolidate control over the area. Correspondingly, the Abkhaz violence against the local population, previously motivated by the local support for the Georgian side, subsided after this change in the collaboration patterns. As Abkhaz fighters say, “We often had *cleaning* operations prior to 1998. 1998 was the biggest one... After that they were fewer and fewer” (Interview 24, 2 November, 2011). This violence further subsided with the border fortification of 2008. As a journalist working on the Gal/i issues explains,

When there exist rules about crossing the border, the mindset changes. It is a boundary for security now. People used to be afraid that the war would restart. As the border is fortified, professional contingent stands there. People are not as afraid. If before they would not, now some call and say that someone was robbed in Gal (Interview 147, 14 December, 2011).<sup>317</sup>

Problems in Gal/i remain, but the situation largely improved. The following quote captures it well:

Locals cooperating with us are stigmatized as enemies of Georgia. Instead of overthrowing this power, they help. But people live in this country, need to have normal relations with the administration... We did not have a strategy toward Gal, there was a loyalty problem that is now being solved by addressing problems of security (Interview 119, 29 November, 2011).

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<sup>317</sup> However, serious problems remain, for example, restrictions on passports among Gal/i residents. See HRW (2011).

Overall, post-war inter-group relations in Abkhazia thus involved two Georgian groups—fighters who fought in the 1992-1993 war against the Abkhaz, who were not allowed to return, and many of whom joined Georgian guerrilla groups; and Georgian residents who returned to the border areas. While the norms of inter-group conflict and violence developed in the pre-war period and solidified in the war defined Abkhaz relations with the former, a new practice of collaboration emerged with the latter in the normative context of the Abkhaz defence of their emergent *de facto* statehood.

### 7.3.3 A Comment on External Factors

While my argument emphasizes the normative and social foundations of post-war violence, external factors, including state weakness, political settlement, destabilization, and external actors, have been the focus of Georgian-Abkhaz research.<sup>318</sup> These logics, I argue, do not engage the local violent dynamics and, hence, the patterns of violent mobilization remain insufficiently understood.

First, Georgia's state weakness, its inability to control the legitimate use of violence and the whole of its territory, is seen as crucial for understanding armed actors' mobilization and protracted post-war violence (Interview 151, 3 April, 2013; Interview 160, April 20, 2013; Fairbanks, 1995). Darchiashvili and Nodia (2003: 18), for example, attribute activities of "Georgian partisan groups ... in the conflict zone" to state weakness. Hence, Nodia (2004: 12) argues, "strengthening the state is... a priority for [Georgia's] governments." Important to an overall understanding of the case, this factor, however, is too broad to account for the variation in type, location, and timing of violence or changes in Georgia's state capacity over time.<sup>319</sup> While Georgia's state grew stronger with changes in domestic politics and Western support, border violence continued apace.<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> No study to date explores post-war mobilization and violence in Abkhazia. Studies noting these processes have acknowledged the mass displacement, looting, and marauding carried out by armed actors against the local population immediately after the war and the recurrence of full-scale armed fighting in 1998, but have not addressed the ongoing violence. See Zverev (1996); Coppieters (2000). Exceptions include Fairbanks (1995, 2002); Walker (1998).

<sup>319</sup> See, for example, Darchiashvili (2004, 2005, 2006); Coppieters and Legvold (2005); Papava (2013); Light (2014).

<sup>320</sup> This logic is also endogenous. State weakness may have contributed to post-war mobilization and violence (Nodia, 1998: 39; Cornell, 2000: 334-6), but it has to a large extent been shaped by these processes. As Zürcher (2007: 147) says, "[t]he story of the Georgian wars is the story of a weak transition state quickly degenerating into a failed state."

The lack of a political settlement is as well attributed responsibility for the protracted nature of the conflict. “If no such agreement is reached,” Walker (1998: 20-21) suggests prior to the 1998 relapse into large-scale fighting, “[a] future leader of Georgia, may well eventually decide to order the Georgian army to occupy Gali.” Commenting on arms availability, Darchiashvili (2003a: 32) corroborates that “if even tentative settlements are reached..., the problem of uncontrolled arms is unlikely to remain so potent.” While mutual mistrust would not vanish, a settlement could change the situation on the ground (Gurgulia, 1999). Yet, reaching it is extremely challenging in this case. It had formerly been plausible for the two sides to enter a federative arrangement (Coppieters et al., 2000), but this window of opportunity drastically narrowed as compromises were not forthcoming, positions hardened on the issues of the return of the displaced persons and Abkhazia’s status, and the Abkhaz leadership continued to build the *de facto* political, economic, and social institutions of Abkhazia in isolation from Georgia. This left both parties perceiving any potential settlement to be a zero sum game, which would involve either the recognition of Abkhazia by Georgia, or giving up some or all territory the Abkhaz had won in the war with heavy losses. Neither option seems likely.

In either case, it could be expected that parties dissatisfied with the result would continue to mobilize for violence to attain their objectives. According to the literature on recidivism, political settlements allow the sides to retain combat capacity, while victory results in the disarming of the defeated side (Quinn et al., 2007: 171). The Abkhaz victory did not lead to Georgia’s disarmament. As Mason et al. (2011: 173) argue, “the postwar environment following a rebel victory is different from that established by a government victory.” Having been defeated in the war, Georgia as a state has been building its formerly weak army, used in many episodes of post-war violence, including the 1998 recidivism.<sup>321</sup> Local Georgians who fought in the war and joined guerrilla groups would also continue to mobilize despite a settlement as the Abkhaz firmly prohibited them from returning.

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<sup>321</sup> On Georgia’s army-building, see Darchiashvili (2004, 2005a, 2006).

Post-war violence by Georgian armed actors can thus be seen as the defeated side's attempt to destabilize its enemy. This logic resonates in and outside of Abkhazia (Interview 119, December 29, 2011; Khintba, 2003; Markedonov, 2008; Lynch, 2004). A United Nations report suggests that violence by Georgian groups infiltrating Abkhazia is "carried out... [to] destabiliz[e] the situation" (S/1995/10: para. 28). According to this logic, Georgia could benefit from the continuously volatile Abkhaz border. Destabilized Abkhazia, said to be unable to control its borders, cannot be seen as a potentially sovereign state. This logic, however, does not account for Georgia's internal divisions regarding Abkhazia. It treats Georgia as a unitary actor with a singular vision for Abkhazia, while forces within Georgia have disagreed on the solution to the problem. For instance, Georgia's leader Shevardnadze perceived Russia's assistance to be a way to subdue Abkhazia (Interview 151, April 3, 2013). For others, Georgia's paramilitary groups had to carry out the task of returning Abkhazia. For example, as the Union for the Liberation of Abkhazia led a 700-strong armed unit in an attempt to retake Abkhazia in 1995, official Georgia prevented this from happening (*Wheatley*, 2005: 87).

The external actor logic is the final argument drawn from the literature. It is offered in two ways. First, post-war violent mobilization is found to be reduced by third-party security guarantees (Walter, 2001).<sup>322</sup> As Fortna (2008: 9) finds, peacekeepers "reduc[e] uncertainty [and]... control... skirmishes that might otherwise escalate to war." Thus as Russian peacekeepers deployed, Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev noted "he was confident that there would be no further war in Abkhazia" (Fuller, 1994). Yet, this was not the case, as the ongoing low-scale violence and 1998 relapse into fighting took place in the presence of peacekeepers. Autesserre (2007) suggests why peacekeepers generally fail in preventing post-war violence. Insufficient attention paid to local violence is a key factor in this regard. In the Abkhaz case, however, peacekeepers were deployed in the very area of local violence. Post-war violence in this area persisted in spite of their deployment.

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<sup>322</sup> Deployment of peacekeepers is a form of third-party security guarantees discussed here (Walter, 2001: 66).

If the peacekeeping forces (provided by Russia) did not play a significant role in preventing violent mobilization in post-war Abkhazia, the Russian government can be said to have influenced the border situation in the Georgian-Abkhaz case. Hence, in the second variant of the external actor logic, Russia is seen as implicated in the persistence of violent mobilization. “As a former imperial center, Russia is not a neutral third party,” Lynch (2004: 81) argues, “it has become a party that is deeply involved at multiple levels in sustaining a status quo.” This is a strong argument given the reduction in the violence that followed the recognition and assistance given by Russia to Abkhazia in 2008 and subsequently. However, violent mobilization continued even after 2008, although in a different way. This explanation, therefore, does not help us understand *how* and *why* it persisted.

Overall, the four alternative logics presented above, just as the arguments on the Georgian-Abkhaz relations discussed in the previous chapters, focus on the macro-level structural factors and political developments. These explanations leave the dynamics of mobilization and violence on the ground unexplored. This is to a large extent due to the challenges described in Appendix D involved in the micro-level, engaged research with individuals in *de facto* states, such as Abkhazia, but also due to the predominant focus on the macro-level factors in the literature. Given this focus, post-war research advances our understating of structural factors likely to facilitate prevention of violence in post-war cases. At the same time, however, the focus on the macro level means that the variation in post-war mobilization and protracted violence on the ground and important changes in the context that affect these processes are not sufficiently explored. This dissertation has been motivated by the need to uncover the micro-level processes and mechanisms of mobilization both in the Abkhaz case and more generally. It has worked to achieve this outcome through a highly detailed exploration of the patterns of violent mobilization by use of extensive fieldwork data involving participants and non-participants in mobilization and a range of secondary sources. By using these materials, it has highlighted ground-level factors that involve but also go beyond the structural, rationalist accounts.

## 7.4 Summary of Findings

This chapter studied the continued influence of the latent normative framework on post-war mobilization and protracted violence. The patterns of violent mobilization, I found, evolved despite and in parallel to the macro-level political developments, which constitute a focus of most post-war research. I demonstrated that the systematic patterns of mobilization and violence characterized the border area between Georgia and Abkhazia after the war. These patterns developed in 1993-1994 and include the low-scale clashes between the Georgian and Abkhaz regular armed forces and the irregular violence of the Georgian guerrilla groups infiltrating Abkhazia, both retaliated in Abkhaz counterinsurgency-like *cleaning* operations. The large-scale fighting in Gal/i in 1998 and Kodor/i in 2008 unfolded in the context of Abkhaz operations aimed at the establishment of control over the contested areas. I established that these patterns correspond to the regular and irregular components of the war process and represent the localized continuation of the war in the post-war period.

Macro-level political developments alone, I argued, do not help fully explain these patterns. The normative and social structure of violence needs to be understood. In particular, Abkhaz post-war mobilization for violence can be best seen as part of the overall struggle for Abkhaz statehood and defence of the victories gained in the earlier mobilization cycles. Georgian post-war violence from this perspective was undertaken to challenge the Abkhaz right to the territory they consider to be their own; and Abkhaz violent mobilization, including the *cleaning* operations, was undertaken to establish control over the whole of the historical territory of Abkhazia and become a more viable state. In essence, the patterns of violence in post-war Abkhazia are part of the process of formation of the Abkhaz state. In this process, the norms of inter-group conflict and violence were cemented regarding Georgians who mobilized against the Abkhaz in and after the war and collaboration with returning Georgians became a new strategic practice. It was essential for violent patterns to persist, as the Abkhaz violence subsided with greater control and reduced collaboration with the other side.

## **Chapter 8: Conclusion**

This dissertation has been motivated by a range of puzzling mobilization decisions made by individuals and small groups in the course of conflict. These decisions are captured as four puzzles of violent mobilization across the conflict cycle and explored to understand the core question of the dissertation—mobilization in civil war. Rationalist, structural explanations do not fully account for potential mobilizers' decisions to assume high-risk mobilization roles in the context of inter-group violence. Hence, the dissertation offers the normative, socially-embedded approach to mobilization across the pre-, civil war, and post-war stages in the conflict cycle and develops conceptually and theoretically the latent normative framework activation mechanism to explain mobilization at the civil war onset stage. This analysis is based on extensive primary and secondary materials collected through fieldwork over 2010-2013 primarily in Abkhazia, but also in Georgia and Russia. With this data, the dissertation traces in detail the process of Abkhaz mobilization across the pre-war (1921-1992), civil war (1992-1993), and post-war (1993-2008) stages of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. It demonstrates that an understanding of the normative and social basis of individual and small group decisions in conflict greatly advances our understanding of high-risk, violent mobilization and civil war more generally. In turn, fine-grained, grounded research with participants and non-participants in mobilization is necessary to get at the normative and social processes underlying mobilization.

This concluding chapter discusses the implications of this research for our understanding of mobilization and civil war, its contributions to the literature, and directions for future research. The first section reflects on my theory and mechanism and addresses specific contributions with regard to civil war, mobilization, the case of Abkhazia, and research methods. This section captures my findings and their generalizability. The second section suggests avenues for future research, first, for the studies of civil war and then for further development of concepts and theoretical arguments advanced in the dissertation and use of primary and secondary materials gathered for this research.

