

Generations For Peace Institute Research
July - December 2014

Conflict
Analysis

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Overcoming Geopolitics: **Grassroots Transformation and the Georgian- Abkhazian and Georgian- Ossetian Conflicts**

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About Generations For Peace Institute

Generations For Peace Institute (GFPI) conducts, invests in, and disseminates applied interdisciplinary research and best practices in partnership with leading universities such as the Georgetown University, the University of Oxford, the University of Western Cape, as well as other institutes, research centres, individual academics and researchers. As well as research on Generations For Peace's own programmes, the Institute's research projects also examine peace-building interventions by other organisations, therefore making broader contributions to the fields of peace building and conflict transformation in general.

The overall objectives of the Institute reflect the aspirations of Generations For Peace to make a practical difference to programme work on the ground, supporting a growing community of practice by demonstrating the impact of, and advocating for increased use of sport, art, advocacy, dialogue and empowerment activities for sustainable peace building.



About Generations For Peace

Generations For Peace (GFP) is a Jordan-based leading global non-profit peace-building organisation founded by HRH Prince Feisal Al-Hussein and Sarah Kabbani in 2007. Dedicated to sustainable conflict transformation at the grassroots, Generations For Peace empowers volunteer leaders of youth to promote active tolerance and responsible citizenship in communities experiencing different forms of conflict and violence.

In the last seven years, Generations For Peace has trained and mentored more than 8,700 volunteer leaders of youth in 50 countries in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Europe. With our support, their ongoing programmes address local issues of conflict and violence, and have touched the lives of more than 200,000 children, youth and adults.

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1. List of Acronyms

DP	Dialogue For Peace
DPP	Dialogue For Peace Programme
FSU	Former Soviet Union
GFP	Generations For Peace
GFPI	Generations For Peace Institute
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
PE	Participatory Evaluation

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1.

Introduction



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This report presents findings based on fieldwork conducted in Georgia between 24 July and 13 August 2014. The data was collected using semi-structured interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), and individuals from Abkhazia and South Ossetia to map the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts. The report was completed for the non-profit peace-building organisation, Generations For Peace (GFP), which has run activities in Georgia since 2011.¹ The fieldwork also included focus groups and a workshop with the organisation's volunteers.

Generations For Peace is a Jordan-based organisation that works to achieve sustainable conflict transformation at a grassroots level by promoting youth leadership, community empowerment, active tolerance and responsible citizenship. It is a volunteer movement that empowers and supports local people to bring about positive change in their communities. In the last seven years, Generations For Peace has trained and mentored more than 8,400 volunteer leaders in 50 countries and territories. The organisation has developed programme activities using sport, art, advocacy, dialogue, and empowerment. To train volunteer leaders GFP uses a cascading system to pass on essential skills. The organisation transfers its values, knowledge, model, and skills to volunteers working in societies affected by conflict who in turn select and train other volunteers in their own communities. After a stringent recruitment process, GFP selects volunteers to train as Delegates so that they can go back to their communities and implement programmes. After they have met set requirements and run programmes in their communities, they become a certified GFP Pioneer. Since 2007, over 600 'first generation' Delegates have been trained by the organisation at International Camps who in turn have passed on their knowledge to more than 8,400 volunteers.² This process enables the organisation to have a truly global outreach at a community level.



¹ Discussion with Lama Hattab, GFP Programmes Director, at Generations For Peace Headquarters: Amman, Jordan. 18 July 2014.

² All information taken from, Generations For Peace, 'Introductory Booklet', 1-6.

In 2010, the organisation founded its research wing, the Generations For Peace Institute (GFPI), which promotes exchange among practitioners and academics working in conflict transformation. The Institute is in partnership with Georgetown University, the University of Oxford, and the University of Western Cape.³ It is through this part of the organisation that this research was conducted.