## **8.1 Implications and Contributions**

### **8.1.1 Theory and Mechanism**

The main contribution of this dissertation to the research on civil war is the development of the normative, socially-embedded approach to the study of civil war in general and in particular the latent normative framework activation mechanism to explain mobilization at the onset of civil war. The discussion of the implications and contributions of this dissertation thus opens with a summary of my theoretical approach and mechanism and their application beyond the case of Abkhazia.

#### **8.1.1.1 Normative and Socially-Embedded Approach**

The basic theoretical argument of the dissertation is that in order to understand the processes of civil war, we need to understand in depth the normative and social foundations of individual and small group decisions in civil war. To systematically study these factors, the dissertation advances the normative, socially-embedded theoretical approach to mobilization across the cycle of conflict. The approach specifies relevant normative and social factors underlying individual and small group decisions in civil war and ways in which these factors interact to produce high-risk civil war action.

The concept of the latent normative framework for action comprises the ideational aspect of the normative, socially-embedded theoretical approach. The concept has a tri-partite structure. Pre-existing social norms, emergent understandings of history and identity, and prescription for action they yield constitute the normative foundation for action in this approach. While pre-existing social norms ingrain in potential mobilizers the sense of belonging and duty to their collectivity, emergent understandings of history and identity fill in the content of what their collectivity's interests are at a particular time in conflict and how to act upon them if the collectivity is at risk. By emphasizing the evolution of this normative framework across the conflict cycle, the normative, socially-embedded approach places individual and small group civil war decisions in a historical trajectory of conflict and helps generate a deeper understanding of mobilization in civil war and civil war more broadly.



The approach, furthermore, situates individual and small group civil war decisions within a social context, in which potential mobilizers are embedded. It is comprised of the micro, meso, and macro levels of the social structure. The levels are theorized as institutional contexts of interaction and operationalized as micro-level, quotidian networks, meso-level, village, town, and city bodies, and macro-level, national elite. By theorizing and systematically treating these levels as they relate to individual and small group civil war decisions, the normative, socially-embedded approach goes beyond a focus on either meso-level, community structures (see, for example, Petersen, 2001), or macro-level, national leadership structures (see, for example, Kaufman, 2001). It focuses attention on decisions of regular men and women while accounting for their micro-, meso-, and macro-level social positioning. This approach thus accommodates mobilization mechanisms beyond top-down community sanctions or manipulation of history by national elite to motivate potential mobilizers.

Each level of society in the normative, socially-embedded approach plays a role in shaping the normative framework for action, inducing individuals and small groups into its relevant norms, and conveying a sense of threat when the collectivity is at risk (see Section 8.1.1.2 below). In these ways the normative and social factors interact in producing high-risk mobilization in civil war. By specifying these interactions, the approach incorporates both top-down and bottom-up processes of mobilization. It views the normative framework for action as constructed through time and treats its perception by potential mobilizers—rather than merely community reinforcement or manipulation by national leaders—as key to their civil war decisions. While recognizing the constraining effects of top-down mechanisms, the approach highlights the positive impact of norms and understandings as constituting potential mobilizers' identity and thus affecting their mobilization. Resulting action at the three levels of the social structure, in turn, shapes the normative framework. The relationship between agents and structure in this approach is, therefore, one of mutual constitution, which opens opportunities for analyzing agent to agent, agent to structure, and structure to agent interactions.

Overall, the normative, socially-embedded approach offers a framework for systematically studying the processes of violent conflict with an emphasis on its normative and social foundations. I argue that without a grounded understanding of these factors it is difficult to get at individual and small group decisions critical to the course of conflict, especially when these decisions involve high risks for potential mobilizers. This dissertation demonstrates the value of this approach through the case of Abkhazia—an understudied case of civil war and a breakaway territory of Georgia since the war of 1992-1993. Rationalist and structural theories do not fully account for the puzzling outcomes of mobilization by the Abkhaz. The former clarify mobilization where expectations of security and other rewards for participation exist, but cannot explain it where there is little prospect of either; the latter specify a context of mobilization, but cannot account for its variation. High-risk mobilization is insufficiently explained by these theories. The normative, socially-embedded approach provides a convincing alternative and better informed understanding of the case. It helps uncover previously overlooked aspects of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict (see Section 8.1.2.3 below) and assess the status of external factors in motivating Abkhaz mobilization, seen as key in the Georgian-Abkhaz studies.

External factors, on their own, were insufficient to motivate Abkhaz high-risk mobilization. Formation in the pre-war period and ongoing transformation of the normative framework for action in the course of mobilization, the dissertation finds, were central to potential mobilizers' decisions. The pre-war evolution of social norms and understandings of history and identity in the process of Georgian-Abkhaz contention, especially as it turned violent in the late 1980s, prepared the Abkhaz for a possibility of the war. It provided the normative basis for action, supported at the micro, meso, and macro levels of the Abkhaz society, which was activated once the Georgian-Abkhaz war began in 1992 (see Section 8.1.1.2 below). As the war ended, the normative framework affected the ways in which the war outcomes—the Abkhaz victory and expulsion of most Georgians from Abkhazia—were treated and acted upon by the Abkhaz, justifying their continued post-war mobilization.

While it informs Abkhaz mobilization, the normative, socially-embedded approach applies not only to the case of Abkhazia, but also more broadly to the cases of irregular civil war. Three sets of scope conditions should be considered when applying the approach. First, at the micro level, the approach most clearly applies to mobilization where expectations of security and other rewards for participation are meager; yet, individuals and small groups pursue risky action instead of adopting alternative options favored by cost-benefit calculations. Explaining high-risk mobilization in these conditions, I argue, requires an in-depth understanding of the normative and social foundations for action. Second, at the meso level, the approach will apply especially in dense communities: micro-, meso-, and macro-level interactions will be most clearly observed in such communities. Finally, at the macro level, the type of civil war may limit the application of the approach. Territorial conflicts are the most obvious candidates for its use: they typically involve a pattern of evolution of historical claims to a disputed territory. While I find that this approach can be fruitful as a general framework for studying other war types, its application beyond these scope conditions requires further testing.

Within these scope conditions, the approach can help clarify mobilization in cases across a range of contexts. In another Georgian war in South Ossetia in 1991-1992, for example, looking at the evolution of the normative framework for action in the Soviet period, as it was supported across the Ossetian social structures, can help gain a nuanced understanding of the Ossetian claim to South Ossetia separate from Georgia. While South Ossetia did not enjoy the status of the Soviet Socialist Republic even for a short period, as Abkhazia did, and was an autonomous part of Georgia from the outset of the Soviet Union, similar processes of formation and transformation of social norms and understandings of history and identity took place among Ossetians. From fighting on the Bolshevik side prior to the Soviet period and the repression in the economic, political, and especially cultural realms (Ossetian schools were similarly closed, for example) within Soviet Georgia, to inter-group violence of the late 1980s, these norms and understandings consolidated in a claim to independence

and mass Ossetian mobilization against the superior Georgian forces in the Georgian-Ossetian war. As in Abkhazia, rationalist explanations do not fully account for this high-risk mobilization and the external factor of Russian support to the Ossetian side in the war cannot explain why some Ossetian individuals and small groups mobilized while others did not. Understanding these regular men and women's mobilization decisions can advance our understanding of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict.

In a related Eastern European context of Kosovo, it is difficult to understand Albanian pro-independence mobilization, which persisted in the face of repression in the 1980s and even after the deployment of the Serbian and Yugoslav security forces and violence against Albanian fighters and civilians in the late 1990s, without considering the evolution of social norms and understandings of history and identity of Albanians in Kosovo. While Kosovo enjoyed major autonomy within Serbia in the 1970s and Albanians were granted concessions in its administrative institutions, just as the Abkhaz in the late Soviet period in Abkhazia, these concessions were removed and the autonomous status reduced in the 1980s. As in Abkhazia, repression and inter-group violence consolidated the perception of ownership and belonging to Kosovo among Albanians—the overwhelming majority of the population at the time. Elite manipulation of history, while important, does not reflect on this bottom-up, intrinsic aspect of potential mobilizers' motivations to engage in high-risk mobilization. Understanding non-violent and violent Albanian mobilization can be advanced by its incorporation.

While the examples above briefly note the application of the normative, socially-embedded theoretical approach to European contexts, this approach should apply to other cases. I expect it to be useful in the cases of post-Soviet wars, such as Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, and Chechnya, other wars in the former Yugoslavia, and territorial wars outside of Europe, including East Timor, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Algeria, South Sudan, Somalia, and, most recently, Ukraine. In all these cases, a systematic analysis of the normative and social foundations for action can help explain individual and small group decisions to pursue high-risk mobilization and inform broader conflict dynamics.

### **8.1.1.2 Latent Normative Framework Activation Mechanism**

The latent normative framework activation mechanism I advance to explain mobilization at the civil war onset stage is the specific application of the normative, socially-embedded theoretical approach discussed above. Conceptual and theoretical development of the mechanism constitutes my core contribution to the study of individual and small group mobilization decisions in civil war. The mechanism incorporates the normative and social factors specified by the normative, socially-embedded approach and proposes a particular sequence of events leading to mobilization. Notably, while focusing on the normative and social factors in producing mobilization at the civil war onset, the mechanism specifies the conditions under which the rationalist logic of action may override the normative and social motivations for mobilization. The mechanism thus differentiates between the roles adopted by individuals and small groups at the civil war onset and accounts for their variation.

Civil war mobilization in the latent normative framework activation mechanism follows the pattern of formation and transformation of the latent normative framework for action at the pre-war stage and its activation at the stage of civil war onset. The previous section briefly summarized the first phase of the mechanism—formation and transformation of the normative framework. My core finding with regard to this phase is that events of inter-group violence greatly impact the normative framework, consolidating the norms and understandings embedded in it and thus forming the basis for mobilization at the stage of civil war onset. At the second phase of the mechanism—normative framework activation—mobilization is motivated by these norms and understandings and triggered by threat framing at the micro, meso, and macro social levels. In the conditions of great uncertainty presented by the civil war onset, where mobilization decisions need to be made immediately absent sufficient information, threat framing at these social levels is critical for triggering threat perception among potential mobilizers and activating the latent norms, particularly their prescriptive aspect.

The central proposition of this mechanism is that the variation in individual and small group mobilization decisions and roles at the stage of civil war onset depends on how threat is perceived. Self-oriented threat perception among potential mobilizers leads to no-to-low risk mobilization and follows the rationalist logic of action. Individuals and small groups in this scenario flee the fighting, if possible, or collaborate with the stronger side in the war, that is, the side that offers the promise of greater safety or other rewards for participation. In contrast, collectivity-oriented, normative-based threat perception raises potential mobilizers' risk acceptance and produces high-risk mobilization. Individuals and small groups in this scenario mobilize to fight, including on the side that offers little promise of security or other rewards for participation, and the continued influence of the normative framework differentiates them as committed fighters in the course of the war.

The substantive chapters of this dissertation demonstrate that the sequence proposed by the mechanism holds in the case of Abkhazia. The normative framework for action that evolved in the pre-war period included the intra-Abkhaz norms of duty to their collectivity, the inter-group norms of friendship and peace, which shifted toward the counterpart norms of conflict and violence in the course of the conflict, and the emergent understandings of history and identity of the Abkhaz as the group whose ownership of and belonging to Abkhazia prescribed mobilization action in defence of this territory. These norms and understandings were widely cited by the Abkhaz who mobilized to fight on the Abkhaz side despite the predominance of Georgia's forces at the onset of the Georgian-Abkhaz war in 1992. In turn, individual and collective actors at the micro, meso, and macro levels of the social structure framed the Georgian advance into Abkhazia as a threat to Abkhazia and the Abkhaz and thus shaped mobilization decisions. Abkhaz fighters and non-fighters strongly support the importance of threat framing. Most mobilization decisions at the outset of the war were made as a result of threat perception induced at the three social levels. The ensuing variation in mobilization roles in general followed the self- and collectivity-oriented patterns proposed by the mechanism.

Embedded in a complex normative and social context, which places civil war in a historical perspective, the latent normative framework activation mechanism proposes a parsimonious logic of individual and small group mobilization decisions at the onset of civil war. The mechanism gets at the non-rationalist motivations of civil war mobilization where it is poorly predicted by the cost-benefit logic, while integrating both normative- and rationalist-based individual patterns to account for the variation in mobilization outcomes. The implication of the mechanism is that in cases within the scope conditions discussed above, where the latent normative framework for action develops in the pre-war period, individuals and small groups will mobilize for high-risk roles at the war onset if they come to perceive it as threatening to their collectivity. The normative framework thus activates to produce high-risk mobilization. At the most basic level, this means that ideas matter in civil war. The contribution of the latent normative framework activation mechanism to our understanding of mobilization in particular and civil war in general is to specify *how* they matter.