1.1 Overview

This report has two main aims: firstly, it analyses varying interpretations of the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts by using conflict analysis and mapping; and, secondly, it assesses GFP's current organisational capacity in the country and, based on this assessment, provides recommendations for future programmes that can address these ethno-territorial disputes. The focus on the cultural dynamics of the conflicts allows for a detailed understanding of a conflict area that can be targeted using peace-building programmes. This builds on previous literature to provide a detailed analysis of how Georgians perceive the conflict as well as an extensive comparison of the interpretations of the different sides involved. The analysis is grounded at a grassroots level with the intention of helping to improve the lives of the people most affected by these conflicts. It provides recommendations for future programmes, along with a heightened awareness of the potential difficulties encountered when planning a conflict transformation intervention in Georgia.

Despite running activities in the country since 2011, Georgia's two ethno-territorial conflicts remain unaddressed by GFP. Previous activities have been successful at boosting Delegates' and Pioneers' confidence and organisational capacity, yet they have not been directly relevant to ethno-territorial conflict.⁴ This research contributes to changing this situation by providing an empirical, theoretical, and practical guide for future activities. It builds on the efforts of the past few years to expand GFP's scope in the country. This research has involved the active participation of Delegates and Pioneers and serves as a form of anonymous feedback for GFP, as well as having relevance for both academics and peace-building practitioners.

1.2 Argument

Georgia's ethno-territorial disputes have often been regarded as backdrops to a larger geo-political contest in the region. Since 2008, this has dominated the thinking of the international community.⁵ Parallels between the Georgian situation and the current events in Ukraine only serve to exacerbate this framing of the conflict.⁶ While this report does not deny Russia's role in Georgia's two ethno-territorial conflicts, it regards the focus on the geopolitical level as unhelpful and

“ This report firstly analyses varying interpretations of the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgia-Ossetian conflicts by using conflict analysis and mapping, and secondly, it assesses GFP's current organisational capacity in the country and, based on that assessment, provides recommendations for future programmes that can address these ethno-territorial disputes.”

3 Generations For Peace, 'Introductory Booklet', 2.

4 Discussion with Lama Hattab, GFP Programmes Director, at Generations For Peace Headquarters: Amman, Jordan. 18 July 14.

5 Ghia Nordia, 'The August War of 2008: The Main Consequences for Georgia and its Conflict', Nationalities Papers 40 (2012).

6 Since April 2014 pro-Russian separatists have fought against the Ukrainian authorities in two Eastern regions of Ukraine. Their actions came in the wake of the overthrow of President Yanukovich in February 2014. It represents another case of Russia becoming heavily involved in an intra-state conflict in the post-Soviet region. In this case, however, ethnic Russians are pursuing secessionist goals. BBC, 'Ukraine Crisis: Timeline,' 9 September 2014. Accessed 30 September 2014. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-26248275>



Read & Share

Useful resource:

Thomas de Waal, *The Caucasus: An Introduction*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)



Read & Share

Useful resource:

Stefan Wolf, *Ethnic Conflict: A Global Overview*. (Oxford: 2006)



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counterproductive for any attempts at grassroots conflict transformation. The Georgian state's attempts to maintain its territorial integrity and the Russian state's attempts to continue its influence in the region detract attention from the ethno-territorial disputes at the core of these conflicts, which have killed thousands, displaced hundreds of thousands and divided once largely peaceful communities.⁷ Academics who have addressed the grassroots elements of these conflicts share this view. John O'Loughlin, Vladimir Kolossov and Gerard Toal conclude that the tendency to treat de facto states – such as Abkhazia and South Ossetia – as pawns of international politics hinders understanding of their complexity and dismisses consideration for the needs of the people who reside within them.⁸

Challenging this understanding of the conflict forms the backbone of this report's argument. Blaming Russia for these conflicts erases the complexity of the situation. It reduces the need to understand more proximate causes and focuses on national and international dynamics at the expense of community-level conflict. Put simply, most ethnic conflicts usually involve one side blaming or showing hostility toward the other – Arab and Jew, Protestant and Catholic, Hutu and Tutsi.⁹ However, in the case of the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts this is not the case. The findings demonstrate that while Ossetians and Abkhazians understand the conflict as a product of Georgian aggression and the fight for survival in the face of that threat, the Georgians interpret the situation as a result of Russian meddling and manipulation aimed at maintaining control in the region and undermining Georgian sovereignty. This results in a situation of 'displaced blame', whereby the Georgian side shifts blame onto a third party which both denies their own complicity in events and denies the Abkhazian and Ossetians agency, as they are considered mere puppets of Russian neo-imperialism.¹⁰ This understanding of the conflict, based on competing post-colonial nationalist narratives, hinders attempts at grassroots peace building and results in contradictory interpretations, which furthers the conflicts' intractability.