While the dissertation explores the mechanism in the conditions of war onset in the Abkhaz case, its application is not limited to this context. I expect the mechanism to apply more broadly to situations of crisis where the interests of the collectivity or the collectivity as such are at risk. This especially holds for the cases of popular defensive mobilization where attacks or offensives against a group or a territory threaten the group's rights on its territory. Given the presence of the normative framework for action, framing at the micro, meso, and macro social levels and perception of threat among potential mobilizers in these situations should be imperative for individual and small group mobilization decisions. Civil war onset is an example of these conditions. Situations of lower-level violence short of war prior to and after the war and violence in the course of protracted wars can as well be explored through the mechanism. Did norms and threat perception interact as predicted by the mechanism in the Timorese mobilization against the superior Indonesian forces in the 1970s or mobilization in Algeria against the French in the 1950s? The mechanism can inform such cases.

### 8.1.2 Specific Arguments

Along with the broad implications and contributions of the theory and mechanism I develop, this dissertation makes a number of specific conceptual and theoretical arguments that advance our understanding of civil war, mobilization, the understudied case of Abkhazia, and research methods in difficult “post-conflict” settings. The following sections briefly discuss these arguments.

#### 8.1.2.1 Civil War

This dissertation conceptualizes *civil war as part of the broader conflict cycle*, which spans the pre-war, civil war, and post-war stages of conflict. The implications of this dissertation for our understanding of civil war are drawn from this broadened conception. My core argument is that we need to look beyond the period of full-scale fighting, commonly used to distinguish civil wars from lower-level forms of contention, in order to understand the processes of civil war. The substantive chapters of the dissertation demonstrate the value of situating civil war within a historical trajectory of conflict and analyzing in depth the pre-war, civil war, and post-war stages in the conflict cycle.

The preceding sections discussed how this broadened conception of civil war allows us to get at the normative and social processes of conflict. It is difficult to understand the normative and social basis for action in civil war without a grounded understanding of the evolution of norms and understandings of history and identity in the pre-war period, just as it is difficult to understand post-war mobilization without considering the changes to the normative framework for action as a result of the war. Theories that focus on the conditions present at the stage of civil war (see, for example, Weinstein, 2007) fall short in explaining such puzzling outcomes of civil war mobilization as those observed in Abkhazia precisely because they do not incorporate an in-depth analysis of the pre-war evolution of perceptions. The dissertation shows that these perceptions are shaped in the course of pre-war mobilization and are central to individual and small group civil war mobilization decisions. This is the main contribution of the dissertation drawn from the conception of civil war I advance.



By looking systematically at the broader process of conflict with an emphasis on individual and small group mobilization across the conflict cycle, the dissertation draws other key conclusions for the study of civil war. First, in contrast to the arguments that discount pre-war events of violence in the analysis of civil war (see, for example, Kalyvas, 2006), the dissertation illustrates that certain *events of violence relevant to the study of civil war* take place in the pre-war period. In particular, I find that episodes of inter-group violence that emerge in the context of conflict and supersede non-violent contention are critical to explaining individual and small group mobilization in civil war. In general, such episodes are regarded as part of the trajectory of the escalation of conflict to war (see, for example, Davenport et al., 2008). I illustrate that pre-war inter-group violence is not necessarily an indicator of conflict-to-war escalation and problematize the automatic assumption of escalation to war with the onset of pre-war violence as linear (see, for example, Lawrence, 2010). In contrast, the dissertation shows that pre-war inter-group violence events can be related to the overall conflict, but isolated from the civil war. My core finding in this regard is that while the events of inter-group violence in pre-war Abkhazia were rooted in the overall Georgian-Abkhaz conflict and emerged at the micro and meso social levels, they did not escalate further to war. Instead, the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-1993 was commenced as a result of the escalating political tensions at the macro level.

Another implication of the dissertation is that the onset of civil war does not simply depend on a set of structural factors (see, for example, Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; Fearon and Laitin, 2003). An informed understanding of civil war demonstrates that *individual and small group mobilization decisions at the onset of civil war* impact whether a war unfolds or not. If the Georgian advance had not been framed as a threat and the Abkhaz had not mobilized en masse in response to this advance, despite their unlikelihood of success, the war of the observed scale would not have taken place. The basic conclusion is that an analysis of potential mobilizers' decisions can further our understanding of the civil war onset. The dissertation contributes to its study by looking closely at these decisions.

The analysis of mobilization across the conflict cycle, moreover, informs our understanding of *the nature of civil war actors and their tactics* at the outset of the war and in its course. Civil war actors are in general separated into incumbent and insurgent forces and associated with regular and irregular tactics respectively (see, for example, Kalyvas, 2006). The dissertation illustrates that this view of civil war does not accommodate the interplay of these ideal types or the complexities of the changing nature of actors in the course of the war. I find that actors considered to be insurgents and assumed to adopt irregular tactics due to their weakness vis-à-vis the state can combine regular and irregular elements (see, for example, Sanín and Giustozzi, 2010). They can adapt to the realities of civil war in its course (see, for example, Parkinson, 2013). In this process, they can turn into regular armies and develop qualities indispensable to their victory on the battlefield, in particular cohesion (see, for example, Staniland, 2010). The combination at the outset of the Georgian-Abkhaz war of regular and irregular aspects in the Abkhaz force, generally seen as insurgent, and its transition into a largely conventional army in the course of the war support these arguments. Through an in-depth analysis of the civil war process, in which learning from failed battles provided the basis for victory of the emergent Abkhaz army, the dissertation informs actor adaptation and outcomes of civil war.

A related implication of the dissertation is that the common definition of civil war does not accommodate important *differences in the perception of sovereignty* by actors participating in civil war. Sovereignty in the civil war cases is messy: even if a war takes place in a recognized sovereign entity, the populations engaged in the war can perceive a pre-existing dual sovereignty rather than a common authority at the outset of the hostilities, as in the common definition of civil war (Kalyvas, 2006). An important finding of this dissertation is that the perception of dual sovereignty can shape the way in which civil war actors and tactics evolve in the course of the war. Absent this perception, the Abkhaz leadership would not have the legitimacy to form the army. Neither would it be able to portray the war outcome as a just victory by the Abkhaz or build the Abkhaz state on its basis after.

This brings us to the final set of implications and contributions of the dissertation to the civil war literature—related to the post-war stage in the conflict cycle. While the post-war period is often viewed as a peacebuilding phase of the conflict, as the commonly used term “post-conflict” implies (see, for example, Pouligny et al., 2007), I find that the post-war stage is marked by the persistence of violence, which is closely related to the processes of civil war and its normative and social basis. The dissertation demonstrates that the normative framework for action, as it further transformed at the civil war stage, legitimized continued Abkhaz mobilization in the post-war period, even though its negative consequences for the affected Georgian population were apparent. This finding points to *the perverse effects of norms*. The contribution of the dissertation in this regard is to demonstrate how such “ethically [bad] norms” come about and thus highlight “the role of social construction in [violent] conflict and war” (Checkel, 1998: 339).

The dissertation, furthermore, establishes that *the patterns of post-war violence* in Abkhazia resembled the war-time regular and irregular warfare, best understood as the localized continuation of the war into the post-war period. One contribution of the dissertation is the extension of Kalyvas’ (2006) control-collaboration framework to explain these patterns. I find that the new realities of the post-war stage invited collaboration with the Georgian population remaining in the contested areas of Abkhazia. In line with Kalyvas’ framework, violence took place in the areas of contested control and largely ended as full control over these areas was established by the post-war Abkhaz forces.

Overall, the three sets of arguments drawn from the broader conception of civil war—on the importance of pre-war violence, the nature and tactics of civil war actors and underlying perception of sovereignty, and the post-war patterns of violence—have implications for the assumptions made on these aspects of civil war in the literature. A central contribution of this dissertation is to identify and challenge these assumptions and offer alternative arguments that accommodate the complexity of the corresponding civil war processes.

### 8.1.2.2 Mobilization

The assumptions discussed in the previous section relate to *the puzzles of mobilization* that form the structure of this dissertation. The puzzles include pre-war mobilization despite the risks of state repression and inter-group violence, immediate mass mobilization at the war onset against a disproportionately stronger opponent, continued mobilization on a weaker side in the course of the war, and protracted post-war mobilization for violence. Identification of these puzzles is one of the major contributions of this dissertation to the study of mobilization in civil war. It systematizes the approach to studying mobilization in civil war and highlights its aspects insufficiently explained by the existing theories of mobilization and civil war more generally that deserve specific attention.

The analysis of the puzzles in this dissertation focuses on the civil war onset and immediate mass mobilization by the Abkhaz that took place in the conditions of significant power asymmetry. The latent normative framework activation mechanism explains this particular moment in conflict. The other three puzzles are placed within the broader normative, socially-embedded approach. Pre-war Abkhaz mobilization, I find, followed the action-reaction pattern by the Abkhaz and Georgians involved in the conflict. Based on the distinct claims of ownership and belonging to Abkhazia, non-violent contention escalated to the first events of violence in the context of these reactionary claims. Similarly, understandings of history and identity, advanced at the war onset, underlined continuing Abkhaz mobilization in its course. Retention was achieved through army formation, legitimized by the state status afforded to the Abkhaz leaders and the liberation force status afforded to the Abkhaz force. The emergent army structure, based on the initially mobilized close-knit fighters groups, the formal subordination it imposed, and its successes due to learning in the course of the war facilitated continued fighter mobilization, while committed fighters were distinguished by their norms toward Abkhazia and the Abkhaz. Post-war violent mobilization then reflected the defence of the victories achieved in the war, which for the Abkhaz signified the restoration of their rights to their territory.

Along with the examination of the puzzles of violent mobilization across the conflict cycle, the dissertation has implications for the ways in which mobilization is conceptualized. I find that a narrow view of civil war mobilization as simply recruitment strategies utilized by armed groups or individual motivations for participation in conflict (see, for example, Eck, 2010) does not capture the phenomenon of mobilization fully. I add an important dimension of organization to the concept and define *mobilization as a process of participation and organization*, distinguishing between the spontaneous and organized forms of resultant collective action and outlining the different recruited and non-recruited patterns toward these outcomes. This definition of mobilization proves fruitful to the analysis of mobilization patterns throughout the dissertation and can be applied in other studies of mobilization, both in the context of civil war and more broadly.

In the context of civil war, this dissertation shows that relating mobilization to spontaneous and organized collective action through the intermediary process of participation and organization greatly clarifies mobilization at the civil war onset and in its course. This dissertation demonstrates that the Abkhaz war mobilization was in part organized and formally recruited through the Abkhaz Guard structure and in part spontaneous, following a pattern of informal, voluntary participation by regular men and women. It is on the basis of these two forms of initial mobilization for war that the Abkhaz army was built in the course of the war. The dissertation arrives at a better informed notion of civil war actors discussed above by looking at these spontaneous and organized patterns of civil war mobilization. My concept of mobilization, moreover, clarifies the pre- and post-war patterns of mobilization in the context of non-violent contention and lower-level violence short of war. As the conflict intensified in Abkhazia, the dissertation demonstrates, the extent of organization increased. While pre-war non-violent mass mobilization was largely spontaneous, the Abkhaz movement got increasingly involved in organizing mobilization following pre-war violence onset. After the war, with the Abkhaz army in place, mobilization was largely organized by the emergent Abkhaz state.

The implication drawn from the concept of mobilization that I advance is that looking at the process of participation and organization leading to outcomes of spontaneous and organized action across the conflict cycle allows to discern changes in the structure of actors involved in the conflict. It, furthermore, allows to trace changes in the *mobilization repertoires* across the pre-war, civil war, and post-war stages in the conflict. The dissertation demonstrates that these changes paralleled the increase in the extent of organization in Abkhazia. Most pre-war period (1921-1989) was marked by spontaneous private everyday resistance at the micro level and elite political contention at the meso level. Repertoires included micro-level non-violent and violent inter-group confrontation, of which offensive language use and brawls were common, and meso-level written protest and gatherings. Secondary repertoires, such as distribution of leaflets, existed as well, but were not as prevalent.

A transition to the more organized public meso- and macro-level mobilization involving the national political and social elite and the public took place as a result of the first inter-group clashes of 1989—a new mobilization repertoire in the context of the falling Soviet state. After these events of violent opposition, Abkhaz repertoires broadened to include large-scale organized mobilization, particularly mass general strikes and referenda. Secondary repertoires, such as hunger strikes by the more extremist elements of the Abkhaz movement, were also present, though not as consequential.