Part of this conflict transformation should be a rethinking among the Georgians and IDPs about the idea that they are powerless in the face of Russian aggression. The findings show that the Georgian view is both deterministic and fatalistic in the sense that Russia is regarded as a constant menace working to undermine Georgians, never allowing them to be truly free; and, as a smaller, weaker country they are unable to challenge this situation. The community and ethnic dimensions of these conflicts need to become a central focus once more in order for grassroots actors to be able to bring about positive change. In other words, individuals on the ground cannot change the politics of the Kremlin but they can change the attitudes, perceptions, and stereotypes in their own societies. Despite the geopolitical situation, people in Georgia, Abkhazia, and Ossetia do have the ability to bring about positive change; empowering individuals with this realisation must form an integral part of any peace-building intervention.

Therefore attempts at reconciliation need to focus on improving dialogue between Georgians/IDPs and the people living in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Exposure to different perspectives will raise awareness of competing needs. For the Georgians

⁷ Thomas de Waal, *The Caucasus: An Introduction*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁸ John O'Loughlin, Vladimir Kolossov and Gerard Toal, 'Inside Abkhazia: A Survey of Opinions in a De-Facto State.' *Post-Soviet Affairs* 27 (2013): 3.

⁹ Stefan Wolf, *Ethnic Conflict: A Global Overview*. (Oxford: 2006).

¹⁰ Argument made in Peter Kabachnik, Joanna Regulska and Beth Mitchneck, 'Displacing Blame: Georgian Internally Displaced Person Perspectives on the Georgia-Abkhazia Conflict.' *Ethno Politics* 20 (2012).

it will result in an increased understanding of the complexity of the situation to counter the simplistic account provided by the Georgian government. As events in Ukraine continue and the West's relationship with Russia deteriorates, the geopolitical understanding of these conflicts is only set to gain wider currency. Now it is more important than ever to reset the focus onto the intra-state rather than inter-state dynamics of these conflicts. Forging trust and rebuilding relationships will remain impossible to achieve if explanations for the conflicts among the Georgians continue to rest on the actions of a handful of men in the Kremlin.

1.3 Structure

The report proceeds in four parts: introduction, findings on ethno-territorial conflicts, findings on GFP in Georgia, and recommendations. The Introduction provides a history of Georgia and its conflicts as well as a demographic overview of the country and a discussion of definitions. It also includes a survey of the secondary literature, both theoretical and conflict specific. It finishes with a discussion of the research questions and the methodology used for data collection.

Chapter Two discusses the findings of interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi as well as IDPs residing in Tbilisi. The interviews held with people in Abkhazia and South Ossetia are integrated into this analysis. The discussion follows the framework used in the interviews, which comprises of five sections: conflicts in Tbilisi; origins, causes and consequences of the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts; understanding of conflict dynamics; people's understanding of geopolitical concerns; and, finally, perceptions of the future. For the IDPs, the conflict in Tbilisi section is replaced with their memory of their territory of origin. This chapter illustrates how Russia's role dominates Georgian understanding of the conflict. Moreover, it uses the small sample of Abkhazians and South Ossetians to illustrate how contradictory group perceptions of the conflict are. It suggests the importance of transformational dialogue in building awareness, mutual understanding, and trust.

Chapter Three begins with a discussion of GFP Delegates' and Pioneers' understanding of the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts. It then goes on to discuss findings from the interviews and workshop regarding GFP's strengths, weaknesses, and the main areas for improvement. Ideas on future programmes and how to address the conflicts are also part of the discussion. It finishes with a brief consideration of how the Delegates and Pioneers found the research process. This chapter finds that while GFP has a hard-working, committed, and imaginative core of volunteers in Georgia, at their current capacity they will not be able to address the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts. GFP needs to build up capacities in the territories separately in order to achieve this future goal. While they are doing this, GFP Georgia can address other issues relevant to the country's ethno-territorial conflicts.

The Fourth and final chapter includes a list of recommendations and the conclusion. The recommendations are divided between improving GFP capacity and addressing ethno-territorial conflict in Georgia. It finishes by recommending transformational dialogue in order to increase awareness, mutual understanding, and trust. The conclusion summarises the findings and argument, before going on to suggest areas for future research.

“As events in Ukraine continue and the West's relationship with Russia deteriorates, the geopolitical understanding of these conflicts is only set to gain wider currency. Now it is more important than ever to reset the focus onto the intra-state rather than inter-state dynamics of these conflicts. Forging trust and rebuilding relationships will remain impossible to achieve if explanations for the conflicts among the Georgians continue to rest on the actions of a handful of men in the Kremlin.”

1.4 Georgia and its Ethno-Territorial Conflicts

Although the focus of this research is Georgia's two ethno-territorial disputes, it also seeks to assess what other conflicts exist in Georgian society that could be addressed by GFP. Therefore, a demographic overview of the country is given below to provide a background for later discussion. The section on the history of these conflicts provides information that serves as an aid to understanding the following chapters of the report.

1.4.1 Demography of Georgia

Georgia has a population of 4.3 million.¹¹ In the only census carried out in post-Soviet Georgia in 2002, ethnic Georgians accounted for 83 per cent of the population, compared with just 70 per cent in 1989. The country has numerous ethnic minorities including Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and Russians. By far the largest minority groups are Azerbaijanis and Armenians making up 6.5 and 5.7 per cent of the population respectively.¹² Georgian is the main language of the country but Russian is still widely spoken, especially among the older generation and the Russified titular nationalities.¹³ There is a low level of proficiency in Georgian among the country's ethnic minorities, which excludes them from Georgian-dominated public life.¹⁴ The country is overwhelmingly Orthodox Christian, at 83.9 per cent of the population. The second largest religious group are Muslims, at 9.9 per cent of the population.¹⁵

South Ossetia has a population of approximately 70,000 and Abkhazia 250,000. Both of these figures represent significant reductions on pre-war populations. While South Ossetia is largely ethnically homogenous, Abkhazia has a sizable Armenian and Russian population, as well as a notable Mingrelian-Georgian population that have gradually returned to the Gali (Gal) district of Southern Abkhazia since the mid-1990s.¹⁶

1.4.2 The History of the Conflicts¹⁷

Situated at a cultural and political crossroads, over the centuries Georgia has been the subject of competition between Persia, Turkey (the Ottoman Empire), and Russia. In the 19th century, the Russians incorporated Georgia into their empire following a protracted struggle to gain control in the region.¹⁸ The country briefly

¹¹ UN Data, 'Georgia.' Accessed 10 September 2014. <https://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=GEORGIA>

¹² Statistic discussed in Laurence Broers, 'Filling the Void: Ethnic Politics and Nationalities Policy in Post-Conflict Georgia.' Nationalities Papers 36 (2008): 277-279.

¹³ Among the Georgian ethnic category, there are several ethnic sub-groups, some of which speak dialects that are distinct from Georgian. The main groups are Mingrelian (some of whom lived in Abkhazia), Svans in Western Georgia and Ajarians in southwest Georgia. Stuart J. Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*. (London: Ithaca, 2001) p. 87.

¹⁴ Traditionally Russian was the lingua franca spoken by Georgia's various ethnic groups, but as levels of Russian proficiency among the Georgian citizens decline (most of the younger generation learn English rather than Russian) it will be increasingly difficult for different ethnic communities within Georgia to communicate. Broers, 'Filling the Void.' 279.