With this rise in the Abkhaz mobilization capacity, the war was then marked by armed and unarmed resistance at the war onset, which turned to conventional warfare in the west of Abkhazia, where the Abkhaz established control in the course of the war, and irregular guerrilla warfare in the areas of fragmented control in the east, blockaded by the Georgian forces. These repertoires largely carried over into the post-war stage, when regular and irregular fighting characterized the contested border areas between Georgia and Abkhazia. New repertoires appeared as well, such as ambushes, mine laying, and kidnapping by the Georgian guerrillas, and counterinsurgency operations of the *de facto* Abkhaz state. Most repertoires at this stage unfolded in the context of organized mobilization.

These changes in mobilization corresponded to *the evolution of norms and understandings of history and identity*—the core of the normative, socially-embedded approach. A key contribution of this dissertation to our understanding of mobilization is to specify how the normative framework for action that evolves in the course of mobilization affects individual and small group decisions to mobilize in its subsequent cycles. I find this to be one of the main under-theorized areas of research on mobilization in civil war. The dissertation demonstrates that social norms and understandings of history and identity evolve in each cycle of mobilization, to affect mobilization in its further cycles.

In the Abkhaz case, I find that the intra-Abkhaz general norms of reciprocity, conformity to custom, and honor and mobilization-specific norms of patriotism, heroism, and masculinity formed historically in response to the changes in Abkhazia's political status, demography, and repression of Abkhaz political, economic, and cultural rights, the latter especially important in the Soviet period. The Abkhaz emergent understanding of history and identity as posed against Georgian assimilation was shaped through efforts to remedy the injustice. Georgian counter-mobilization and deterioration of inter-group relations unfolded in the context of these efforts. Everyday inter-group confrontation was normalized and the first inter-group clashes of the late 1980s shifted the inter-group norms of friendship and peace toward conflict and violence. This ended the pre-war mobilization cycle in the strengthening of the intra-Abkhaz norms, consolidation of the emergent understandings to demand the restoration of an independent status of Abkhazia, and polarization and militarization of society. The resulting increase in Abkhaz cohesion and organizational capacity and perception of Abkhazia as separate from Georgia was critical to mobilization in the subsequent cycle of civil war, when the Georgian force was framed as an aggressor and the Abkhaz army emerged as a state liberation force from Georgianization of Abkhazia. Abkhaz victory was thus seen as just, though it cemented violent and conflictual relations with Georgians who fought in the war, providing the normative foundation for the defence of the *de facto* Abkhaz state built on its basis in the post-war cycle of mobilization.

### 8.1.2.3 The Abkhaz Case

The previous sections capture some contributions of the dissertation to our understanding of the Abkhaz case. These contributions stem primarily from extensive field research with participants and non-participants in Abkhaz mobilization, but also collection of a broad range of secondary and archival materials to cross-check this interview data. As a result, the dissertation is *the first study of Abkhaz mobilization from within Abkhazia across the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict cycle*. Through its systematic analysis, the dissertation challenges a static view of the Abkhaz movement as invariably separatist throughout the Soviet period (see, for example, Papaskiri, 2010). It demonstrates that the Abkhaz claim to separation from Georgia evolved in the course of pre-war mobilization. By tracing the evolution of issues raised by the Abkhaz in Abkhaz letters to the Soviet center and mobilization events of 1921-1989, I establish that the Abkhaz claims focused on reverting the detrimental effects of the Georgianization policy in the early decades of the Soviet Union and especially after the 1931 status change. The emphasis shifted in the late 1950s to the issue of Georgian historiography, which reduced the Abkhaz status as a titular nation in Abkhazia, and only in the final decades of the Soviet Union did the Abkhaz get at the comprehensive set of issues in the historical memory and dominant discourse demanding the separation from Georgia and restoration of Abkhazia's independent status.

The basis of these claims is established through an analysis of changes in the political status, demographic makeup of Abkhazia, and repression of the Abkhaz, particularly in the cultural realm. This analysis helps get at the intra- and inter-group norms and formation of the Abkhaz movement. The strengthening of the Abkhaz norms, consolidation of the Abkhaz movement, and deterioration of inter-group relations noted above is observed through the stages I identify in the political status changes, Abkhazia's demographic composition, and opportunities of the Abkhaz for the exercise of their rights. The overall result is a systematic treatment of history underlying the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, which allows to determine the normative and social foundations of Abkhaz mobilization.



Beyond these broad contributions to our understanding of the Abkhaz case, this dissertation informs specific stages of violent conflict in Abkhazia. First, in the pre-war period, I identify stages of *the escalation of conflict to the first events of inter-group violence*. The tracing of hour-to-hour developments in mobilization across different locales allows me to systematize the events from the movement formation subsequent to the 1988 Abkhaz letter—the first to demand the restoration of Abkhazia’s Soviet Republic status,—to the 1989 Abkhaz Lykhny mobilization triggering the initial clashes of April, 1989, to Georgia’s Independence Day celebration in Abkhazia and the opening of the Tbilisi university branch leading to the second, major clashes in July, 1989. These events, I find, were a part of the action-reaction dynamic toward the first major inter-group violence in Abkhazia. This action-reaction pattern is one mechanism of the transition of non-violent to violent contention—a critical understudied area according to mobilization scholars (see, for example, Tarrow, 2007). Through this analysis, I determine specific events that increased Abkhaz cohesion, observed later in the war, but poorly explored in the literature (see, for example, Billingsley, 2013). It is after the July clashes that the Abkhaz movement was able to unite the Abkhaz population in a general strike and facilitate the Abkhaz Guard formation, both vital to Abkhaz mobilization capacity at the war onset.

Second, the dissertation carries out the first systematic mapping of *the mobilization patterns at the war onset* in the Abkhaz case. I find that the Abkhaz did not foresee a war, yet mobilized for it en masse, following the spontaneous and organized patterns discussed above. The implication of this analysis is that the Abkhaz force was more complex and organized than commonly recognized (see, for example, Fairbanks, 1995) and external factors fall short in explaining it (see, for example, Baev, 2003). Some individuals and small groups mobilized in response to Georgia’s advance from the west and east of Abkhazia within the macro-level Abkhaz Guard structure, while others engaged in network-based micro- and meso-level mobilization, often without arms. The Abkhaz force and its further development are poorly understood without a close analysis of these mobilization patterns.

Third, and related, the dissertation makes an important contribution to our understanding of the Abkhaz case and more broadly by tracing *the transformation of the initial Abkhaz force into the army*. The dissertation demonstrates that the Abkhaz Guard and initially formed defence volunteer groups provided the basis for the creation of the Abkhaz army. As this emergent army structure was shaped in the course of war, the process of army building took place in the context of failed battles. Learning of military strategy at the macro level and training of fighters to better suit war conditions at the micro and meso levels was indispensable to the formation of a battle-ready, disciplined force. In turn, the attention paid to the close-knit basis of the initially formed fighters groups in structuring the units of the emergent army and shaping the inter-fighter relations within it helped maintain the cohesion demonstrated by the Abkhaz following the pre-war inter-group violence events and at the outset of the war. A close observation of the evolution of Abkhaz military operations supports these arguments and has implications for our understanding of how pre-existing armed groups and regular civilians get incorporated into organized armed structures capable of military victory in civil wars.

Finally, the dissertation is the first to identify *the systematic patterns of post-war violence* in Abkhazia. These patterns formed over the initial post-war year to consolidate in low-scale violence, which protracted until 2008, and large-scale armed fighting in 1998 and 2008 over the border areas, which remained contested after the war. These patterns included regular armed clashes between the Georgian and Abkhaz troops and irregular Georgian guerrilla activity, met by the crackdowns from the Abkhaz side, detrimental to the remaining Georgian population. The patterns evolved in parallel and in interaction with the macro-level developments aimed at conflict settlement and played a key role in protracting the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict long into the post-war period. This has significant implications for the Georgian-Abkhaz research, which focuses predominantly on the macro level in analyzing the post-war situation in Abkhazia. This focus evades local-level processes central to our understanding of Abkhaz mobilization in particular and the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict in general.

#### 8.1.2.4 Research Methods

This dissertation has been able to arrive at the conclusions discussed above on the processes of civil war and mobilization in the Abkhaz case and more broadly through in-depth field research, which focuses attention on the very individuals and small groups whose mobilization decisions are being analyzed. The dissertation demonstrates that *it is only through grounded research that we can better understand local-level factors* that lie at the basis of the mobilization and civil war processes, while at the same time capturing a “broader structural-discursive-ethical context” (Checkel, 2008b: 126). This is the general methodological contribution of the dissertation.

More specifically, the dissertation has implications for fieldwork in difficult “post-conflict” settings. The dissertation demonstrates how the challenges of access, trust building, quality of data, and security of the researcher and her collected materials presented by this research setting can be addressed to yield a systematic case analysis with broader implications for the literature and related war contexts. In terms of *access to research participants*, the dissertation develops a novel strategy of data collection, whereby traditional snowball sampling is limited to research participants who fit the purposes of research (see, for example, Cohen and Arieli, 2011) and supplemented by ethically-informed direct approach to those whose participation is required for the research, but whose access is not provided through the researcher’s snowball networks. In this strategy, pre-theorization of the necessary respondent categories and sub-national research locales to represent potential variation in the strategically diverse areas of conflict are critical to careful selection of research data in the field. Through this data collection strategy, the dissertation was able to achieve the needed representation of respondent categories in the pre-, civil war, and post-war stages and across four locales of distinct war-time territorial control—the core stage for this research. Respondents were relatively balanced between participants and non-participants in mobilization across the conflict cycle, which allowed me to draw systematic conclusions on their pre-, civil war, and post-war mobilization decisions.

The building of *the trust-based relationship with research participants* was a central aspect of my interviews. The approach to the interview process I developed for this research illustrates the value of the researcher's active listening (see, for example, Wood, 2006a) and sincerity of response as the foundation of grounded, face-to-face research with individuals and small groups engaged in and affected by collective violence. The semi-structured interview process in this approach allows for personal diversions by respondents, even if they do not directly inform an interview question. In this way, the approach ensures respondent ownership of the interview and enables co-production of meaning by the researcher and her respondents (see, for example, Wedeen, 2010). An implication of this approach is that in-depth research with respondents in the context of violence takes a substantial amount of time and emotional energy. Having provided the due attention to every respondent, I got at highly detailed and personalized, often traumatic accounts of mobilization. The responses proved increasingly reliable, as the story repeated itself across most of the 150 interviews that I collected.

This *reliability of data* was further advanced by extensive triangulation across a wide range of sources that I consulted for this dissertation. This included not only collection of archival, news, and local and external academic materials, but also additional individual and focus group interviews with experts and persons affected by the conflict in Georgia and Russia. Cross-checking of Abkhaz interview responses with these materials, while acknowledging the conditions of their construction (see, for example, Herrera and Kapur, 2007), was key to establishing confidence in the conclusions of this dissertation. One implication of this data collection process for studies of violent conflict is that the appreciation of sensitivity and politicized nature of difficult "post-conflict" settings invites a close analysis of a variety of data with an understanding of how this data was produced to arrive at reliable conclusions. This research context, moreover, has implications for *the researcher and data security*. My field experience indicates that an understanding of the local context, achieved through preliminary field research, for example, and careful data protection can help avoid such problems.

Along with the implications for data collection strategies, this dissertation informs methods of analysis of data gathered in difficult “post-conflict” settings. My main contribution in this regard is the strategy I develop of chronologizing through time and mapping in space historical processes and mobilization events. Along with a systematic analysis of interview data, which reflects patterns in responses of participants and non-participants in mobilization events, this strategy allowed me to determine if alternative explanations hold in the case of Abkhaz mobilization—a central aspect of the process-tracing method that I adopt to demonstrate the effect of my latent normative framework activation mechanism. This data analysis strategy then helped me identify mobilization cycles and defining stages in these cycles and relate decisions of individuals and small groups to the normative and social dimensions of conflict—my core contribution to the study of mobilization and civil war.

## **8.2 Future Research**

Civil war remains a major form of violent conflict today (WDR, 2011; HSR, 2012). Without a systematic analysis of its normative and social foundations, its underlying processes, particularly mobilization, are insufficiently understood, as are the lower-level forms of violence in the transition from non-violent to violent contention prior to the war and post-war violent conflict ongoing in its aftermath. This dissertation suggests fruitful avenues for future research in these areas.

### **8.2.1 Questions for Future Studies**

First, the application of the normative, socially-embedded approach to mobilization puzzles identified in this research can generate a better understanding of mobilization in territorial and other cases of civil war. The latent normative framework activation mechanism in particular can be further tested in cases where rationalist and non-rationalist motivations are likely to be present, both in the civil war onset and lower-level violence contexts. In the recent case of Ukraine, for example, where existing information suggests that rationalist and non-rationalist motivations exist, what is the role of the normative and social factors in motivating fighter mobilization? Does the mechanism hold?