¹⁵ Aside from the overall population figure, these statistics do not include Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

¹⁶ BBC, 'Abkhazia Profile.' Accessed 4 September 2014. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-18175030>; BBC, 'South Ossetia Profile.' Accessed 4 September 2014. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-18269210>

¹⁷ Map 1.1: 'Q&A Conflict in Georgia', BBC. 11 November 2008. Accessed 17 September 2014. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/7549736.stm>; Map 1.2: BBC, 'South Ossetia Profile.' Map 1.3: BBC, 'Abkhazia Profile.'

¹⁸ Thomas de Waal, *The Caucasus*. 38-39.

experienced independence under Menshevik rule between 1917 and 1921 before being incorporated into the Soviet Union.¹⁹

In 1991, Georgia gained independence. The country's first post-Soviet President, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, embarked on a fervently nationalist course that did much to destabilise the fledgling country. The nationalists cast ethnic minorities as a potential fifth column that desired to undermine the country's newfound freedom.²⁰ Following a small civil war, he was overthrown and replaced by the former Soviet Foreign Minister, Eduard Shevardnadze. During his 11 years of rule, the Georgian people became increasingly frustrated with poverty, crime, and corruption and in 2003 he was overthrown in a popular uprising known as the 'Rose Revolution'. Mikhail Saakashvili, who led the protests, replaced him as President in 2004.²¹

He pursued a policy of strengthening Georgia's ties to the West through aiming for accession with NATO and the EU as well as restoring the country's territorial integrity. In 2012, the Georgian Dream Coalition formed a new government and in October the following year Saakashvili was replaced by Giorgi Margvelashvili. The new government has continued Georgia's EU integration trajectory.²²

Georgia's post-Soviet history has been dominated by two ethno-political disputes in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The emergence of a sovereign Georgia was



Map 1.1: Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia

19 Under Soviet rule, Georgia became a popular tourist destination and was idealised as a sub-tropical paradise – a 'Soviet Florida'. The country enjoyed a relatively high standard of living when compared to the rest of the Union. Ibid. 82-83.

20 Emil Souleimanov, 'Understanding Ethno-Political Conflict: Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia Wars Reconsidered.' (Basingstoke: Houndsmill, 2013), 90.

21 BBC, 'Georgia Profile.' Accessed 16 July 2014. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17301647>

22 In May 2014, Georgia passed a law banning all forms of discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, language, and religion as a precondition for relaxed visa conditions with EU member states, and in July 2014 the Georgian parliament ratified an Association Agreement with the EU, which included a comprehensive free trade area. Civil Georgia, 'Georgia Ratifies EU Association Agreement.' 18 July 2014. Accessed 18 July 2014. <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=27503>

paralleled by attempts to gain dominion by the country's ethnic minorities.²³ In the late 1980s, the Ossetians began to pursue a course independent of an increasingly nationalistic Georgia.²⁴ The war of 1991-1992, between Georgians and Ossetians, had a devastating impact on the territory. A peace treaty was organised in 1992.²⁵ The war in Abkhazia between 1992 and 1993 resulted in a mass exodus of ethnic Georgians that drastically altered the demographic composition of the territory.²⁶ Following the wars, these disputes became so-called 'frozen conflicts', with no war and no peace.²⁷

The situation in Georgia was brought to the world's attention in August 2008 when the Georgian military's response to a violent outbreak in South Ossetia resulted in Russia's invasion of the country.²⁸ The war drastically altered the two conflicts by further entrenching the incompatibility of Georgian-Ossetian and Georgian-Abkhazian interests. In addition, Russia's recognition of the breakaway territories has given legitimacy to their secessionist ambitions.²⁹ On the international stage, ethno-territorial conflict in Georgia was therefore overshadowed by the country's geopolitical contest with a resurgent Russia.

Following the war, Russia has become increasingly involved militarily and economically with the territories, which has further cemented their estrangement from Tbilisi. In 2011, the UN estimated that overall there were 276,000 IDPs in Georgia as a result of the situation in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.³⁰ More recently, President Margvelashvili has taken a conciliatory tone towards the two breakaway territories. He stated in an interview in late 2013 that he desired to attract them back to a democratic Georgia.³¹ However, for Tbilisi, developments in the breakaway territories are largely out of reach, as the areas remain sealed off by Russian troops. Whether these troops are protectors or occupiers depends on people's interpretation of the conflict.