Second, in terms of the civil war process, the most interesting issues for future work include escalation of non-violent to violent contention and its relation to the civil war onset, transformation of civil war actors in the process of adaption to the realities of the war, and formation of the patterns of post-war violence. How systematically do pre-war violence events trigger the onset of civil war? Under what conditions do the insurgent forces transform into the regular armies and how does this transition relate to civil war outcomes, including insurgent victory? Lastly, do patterns of warfare in civil war relate to post-war violence across cases? Research exists on these aspects of the civil war process (on pre-war violence, see Lawrence, 2010; on the nature and transformation of actors, see Sanín and Giustozzi, 2010; Parkinson, 2013; on post-war violence, see Boyle, 2014). Future studies can benefit from an analysis of these aspects across cases and across the conflict cycle within them.

Third, future research on mobilization in civil war and more broadly can be advanced by the adoption of the concept of mobilization I propose. Interaction between spontaneous and organized mobilization, evolution in the extent of organization and repertoires of mobilization, and mutually constitutive effects of mobilization and the normative framework for action are among the areas of research that arise from this concept. What differentiates fighters engaged in pre-war armed groups from fighters who join the war spontaneously? How do the extent of organization and mobilization repertoires interact? When does mobilization most significantly affect norms and understandings? Future work can further our understanding of mobilization by considering these difficult questions.

Finally, my research suggests avenues for future work on Abkhazia. It encourages students of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict to look at the conflict processes from within Abkhazia. The local-level factors that this grounded approach to the case uncovered include the evolution of the Abkhaz discourse, the interaction between Abkhaz and Georgian mobilization in the course toward the first violence, the structure of the Abkhaz war force, and the complexity of the post-war situation. Future work can draw on these findings to move beyond a focus on the macro level in explaining the case.

Specifically, future studies of the pre-war stage can look at organizations beyond Aidgylara, such as Kiaraz, and interaction of diverse Abkhaz groups in the formation of the Abkhaz movement in the framework of evolving norms and understandings of history and identity. Another important area of future research on the pre-war escalation of conflict is a comparison of Abkhaz and Georgian norms and understandings that developed in the course of their respective pre-war mobilization. In the war period, the Georgian-Abkhaz scholars can further analyze Abkhaz mobilization beyond the focus on fighters, of whom the majority were men, and incorporate the roles across the mobilization spectrum from neutrality to membership with an emphasis on women's participation in the conflict. Finally, future work on the post-war period can greatly benefit from the analysis of the mobilization process on the Georgian side of the Georgian-Abkhaz border line established as a result of the war.

### **8.2.2 Beyond the Dissertation**

The future work I intend to undertake to extend this dissertation has four directions. First, I look to further study escalation through an analysis of pre-war social relations in Abkhazia. Second, I aim to extend my research of war mobilization to foreign fighters and analyze Abkhaz recruitment strategies and foreign fighters' motivations to participate in the Georgian-Abkhaz war. Third, I plan to use my materials to extend the study of post-war violence, including with a quantitative analysis of the news archives collected and coded for this research. Finally, I intend to apply my normative, socially-embedded theoretical approach in general and the latent normative framework activation in particular to other cases of civil war, of which the case of Ukraine is currently of greatest interest.

Overall, my research will continue to analyze in-depth regular men and women's decisions to engage in violence—the area of research that I consider to be most fruitful for our understanding of mobilization, civil war, and violent conflict in general. The ultimate goal of my research is to help understand regular people's choices in highly politicized violent conflicts and inform approaches to conflict prevention, intervention to protect civilians in civil wars, and post-war conflict settlement.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Interview Data (Abkhazia)

Table 14. Interview Data (Abkhazia)<sup>323</sup>

Log	Date	Gender	Self-identified	Age	Location	Pre-war		War Mobilization	Post-War		Notes
						Occu- pation	Mobili- zation		Occu- pation	Mobili- zation	
1	21.10.11	F	R	70	A	n/a	n/a	n/a	R-A border trade	n/a	Provided contact 3
2	23.10.11	M	O	35	A	n/a	n/a	n/a	R-A border officer	n/a	
3	24.10.11	F	A	50	GU	Teacher	n/a	FA	Teacher; Professor	n/a	Provided contact 93
4	25.10.11	M	A	27	GU	n/a	n/a	EF	A-R customs officer	n/a	
5	27.10.11	M	A	40	GU	Illicit A-R cross-border trade	SM	SM (SI)	Vice-Chairman, ADWV	n/a	
6	27.10.11	M	A	55	GU	Dancer, Sharatyn ensemble	SM	SM (SI)	Member, ADWV	n/a	
7	27.10.11	M	A	50	GU	Driver	OA (hunger strike organization)	SM (SI)	Chairman, ADWV	n/a	Provided contact 49
8	27.10.11	M	A	60	GU	Musician, Nart ensemble	SM	SM (SI)	Member, ADWV	n/a	

<sup>323</sup> The interview data is listed per 2011 when it was collected. Note that respondents were 19 years younger at the outset of the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-1993. All interviews were conducted in Russian by the author.

Log	Date	Gender	Self-identified	Age	Location	Pre-war		War Mobilization	Post-War		Notes
						Occu- pation	Mobili- zation		Occu- pation	Mobili- zation	
9	31.10.11	M	A	70	GU	Railroad security	SM	SM (International Battalion (Afghan Group); Highlander Battalion (SI))	Member, ADWV	n/a	
10	31.10.11	M	A	75	GU	Worker	SM	SM (Reconnaissance (SI))	Member, ADWV	RM (Secret service)	
11	31.10.11	F	O-A	60	P	Tourism	n/a	IF	Chairman, CWPFS	n/a	Provided contacts 12, 14-15, 19-20, 22, 38-39
12	31.10.11	F	G	45	P	Food Sector, District Party Committee	n/a	SM (Food provision)	President service; Cook, Samshitovaya Rosha Hotel	n/a	
13	01.11.11	M	A	55	P	Worker	OA (Aidgylara)	OM (Pitsunda Battalion (provision))	n/a	RM	
14	01.11.11	M	A	55	P	Secretary of Komsomol; Chairman of State Trade	SM	SM (Pitsunda Battalion (field engineering))	Director, Tourism Department	RM	
15	01.11.11	M	A	45	G	Journalist	OA	WJ	Chairman, Culture Department	n/a	

Log	Date	Gender	Self-identified	Age	Location	Pre-war		War Mobilization	Post-War		Notes
						Occu- pation	Mobili- zation		Occu- pation	Mobili- zation	
16	01.11.11	F	A	45	G	Journalist	OA (Assistant Chairman, Gagra Aidgylara)	EF	Head, Historical Museum	n/a	Repeat interview 71
17	01.11.11	M	A	75	G	Composer, conductor, creator of Kiaraz and other ensembles	OA	Heroic-patriotic Psou ensemble performing for fighters	Director, Boys Choir of Abkhazia	n/a	
18	01.11.11	M	A	45	G	Cultural ensemble	OA	SM	General Director, Gagra TV	RM	Repeat interview 55
19	01.11.11	F	A	40	P	Accountant	OA husband	IF; OM husband	Member, CWPFS; Hairdresser	n/a	
20	02.11.11	M	A	50	P	Tourism	OA (Aidgylara)	OM; C	Hotel business	RM	
21	02.11.11	M	A	45	P	Businessman	SM	SM (Pitsunda Battalion)	Head, Pitsunda Administration	RM	
22	02.11.11	F	A	35	P	Teacher	OA brother	IF; OM brother	Resort management	RM brother (SI, died)	
23	02.11.11	M	A	50	P	n/a	n/a	n/a	Police	PM	Focused post-war interview
24	02.11.11	M	A	40	P	n/a	n/a	n/a	Police	PM	Focused post-war interview

Log	Date	Gender	Self-identified	Age	Location	Pre-war		War Mobilization	Post-War		Notes
						Occu- pation	Mobili- zation		Occu- pation	Mobili- zation	
25	02.11.11	M	A	35	P	n/a	n/a	n/a	Police	PM	Focused post-war interview
26	02.11.11	M	A	35	P	n/a	n/a	n/a	Police	PM	Focused post-war interview
27	02.11.11	M	A	45	P	Director, Pitsunda Bread Factory	OA (Aidgylara)	OM (Pitsunda Battalion)	Deputy, People's Council	RM	
28	02.11.11	M	A	65	P	Engineer	OA (Aidgylara; fast response brigade)	OM	Bartender	RM	
29	02.11.11	M	A	80	P	Worker	SM	SM; C	Pensioner	RM; C	
30	02.11.11	M	A	50	P	n/a	n/a	n/a	Police Deputy Chief	PM	Focused post-war interview
31	02.11.11	M	A	50	P	Director, Bzyb Plant	SM	SM	Pensioner		
32	03.11.11	M	A	40	P	n/a	n/a	n/a	Police	PM	Focused post-war interview. Provided contact 73
33	03.11.11	M	A	50	P	Police	Police	SM (Pitsunda Battalion)	Police Major	PM	
34	03.11.11	M	A	70	P	Head, Intourist Hotel Garage	SM	SM; C (Pitsunda Battalion)	Chairman, Elders Council	RM	

Log	Date	Gender	Self-identified	Age	Location	Pre-war		War Mobilization	Post-War		Notes
						Occu- pation	Mobili- zation		Occu- pation	Mobili- zation	
35	03.11.11	M	G	30	P	Driver	n/a	Driver of Deputy Commander of Front	Car technician	n/a	
36	03.11.11	M	A	40	P	Vice-Chairman, Pitsunda Kolkhoz	SM	SM	Head, Ldzaa Administration	RM	Provided contacts 63-66
37	03.11.11	M	A	30	P	n/a	n/a	n/a	Police	PM	Focused post-war interview
38	04.11.11	F	A	40	P	Sales secretary	n/a	IF	Member, CWPFS; Pitsunda Bread Factory	n/a	
39	04.11.11	F	A	40	P	Teacher	OA husband	IF; OM husband	Member, CWPFS; Director, Pitsunda Fish Factory	n/a	
40	04.11.11	M	A	40	P	Driver	n/a	SM (Esher/i Battalion)	Police	PM	
41	04.11.11	M	A	40	P	Sales associate	OA (Aidgylara)	OM (Pitsunda Battalion)	Deputy Head, Pitsunda Administration	n/a	
42	04.11.11	M	A	70	P	Chairman, Pitsunda Kolkhoz	SM	SM (Pitsunda Battalion)	Gal/i Agriculture Minister; Pensioner	RM	

Log	Date	Gender	Self-identified	Age	Location	Pre-war		War Mobilization	Post-War		Notes
						Occu- pation	Mobili- zation		Occu- pation	Mobili- zation	
43	04.11.11	M	A	48	P	Intourist Hotel Administration	SM	SM (Pitsunda Battalion)	General Director, Resort Management	RM	
44	04.11.11	M	A	35	P	Student	OA (Aidgylara)	OM (Pitsunda Battalion)	Tax Police	PM	
45	04.11.11	M	A	30	P	Student	n/a	n/a	Police	PM	
46	04.11.11	M	A	70	P	Writer	OA (Core, Aidgylara)	SM (Pitsunda Battalion)	Writer	n/a	Repeat interview 124
47	04.11.11	M	A	55	P	Tourism	OA (Aidgylara)	OM; C	Businessman	RM	
48	04.11.11	M	A	50	P	Tourism	SM	SM; C	Businessman	RM	
49	04.11.11	M	A	50	P	Wildlife Reserve staff	SM	SM (Pitsunda Battalion)	Hotel owner	RM	
50	04.11.11	F	A	50	P	Wildlife Reserve staff	n/a	IF	Hotel owner	n/a	
51	06.11.11	M	A	50	D	Worker	n/a	SM (SI)	Member, ADWV	n/a	
52	08.11.11	F	A	40	G	Journalist	n/a	IF	Editor, GV	n/a	Provided contact 60, 78
53	08.11.11	M	AR	40	G	Businessman	n/a	SM (Armenian Battalion)	Director, Gagrypsh Hotel	RM	
54	08.11.11	M	A	60	G	Administration staff	SM	SM	Deputy, People's Council	n/a	

Log	Date	Gender	Self-identified	Age	Location	Pre-war		War Mobilization	Post-War		Notes
						Occu- pation	Mobili- zation		Occu- pation	Mobili- zation	
55	08.11.11	M	A	45	G	Cultural ensemble	OA	SM	General Director, GTV	RM	Repeat interview 18
56	08.11.11	M	A	36	G	Student	n/a	EF	Vice-Chairman, People's Council	n/a	
57	08.11.11	F	AR-R	40	G	Worker	n/a	FA	Gagrypsh Hotel staff	n/a	
58	09.11.11	M	A	50	G	Head, Construction Department	OA (Strike Committee)	SM (SI)	Chairman, People's Council	n/a	
59	09.11.11	F	A	40	G	Librarian	SM	FA	Chief Librarian	n/a	
60	09.11.11	M	A	50	G	Agricultural Sector	SM	SM; C (Tsandrypsh Battalion)	Head, Gagrypsh Administration	RM	Provided contact 61, 67
61	09.11.11	M	A	50	G	Teacher	SM	SM; C (Tsandrypsh Battalion)	Teacher	RM (SI)	
62	09.11.11	M	A	40	G	n/a	n/a	n/a	Police	PM	Focused post-war interview
63	09.11.11	M	A	27	G	n/a	n/a	n/a	Deputy, People's Council; Chairman, YOMA	n/a	Focused post-war interview