1.4.3 Political Situation and Definitions

Commonly known as de facto states, Abkhazia and South Ossetia are two of around 20 political entities in the world lacking widespread recognition.³² Several of these are in the Former Soviet Union (FSU). Along with the two on the territory internationally recognised as Georgia's, there is Trans-Dniester in Moldova and

23 Christopher Zurcher, 'The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict and Nationhood.' (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 131.

24 Ibid, 124.

25 The Ossetians are a largely Orthodox Christian ethnic group who speak a language related to Persian. Most Ossetians live in Russian North Ossetia. Thomas de Waal, *The Caucasus*. 145.

26 Kirill Shevchenko, 'Introduction in Islam'; Tekushev et al (eds), 'Abkhazia: Between the Past and the Future.' (Prague: Median Orient, 2013). 13.

27 Although South Ossetia technically formed a de facto separate political entity, its border with Georgia remained open and people were allowed to travel freely. It remained badly damaged from the war and became a haven for smuggling. de Waal, *The Caucasus*. 145. In Abkhazia, tens of thousands of ethnic Armenians and Russians remained in the territory alongside the Abkhaz. Ethnic Mingrelians and Georgians began returning to the Gali (Gal to the Abkhaz) district of Southern Abkhazia. In Gali some Mingrelian-Georgians waged a low-level war, which escalated in 1998 causing many Abkhaz deaths and another exodus of ethnic Georgians following the response of the Abkhaz armed forces. In 1999, the territory held a referendum and declared independence. Ibid. 165-166.

28 Ghia Nordia, 'The August War of 2008: The Main Consequences for Georgia and its Conflict.' *Nationalities Papers* 40. (2012): 722.

29 Ghia Nordia, 'The August War of 2008.' 727.

30 UN Data, 'Georgia.'

31 Tabula, 'President: Russian Proved Losers by Recognising Abkhazia, South Ossetia.' 4 December 2014. Accessed 15 July 2014. <http://www.tabula.ge/en/story/77769-president-russia-proved-loser-by-recognizing-abkhazia-south-ossetia>

32 Discussed in O'Loughlin, Kolossov, and Toal, 'Inside Abkhazia.' 2.

Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan.³³ De facto states share several common features: they usually arise from the breakdown of larger imperial structures, they are often supported by an outside power, they are witness to extensive state- and nation-building efforts, and subject to difficult property situations arising from displacements.³⁴ International law surrounding these entities has been confused since the West's recognition of Kosovo in 2008, which was firmly opposed by Russia. Later that year Russia recognised Abkhazia and South Ossetia following the war with Georgia. While the West is unwilling to backtrack on its commitment to Georgia's 'territorial integrity', Russia refuses to recognise Kosovo.³⁵

Due to this political situation hanging over the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts there is confusion over the exact definition of these disputes. In Georgia it is widely circulated that these are political (or geopolitical) rather than ethnic conflicts. This theme often came up in interviews for this research.³⁶ This report argues that they are both, a situation captured by the term ethno-territorial conflicts, which denotes an ethnic conflict arising from a dispute over territory. Ethnic conflict is defined as one in which the goals of at least one party are understood in distinctly ethnic terms and in which the primary fault line of the conflicts are of ethnic distinctions.³⁷ In Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the ethnic component is undeniable. In the wars of the 1990s, ethnicity formed the main motive for mobilisation and interests were understood in ethnic terms. The war in Abkhazia resulted in one of the greatest acts of ethnic cleansing seen in the FSU, with 200,000 ethnic Mingrelians-Georgians forced to leave their homes.³⁸ However, these conflicts are also political. Firstly, there is the issue of status: the Georgian government regards the two territories as integral parts of the Georgian nation, while the Abkhazian and Ossetian authorities consider themselves leaders of independent countries. Secondly, there is the geopolitical factor of Russia's complicity. In sum, the conflicts have both ethnic and political dimensions that can be defined as ethno-territorial or ethno-political. This definition is important for overcoming the one-dimensional geopolitical framing of these conflicts.³⁹