Log	Date	Gender	Self-identified	Age	Location	Pre-war		War Mobilization	Post-War		Notes
						Occu- pation	Mobili- zation		Occu- pation	Mobili- zation	
64	09.11.11	M	A	60	G	Worker, Bzyb Plant	OA (Chairman, Strike Committee)	SM; C (Bzyb Headquarters)	Colonel, Ministry of Defence	RM	
65	09.11.11	F	A	60	G	Housewife	OA (Strike Committee)	IF	Member, UWA	n/a	
66	09.11.11	M	A	80	B	Pitsunda Auto Base	OA (Strike Committee)	SM; OM son	Vice-Chairman, Elders Council	RM (Psou shore defence)	
67	09.11.11	F	A	45	B	Mother, wife	OA son (Aidgylara)	IF; OM son	Housewife	n/a	
68	09.11.11	M	A	45	B	Student	SM	SM	Head, Bzyb Administration	n/a	
69	09.11.11	M	A	37	B	Tqvarchel/i Miner	SM	SM	Administration staff	RM	
70	11.11.11	M	A	65	G	Director, Auto Transport Company	n/a	SM	Deputy, People's Council	RM	
71	11.11.11	F	A	45	G	Journalist	OA (Assistant Chairman, Gagra Aidgylara)	EF	Head, Historical Museum	n/a	Repeat interview 16
72	11.11.11	M	A	40	G	Medical staff	n/a	SM (Fifth Battalion)	Doctor; Deputy Head, Gagra Administration	n/a	
73	12.11.11	M	A	40	G	Worker	SM	SM (Tsandrypsh Battalion)	Businessman	RM	

Log	Date	Gender	Self-identified	Age	Location	Pre-war		War Mobilization	Post-War		Notes
						Occu- pation	Mobili- zation		Occu- pation	Mobili- zation	
74	12.11.11	M	A	50	G	Director, Pitsunda Fish Factory	n/a	SM; C (Fifth Battalion)	Member of Parliament	RM	
75	13.11.11	M	A	40	G	University student	OA	SM	Administration staff	RM	
76	13.11.11	M	A	65	G	Minister of Culture	OA	EF	Activist (Head, IOFA; ASUN)	n/a	
77	15.11.11	M	U	45	G	Administration staff	n/a	FA	Administration staff	n/a	Repeat interview 90
78	15.11.11	M	A	60	G	Chairman, City Department for Public Education	OA (Aidgylara)	SM; C (special unit)	Hotel owner	RM	
79	15.11.11	F	A	40	G	Journalist	OA (Aidgylara); OA sister (SI, died)	EF	Journalist, GV	n/a	Repeat interview 83
80	15.11.11	F	A	55	G	Sales economist	SM husband (SI, died)	EF	Pensioner	n/a	
81	15.11.11	M	A	50	G	Director, private organizations	OA (Aidgylara)	SM; C (Armored Vehicles Platoon)	Regional ethnographer	RM	
82	15.11.11	M	AR	40	G	Worker	n/a	SM (Bagramyan Battalion)	Businessman	RM	

Log	Date	Gender	Self-identified	Age	Location	Pre-war		War Mobilization	Post-War		Notes
						Occu- pation	Mobili- zation		Occu- pation	Mobili- zation	
83	16.11.11	F	A		G	Journalist	OA (Aidgylara); OA sister (SI, died)	EF	Journalist, GV	n/a	Repeat interview 79
84	16.11.11	M	A	55	G	Historian; Editor, Pitsunda Regional Newspaper	SM	P	Head, Information Department of Administration	n/a	
85	16.11.11	M	A	50	G	Journalist	OA (Core, Gagra Aidgylara)	OM	Journalist, GV	RM	
86	17.11.11	M	A	75	G	Worker	OA (Strike Committee; Aidgylara (SI))	SM	Pensioner	n/a	
87	17.11.11	M	A	40	G	Worker	OA	OM	Businessman	RM	Provided contact 88
88	17.11.11	M	A	50	G	Assistant, Prosecutor's Office	n/a	Sent to recruit Cossacks in Rostov	Senior Assistant, Prosecutor's Office	n/a	
89	17.11.11	M	A	40	G	n/a	n/a	n/a	Police	PM	Focused post-war interview
90	18.11.11	M	U	45	G	Administration staff	n/a	FA	Administration staff	n/a	Repeat interview 77

Log	Date	Gender	Self-identified	Age	Location	Pre-war		War Mobilization	Post-War		Notes
						Occu- pation	Mobili- zation		Occu- pation	Mobili- zation	
91	18.11.11	M	A	35	G	Student	n/a	SM	Administration staff	RM	
92	18.11.11	M	A	75	GU	Teacher	SM	SM	Head of school; Pensioner	n/a	
93	18.11.11	F	A	40	GU	Research associate	OA (activism research)	EF	Gudauta Museum Keeper	n/a	Provided contacts 7, 94-95, 100-101
94	18.11.11	F	A	40	GU	Mother	SM son	IF	Housewife	RM son (SI, died)	
95	18.11.11	F	A	45	GU	Mother	SM son	SM (Provision Battalion); IF	Housewife	RM son (SI, died)	
96	19.11.11	M	A	50	G	Doctor	n/a	SM (Head Doctor)	Head Physician, Central Hospital	n/a	
97	19.11.11	M	A	38	G	Student	SM	SM	Deputy Chairman, Youth and Sports	RM	
98	19.11.11	M	G	40	G	Worker	n/a	SM	Security staff	RM	
99	19.11.11	M	G	35	G	Student	n/a	EF	Police Lieutenant	PM	
100	20.11.11	F	A	45	GU	Nurse	n/a	SM (Head nurse)	Youth Activist (UDA)	RM (Nurse)	
101	20.11.11	F	A	45	GU	Housewife	n/a	SM (Nurse (SI))	Hotel owner	n/a	
102	23.11.11	F	A	45	S	Sales associate	SM; OA son	IF	Chairman, MPSJ	n/a	

Log	Date	Gender	Self-identified	Age	Location	Pre-war		War Mobilization	Post-War		Notes
						Occu- pation	Mobili- zation		Occu- pation	Mobili- zation	
103	23.11.11	F	A	45	S	Communications operator	SM	IF	Member, MPSJ	n/a	
104	23.11.11	F	A	45	S	Journalist	OA (Press Service, Aidylara)	IF	Member, MPSJ	n/a	
105	23.11.11	F	A	45	S	Tqvarchel/i resident	n/a	IF	Member, MPSJ	n/a	Repeat interview 109
106	23.11.11	F	A	55	S	Writer	n/a	FA	Member, MPSJ	n/a	
107	25.11.11	F	A	50	S	Member of Parliament; Professor	OA (Presidium, Aidgylara)	P	Member of Parliament; Deputy Chairman, Commission on Human Rights and Ethnic Relations; Minister of Information and Press; Director, CDHR; President, AWA	n/a	

Log	Date	Gender	Self-identified	Age	Location	Pre-war		War Mobilization	Post-War		Notes
						Occu- pation	Mobili- zation		Occu- pation	Mobili- zation	
108	25.11.11	M	A	75	S	Member of Parliament; Professor	OA	P	Member of Parliament; Professor; Activist (Co-Chairman, Ajtajra)	n/a	Repeat interview 137
109	25.11.11	F	A	45	S	Tqvarchel/i resident	n/a	IF	Member, MPSJ	n/a	Repeat interview 105
110	26.11.11	F	A	50	S	Professor	OA (Aidgylara)	WJ	Director, AP; Activist	n/a	
111	26.11.11	M	A	60	S	Journalist, Soviet Abkhazia	SM	WJ	Chief Editor, EA	n/a	
112	27.11.11	M	A	45	S	Worker	SM	SM; C (Tsandrypsh Battalion)	Businessman	RM; C (Bagramyan Battalion)	
113	27.11.11	M	A	45	S	Head, Department of Botany and Zoology	SM	SM; C (coy)	Minister of Ecology	RM	Repeat interview 117
114	28.11.11	F	A	45	S	Journalist	OA (Aidgylara)	WJ	Journalist; Professor	n/a	
115	28.11.11	M	A	40	S	Student	n/a	FA	Research associate	n/a	
116	28.11.11	F	A	65	S	Librarian	SM	EF	Librarian	n/a	
117	28.11.11	M	A	45	S	Head, Department of Botany and Zoology	SM	SM; C (coy)	Minister of Ecology	RM	Repeat interview 113

Log	Date	Gender	Self-identified	Age	Location	Pre-war		War Mobilization	Post-War		Notes
						Occu- pation	Mobili- zation		Occu- pation	Mobili- zation	
118	29.11.11	M	A	60	S	Member of Parliament; Secretary, Tqvarchel/i Komsomol; Director, Tqvarchel/i Argonaut Plant	OA (Tqvarchel/i Strike Committee)	SM; C (Tqvarchel/i Front)	Member of Parliament	n/a	
119	29.11.11	M	A	30	S	Student	n/a	EF	Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs; Professor	n/a	
120	29.11.11	M	A	45	S	Journalist, Apsny	OA (Aidgylara)	WJ	Director, Abaza TV	n/a	
121	30.11.11	M	A	50	S	Research Associate (Moscow)	n/a	FA (graduate student)	Minister of Foreign Affairs; Representative in West Europe; Representative in UNPO	n/a	
122	30.11.11	M	A	40	S	Student	n/a	EF	Economist	n/a	Contact made in 2010

Log	Date	Gender	Self-identified	Age	Location	Pre-war		War Mobilization	Post-War		Notes
						Occu- pation	Mobili- zation		Occu- pation	Mobili- zation	
123	30.11.11	M	A	60	S	Member of Parliament; Professor	OA (Aidgylara)	P	Vice-Speaker of Parliament; Representative in Geneva Talks; Security Council Secretary; Professor	n/a	
124	30.11.11	M	A	70	P	Writer	OA (Core, Aidgylara)	SM	Writer	n/a	Repeat interview 46
125	30.11.11	F	A		S	Student	OA (Aidgylara)	IF	Member, MPSJ	n/a	
126	01.12.11	M	A	55	S	Director, Gudauta Employment Bureau	SM	SM; C (Gagra Battalion; Gagra Intelligence)	Deputy Defence Minister	RM (Head, Military Intelligence of the Ministry of Defence)	
127	01.12.11	M	A	50	S	Council for Tourism and Excursions	SM	SM; C (Gumista Front Artillery)	Chairman, State Customs Committee	RM; C (Ministry of Defence Artillery)	
128	01.12.11	F	A	45	S	Professor	SM	EF	Activist (Director, CIMF); Professor	n/a	



Log	Date	Gender	Self-identified	Age	Location	Pre-war		War Mobilization	Post-War		Notes
						Occu- pation	Mobili- zation		Occu- pation	Mobili- zation	
129	05.12.11	M	A	55	S	Professor	SM	SM	Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs; Human Rights Commissioner	n/a	
130	06.12.11	F	A	45	S	Student	OA (Union of Creative Youth; Aidgylara)	Secretary for Ardzinba; Medical Instructor	Professor	n/a	
131	06.12.11	F	A	50	S	Professor	OA (Aidgylara)	EF	Activist (Deputy Director, CHP; CR)	n/a	Contact made in 2010
132	06.12.11	F	A	50	S	Psychologist	OA (Union of Creative Youth; Aidgylara)	EF	Activist (Executive Director, CHP)	n/a	Contact made in 2010
133	06.12.11	F	A	45	S	Teacher	n/a	EF	Activist (CHP)	n/a	
134	06.12.11	M	A	55	S	Director, Historical and Architectural Reserve; Professor	SM	SM; C (Medical Battalion)	Activist (Executive Director, CHP)	n/a	
135	07.12.11	M	A	60	S	Ministry of Culture	n/a	SM	Minister of Culture	n/a	
136	07.12.11	M	A	55	S	Ministry of Culture	n/a	SM	Major, Ministry of Defence	n/a	

Log	Date	Gender	Self-identified	Age	Location	Pre-war		War Mobilization	Post-War		Notes
						Occu- pation	Mobili- zation		Occu- pation	Mobili- zation	
137	07.12.11	M	A	75	S	Member of Parliament; Professor; Activist	OA (Aidgylara)	P	Member of Parliament; Professor; Activist (Co-Chairman, Ajtajra)		Repeat interview 108
138	08.12.11	F	A	35	S	n/a	n/a	n/a	Journalist, AP	n/a	Focused post-war interview
139	08.12.11	M	A	50	S	n/a	n/a	n/a	Journalist, AP	n/a	Focused post-war interview
140	13.12.11	F	R	45	S	Editor, Almanakh	OA (Union of Creative Youth; Aidgylara)	EF	Journalist, AP	n/a	
141	13.12.11	F	R-AR	45	S	n/a	n/a	n/a	Journalist, AP	n/a	Focused post-war interview
142	13.12.11	M	R	65	S	Soviet Army	n/a	n/a	Head of Headquarters, Ministry of Defence	n/a	
143	13.12.11	M	A	50	S	Senior Inspector, Ochamchira Department of Internal Affairs	n/a	SM; C (Partisan Unit; Headquarters; East Front)	Minister of Defence	RM	

Log	Date	Gender	Self-identified	Age	Location	Pre-war		War Mobilization	Post-War		Notes
						Occu- pation	Mobili- zation		Occu- pation	Mobili- zation	
144	13.12.11	M	A	50	S	Police Academy, Ministry of Internal Affairs	n/a	SM; C (Fifth Battalion)	Minister of Internal Affairs	PM	
145	13.12.11	M	A	50	S	Head, Presidium of High Council Sector for Work with Law Enforcement Agencies	n/a	SM (Special Group Dolphin, East Front)	Minister of Justice	n/a	Contact made in 2010
146	14.12.11	M	A	45	S	Historian	SM	FA	Journalist, EK	n/a	
147	14.12.11	F	R	50	S	n/a	n/a	n/a	Journalist, RA (Gal/i specialist)	n/a	Focused post-war interview
148	14.12.11	M	A	55	S	Professor	SM	SM; C (Headquarters; Gagra Battalion; Special Group Dolphin, East Front)	Head, Gal/i Administration; Representative of President in Gal/i Region	RM (Head, Gal/i Security Service Department)	
149	14.12.11	F	A	55	S	Scholar	SM	EF	Director, WWV; Youth Activist; Professor	n/a	
150	14.12.11	F	A	45	S	n/a	n/a	n/a	Chairman, Commission for Education Development of; Children's Activist	n/a	Focused post-war interview

## Appendix B: Additional Interview Data (Georgia and Russia)

Table 15. Additional Interview Data (Georgia and Russia)<sup>324</sup>

Log	Date	Gender	Location	Occupation	Interview Type	Notes
151	03.04.13	M	SD	Professor; Chairman, CIDPP	Expert	Provided contact 160
152	03.04.13	M	SD	Professor	Expert	Provided contacts 156, 173
153	12.04.13	F	T	Witness	Regular	
154	12.04.13	F	T	Witness	Regular	
155	12.04.13	F	T	Witness	Regular	
156	15.04.13	M	T	Professor; Country Director, ACIE	Expert	Provided contact 159
157	15.04.13	F	T	Displaced person	Regular	
158	16.04.13	F	T	Project Coordinator, CIDPP	Expert	
159	19.04.13	M	T	Professor	Expert	
160	20.04.13	M	T	Professor; Chairman, Parliamentary Committee on European Integration	Expert	
161	21.04.13	M	T	Head, Georgian-Abkhaz Institute	Expert	
162	22.04.13	M	T	Project Manager, ECMI	Expert	
163	23.04.13	M	T	Professor	Expert	
164	24.04.13	M	T	Independent Public Policy Analyst; Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Abkhazia sector)	Expert	
165	25.04.13	M	T	Deputy State Minister for Reintegration	Expert	
166		M	T	Representative, CMI; Senior Manager, BSPN		
167	27.04.13	M	T	Head, UGAMF	Expert	
168	29.04.13	M	T	Film Director, Absence of Will	Expert	
169	30.04.13	F	G	Municipality Council	Expert	
170	30.04.13	M	G	Special Services	Expert	
171	31.04.13	M	G	Witness	Regular	
172	01.05.13	F	T	Minister of Education and Culture of Abkhazia (in exile)	Expert	Provided contact 24
173	01.05.13	M	T	President, GFSIS	Expert	
174	02.05.13	Mixed	T	Department of Education of Abkhazia (in exile); Displaced Persons	Focus Group	
175	02.05.13	M	T	Displaced Person	Regular	
176	16.05.13	M	M	Senior Research Associate, CRC	Expert	
177	17.05.13	M	M	Professor; RCIA Expert	Expert	
178	20.05.13	M	M	Professor	Expert	
179	21.05.13	M	M	Professor	Expert	
180	21.05.13	F	M	Professor	Expert	
181	22.05.13	M	M	Professor; CSCA Expert	Expert	

<sup>324</sup> The interview data is listed per 2013 when it was collected. Note that these interviews were used as a cross-check. Not all are cited in the dissertation. All additional interviews were conducted in Russian and/or English by the author.

## Appendix C: News, Library, and Private Archives

Figure 24. News, Library, and Private Archives<sup>325</sup>

News Archives:
<i>Abkhazia</i>
1. Apsnypress (1994-2011)
2. Echo Abhazii (1995-2011)
3. Respublika Abhazija (1999-2011)
<i>Georgia</i>
1. Georgian Chronicles (1992-1997)
2. Svobodnaja Gruzija (1992-2006)
3. The Armed Forces in Georgia (1998-1999)
4. The Army and Society in Georgia (1999-2001)
<i>Russia</i>
1. Current Digest of Russian Press (1992-2011)
<i>International</i>
1. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (1992-2011)
Other Archives:
1. State Statistics Administration <i>Abkhazia in Numbers</i> (2002-2010)
2. State Republican Library of Abkhazia War Archive (1992-1993)
3. Ekaterina Bebia Private Video Archive (1992-2008)
4. Gagra TV Video Archive (1992-2008)
5. Gudauta War Museum War Archive (1992-1993)
6. Published Interview Archives (Khodzhaa, 2003; 2006; 2009)
7. Published War Document Archive (Volkhonskij et al., 2008)
8. Private Archive of Aidgylara (1989-1992)
Libraries:
1. Gagra Library № 1, Gagra, Abkhazia
2. Gudauta War Museum Library, Gudauta, Abkhazia
3. State Republican Library, Sukhum/i. Abkhazia
4. National Parliamentary Library of Georgia, Tbilisi, Georgia
5. Russian State Library, Moscow, Russia

<sup>325</sup> These sources were consulted to cross-check the interviews. Not all are cited in the dissertation and will be used in future research.

## Appendix D: Notes on Research in Unrecognized “Post-Conflict” Territories

Unrecognized, or *de facto* “post-conflict” territories are fruitful venues for field research on conflict. Yet, these territories are often understudied due to the problems of access and politics of research. Data on these territories is often gathered in states they seek to separate from and research can, as a result, be politicized. Researcher’s safety and security of data collected in these territories cannot always be guaranteed. These problems are all present in carrying out research in Abkhazia.

Abkhazia is a highly understudied case. A large body of literature exists on the Georgian-Abkhaz relations, but only a minority of studies—mostly local work—analyze the processes from within Abkhazia, especially by doing fieldwork in this breakaway region. Due to the problems of access and security in Abkhazia, few researchers travel to the region to seek explanations to critical questions of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict.<sup>326</sup> None looks systematically at the questions of violent mobilization in the Abkhaz case. Researchers who do fieldwork in Abkhazia are often reluctant to hold in-depth interviews with participants in the conflict, especially on violence, and instead carry out survey research and interviews with *de facto* government and non-governmental authorities.

I suggest that this problem can in important part be explained by the politics of research in unrecognized “post-conflict” territories. A breakaway region of Georgia and a partially recognized *de facto* state, Abkhazia is without due consideration perceived as an illegitimate, separatist entity, contrasted with the internationally recognized and, hence, more trusted state structures of Georgia. Given the limits on research in *de facto* territories established by the states, researchers often forego the academic advantages of carrying out research in these territories in order to maintain a positive relationship with the official states that their research concerns. In the Abkhaz case thus Georgian officials are typically the source of information utilized to analyze the Georgian-Abkhaz relations.

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<sup>326</sup> Individuals traveling to Abkhazia are permitted to cross into the breakaway region only through Georgia and only if given a special permission by Georgia.

The Georgian state, however, is not a neutral, unbiased organization. It is an organization with political objectives. A part of the Georgian state, Georgian government officials are interested in constructing a particular image of Abkhazia and its *de facto* governance structures. The reliance on interviews with state officials, as a result, often produces deep biases that researchers carry with them and reproduce when they explore questions related to Abkhazia. The constant use of the term *separatist* is an example of an ahistorical treatment of the case predominantly based on accounts of official state representatives and other sources siding with the Georgian perspectives on the issue.

The use of one-sided sources in highly politicized situations, such as the Georgian-Abkhaz relations, results in problematic conclusions. Drawn primarily from the examination of the official documents, international, rather than local, media, and interviews with officials from Georgia (and often Russia), and more rarely Abkhazia, the results of studies on the Georgian-Abkhaz relations often do not reflect the reality within Abkhazia and the perceptions of the Abkhaz on the issues of mobilization, violence, and civil war.<sup>327</sup> This dissertation is one of the first studies to problematize this and look at the case, focusing on the questions of violent mobilization, from within Abkhazia.

A “post-conflict” society, Abkhazia is a fruitful, yet unexplored, context for data collection on the questions related to civil war, including violent mobilization. In “post-conflict” conditions, a researcher can obtain information that is inaccessible in war-time. As Cohen argues (2010: 55), “post-conflict environments present opportunities to ask and to answer questions that may have been impossible to address during wartime.” Indeed, I was able to undertake research in Abkhazia mainly because no large-scale armed activity was carried out at the time.<sup>328</sup> For this reason it was possible to access the breakaway area, and the level of security threat—a critical concern during the war—was not excessive for the duration of my fieldwork. Moreover, sufficient time has passed

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<sup>327</sup> Exceptions include the work by Hewitt, Garb, and Coppieters. See especially Trier (2009) and Ó Beacháin (2013).

<sup>328</sup> The latest major armed activity was in 2008 during the Russo-Georgian war. My research began in 2010.

since the war of 1992-1993 for participants in the violent events to be willing to talk about issues related to the war. Access to official interviews and other sources of primary and secondary data was as well facilitated by the period elapsed since the Georgian-Abkhaz war. By the time of my fieldwork, government and non-governmental structures were built and libraries and archives were opened, with their use for research purposes permitted by the Abkhaz *de facto* authorities.

Fieldwork in Abkhazia, however, not only exposed me to numerous, common challenges of field research in war zones and societies emerging from civil war, including the ethics of research, access and quality of data, and emotional difficulties (Wood, 2003, 2006a, 2007, 2009b; Fujii, 2010), but also posed an added set of challenges related to field research in *de facto*, unrecognized territories. These challenges include field access, security concerns, and added data issues related to the problems of international isolation and internal politics. I discuss these challenges in turn.

First, access to Abkhazia is an intricate issue. The breakaway area can be entered through the borders with Russia or Georgia. The former option is allowed by Russia, for Russian citizens in particular, but prohibited by Georgia (see fn. 326). The latter option is permitted by Georgia, mostly for international researchers (excluding Russian citizens), but creates issues of trust and reliability as a researcher in Abkhazia. Due to the history of relations and ongoing “information war” between Georgia and Abkhazia, a researcher is considered to be untrue to the purposes of unbiased research if her first point of contact with the situation is Georgia.<sup>329</sup> This, moreover, distorts responses by the Abkhaz to questions posed in the interviews: respondents highlight some facts at the expense of others to counter the information that a researcher obtained in Georgia.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> I was immediately judged in a positive way by my respondents, most of whom asked whether I accessed Abkhazia through Russia or Georgia, based on my response, i.e. through Russia, to this question.

<sup>330</sup> I faced a different set of challenges doing field research in Georgia and Russia than those in Abkhazia. In Tbilisi, I experienced fear when interviewing government officials due to the fact of having done research in Abkhazia. In Russia, my greatest challenge was gaining access to individuals I aimed to interview.



I had to consider the trade-offs between my research goals and my position as a scholar and consequences for future research in Georgia and make difficult decisions on entry into Abkhazia. To gain nuanced, first-hand knowledge on the situation in Abkhazia—past and present—and avoid reproducing some biases present in the Georgian-Abkhaz literature, I chose an option that enabled trust and close contact with my research population. My position as a dual, Canadian and Russian, citizen facilitated access and eased my relations with Georgia during my fieldwork in Tbilisi.

This choice, however, impacted my personal security and added to data concerns. While no major violence events are currently observed, the security situation in Abkhazia remains explosive, especially in the Georgian-Abkhaz border area. On the one hand, crossing into Abkhazia through the Russian border allowed easy access into Russia where I could seek safe havens if my security were to be jeopardized.<sup>331</sup> This set me apart from the locals, many of whom lack an option of exit.<sup>332</sup> On the other hand, entering Abkhazia through Russia posed challenges for personal safety and that of gathered data. Not only the border crossing is a humiliating process, it is also associated with random searches. Hence, I had to carefully hide and password protect all data, especially data brought out of Abkhazia, and leave it in a secure place in Russia every time I left the territory.

In terms of personal security in Abkhazia, I felt relatively safe, with the exception of some events. Upon entering each field site selected for research, I made contact with the local authorities, especially the police office, and thus ensured to be known and seen, mainly for protection purposes. Being a foreign researcher in Abkhazia, the Abkhaz authorities took great care to provide me with a sense of security, in part to maintain the hospitality customs and in part to establish an image of Abkhazia as a safe place that is normalizing after the violent events of the 1990s. However, this did

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<sup>331</sup> Geographically, it is faster to exit Abkhazia into Russia than into Georgia when doing fieldwork in major cities and towns of the breakaway area.

<sup>332</sup> I had to use my option of exit when fieldwork in Abkhazia became increasingly emotionally challenging.

not always provide a guarantee against unexpected events. First, while I stayed with host families who provided support for my fieldwork in Abkhazia, I felt vulnerable to crime in my residences.<sup>333</sup> Second, conducting some interviews, particularly with individuals currently engaged in violence at the Georgian-Abkhaz border, was unsettling.<sup>334</sup> Most importantly, this situation at the Georgian-Abkhaz border obstructed my access to field sites there.<sup>335</sup> I had to work around this issue by gathering data on the border area developments with experts and participants in the events there.

Data issues in Abkhazia went beyond my concerns with personal safety and data security. In highly politicized contexts, such as Abkhazia, addressing data quality is one of researchers' top priorities. Respondents may misremember, lie, and choose not to talk about their knowledge and participation in violent events (Wood, 2003, 2006a; 2007; 2009b; Fujii, 2010). To overcome some of these problems, I worked to establish presence, build trust, and develop an understanding of local peculiarities and enduring relationships with my research participants.<sup>336</sup> In a preliminary research trip to Abkhazia I established contacts with state authorities, non-governmental staff, and persons who offered logistical support. However, I realized that formal affiliation or contact with research participants through government and non-governmental staff, even if local, was unfavorable in the politicized Abkhaz society, where formal affiliation with one or another organization is viewed as acceding to this organization's position on various current issues, while trust originates above all in family and friendship networks.<sup>337</sup> As Arias (2009: 245) suggests,

Ongoing, engaged presence in an area building trust and working to understand social relations can help to dispel the notion that the researcher is affiliated with government [and non-governmental] agencies, a frequent fear of the residents of high-violence locales.

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<sup>333</sup> Staying with host families as opposed to hotels was important in establishing trust with the population in Abkhazia.

<sup>334</sup> Their proximity to present-day violence made interviewing challenging due to my fears and biases against violence.

<sup>335</sup> I attempted accessing the Gali region, but was prevented, in one instance, by the head of the local police.

<sup>336</sup> This is characteristic of ethnographic methods. On ethnography, see Wedeen (2010).

<sup>337</sup> Participants in my research often asked whether I was affiliated with any non-academic organizations in and outside Abkhazia, especially in Georgia and Russia, and accepted the interview only once my exclusive academic affiliation was clear. I was also suspected of being a Russian spy and was interrogated by former KGB agents prior to my group interview with important Abkhaz security and defence officials.

I thus built contact networks by locating private, locally connected individuals in each field site.<sup>338</sup> Establishment of immediate contact with the local authorities upon arrival to each field site noted above not only addressed my security concerns, but also helped me establish trust with my research participants. This way my research was formally approved and research participants did not bear reprisals for participation from the Abkhaz *de facto* state. As discussed in Chapter 1, if access to the needed respondent categories, such as the local police, was not offered through my private networks, I established contact by directly introducing myself to these potential research participants. My attentiveness to detail, knowledge of important local individuals and their stories, or personal circumstances, and research approval by relevant authorities helped me establish trust with these and other research participants. Finally, my engagement with the community, especially participation in local events, such as public and private celebrations, facilitated each element of this strategy of building the research base in a highly interconnected setting of Abkhazia.

In terms of the interview process, I began interviews with introductions and ethics review. I spent as much time as needed to ensure that my academic affiliation, research purposes, and the interview process were clear and understood and accepted by respondents. Interviews were semi-structured, following the pre- to post-war related questions on mobilization, violence, and context of events. If a respondent changed the focus, especially to tell about a traumatic memory, I paused and shared in the memory.<sup>339</sup> This response helped move the interview to life story conversation, or oral history, and offered a level of detail necessary to understand deeper social structures and the process of mobilization for select individuals and their networks. Listening actively and sincerity of response proved to be the foremost qualities in the interview process. Along with my participant observation it helped get at the “meta-data” key for interpretation of interviews (Fujii, 2010: 232).

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<sup>338</sup> This is in contrast to other fieldwork-based studies of civil war based on researchers’ local organizational affiliation (see, for example, Wood, 2003; Cohen, 2010).

<sup>339</sup> See Wood (2007: 384) on “secondary trauma” involved for field researchers in such situations.

## Appendix E: Demographic Composition of Abkhazia (1886-2003)

Table 16. Demographic Composition of Abkhazia (1886-2003)<sup>340</sup>

	1886	1897	1926	1939	1959	1970	1989	2003
Abkhaz	58,963	58,697	55,918	56,197	61,193	77,276	93,267	94,597
Georgians*	4,166	25,873	67,494	91,967	158,221	199,595	239,872	44,041
Russians	1,106	5,135	12,553	60,201	86,715	92,889	74,914	23,420
Other**	4,995	16,474	65,051	103,520	98,609	117,199	117,008	51,958
Total	69,230	106,179	201,016	311,885	404,738	486,959	525,061	214,016

\*This category incorporates Georgians and Mingrelians, considered to be a Georgian sub-group

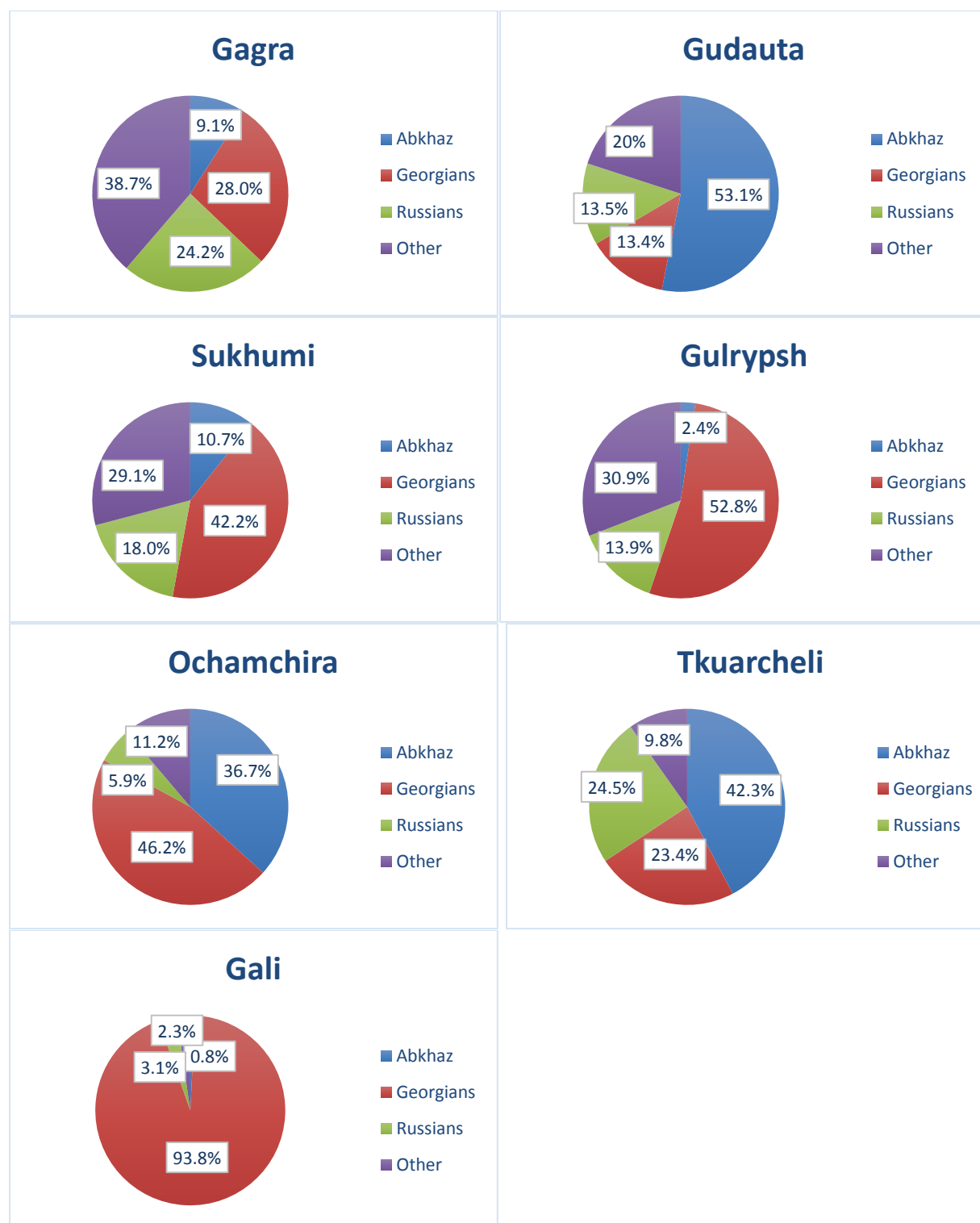
\*\*This category incorporates Armenians, Greeks, Estonians, and Ukrainians

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<sup>340</sup> This table is based on official census data and consults Lakoba (2004) and Trier et al. (2010) for verification.

## Appendix F: Demographic Situation in Abkhazia by Region in 1989

Figure 25. Demographic Situation in Abkhazia by Region in 1989<sup>341</sup>



<sup>341</sup> Note a substantial Armenian population in Gagra and Gulrypsh.

## Appendix G: Concise Abkhaz Mobilization Chronology (1921-2008)

Figure 26. Concise Abkhaz Mobilization Chronology (1921-2008)

1921 - Pro-Soviet demonstrations; Kiaraz fighting
1921a - E. Eshba letter to Central Committee of the Caucasian Bureau
1931 - Anti-status change gathering
1935 - N. Lakoba letter to Central Executive Committee
1941-1944 - World War II
1947 - G. Dzidzaria, K. Shakryl, B. Shinkuba letter to Central Committee of the Communist Party
1952 - E. Shakryl, T. Shakryl letter to J. Stalin
1953 - G. Dzidzaria, B. Shinkuba letter to First Secretary of Central Committee, N. Khrushchev
1954a - D. Gulia letter to Central Committee of the Communist Party
1954b - D. Gulia letter to Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, K. Voroshilov
1956 - D. Gulia letter to Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, K. Voroshilov
1957 - Anti-Georgianization gathering
1957a - D. Gulia letter to First Secretary of Central Committee, N. Khrushchev
1957b - A. Labakhua, I. Tarba letter to Presidium of Central Committee of Communist Party
1965 - Anti-Georgianization gathering
1967 - Anti-Georgianization gathering
1967a - Letter of “eight” to General Secretary of the Communist Party, L. Brezhnev, Chairman of the Council of Ministers, A. Kosygin, Chairman of Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, N. Podgorny
1977a - Letter of “a hundred and thirty” to General Secretary of the Communist Party, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, L. Brezhnev
1977b - Letter of “six” to Politburo members of Central Committee of the Communist Party
1977c - Letter to the Department of Science of Central Committee of the Communist Party
1978 - Anti-Georgianization gathering
1978a - Letter to General Secretary of the Communist Party, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, L. Brezhnev
1983 - Letter of “twelve” to General Secretary of the Communist Party, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, Ju. Andropov
1985 - Letter to the XXVII Congress of the Communist Party
1988 - Status restoration, anti-Georgianization gathering; establishment of Aidgylara
1988a - Letter of “sixty” to the XIX All-Union Party Conference
1989 - Status restoration, anti-Georgianization gathering; first inter-group violence
1989a - Letter to General Secretary of the Communist Party, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, M. Gorbachev
1989b - Ardzinba’s speech at the I Meeting of People’s Deputies
1989c - Letters of the National Forum of Abkhazia
1990 - High Council decrees "On the state sovereignty of the Abkhazian Soviet Socialist Republic" and "On the legal safeguards for the protection of statehood of Abkhazia"
1991 - All-Union Referendum
1992 - Restoration of the 1925 Constitution of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia
1992-1993 - Georgian-Abkhaz war
1993-2008 - Border guard
1998 - Gal/i Six-Day War
2008 - Kodori Operation