Useful resource:
Berghof Foundation,
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Transformation':
<http://bit.ly/1Gay7be>

33 Events are moving fast, but the Donetsk People's Republic and Lugansk People's Republic, on territory internationally recognised as Ukrainian, may become two more permanent de facto states in post-Soviet space. Patrick Jackson, 'Ukraine Crisis: Frozen Conflicts and the Kremlin', BBC. 10 September 2014. Accessed 10 September 2014. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-29078541>

34 Discussed in O'Loughlin, Kolossov and Toal, 'Inside Abkhazia.' 2.

35 Sergey Markendenov, 'International Experts View of Abkhazia'; Islam Tekushev et al (eds), 'Abkhazia: Between the Past and the Future.' (Prague: Median Orient, 2013). 72.

36 Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July-11 August 2014.

37 Wolf, 'Ethnic Conflict.' 2.

38 This use of this term is disputed by the Abkhaz. Zurcher, 'Post-Soviet Wars.' 115.

39 Two other relevant definitions are conflict and violence. A conflict is defined as a clash of antithetical ideas or interests among actors and/or groups pursuing mutually incompatible goals. It is a social phenomenon that is a universal part of human interaction; yet, each conflict has its own distinct history, features and dynamics. Violence denotes much more than just physical acts. It includes actions, words, attitudes, structures, or systems that cause physical, social or psychological damage. Both these definitions offer a much broader understanding of conflict and violence than is prevalent in popular understanding. Through expanding the definition of these terms, the multifarious and diverse ways conflict manifests itself in society and the impact this has on peoples' lives can be better understood. Berghof Foundation, 'Berghof Glossary of Conflict Transformation.' Accessed 7 July 2014. <http://www.berghof-foundation.org/publications/glossary/>



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“ In Galtung’s ABC triangle, Attitudes (A) refer to the assumptions, cognitions, and emotions that one side has towards the other; Behaviour (B) refers to the mental, verbal and physical acts expressed during a conflict; Contradictions (C) -in values, goals, or interests- form the basis of the conflict; it is from here that violent attitudes and behaviour arise.”

1.5 Literature Review

1.5.1 The Specific Field: Conflict Mapping, Identity Frames and Psychocultural Interpretations

The overview above demonstrates how the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts arose from certain disagreements over territory and rights. These interests were understood in ethnic terms and when events escalated people mobilised along ethnic lines. Applying theoretical frameworks to this situation allows for a deeper understanding of how these conflicts work; this, in turn, strengthens the researcher’s ability to suggest ways they could be addressed. Every conflict has basic elements that enable the researcher to produce a map. This should decipher the different parties involved in the dispute, the contradictions from which it arises and the different dynamics that shape the conflict.⁴⁰ One form of conflict mapping is the ABC triangle, developed by Johan Galtung.⁴¹ The ABC triangle provides a simple way of breaking down conflict dynamics into just three areas; therefore, it was easy to use as a basic form of participatory conflict analysis and incorporate into the interview questions used in this study.⁴² In the triangle, ‘A’ stands for attitudes, ‘B’ for behaviour and ‘C’ for contradictions. Attitudes refer to the assumptions, cognitions, and emotions that one side has toward the other. Behaviour refers to the mental, verbal, and physical acts expressed during a conflict. Contradictions – in values, goals, or interests – form the basis of the conflict; it is from here that violent attitudes and behaviour arise. In a conflict, each of these three elements influences the other to varying extents depending on its nature.⁴³ For example, contradictions may trigger hostile attitudes that in turn lead to violent behaviour that further entrenches those contradictions. The ABC triangle provides a simple visualisation of conflict dynamics; it represents a framework for addressing conflict that accounts for structural considerations alongside cultural and behavioural factors.

Identity is an integral part of ethno-political conflict. Ethnic identity connects individuals through perceived common past experiences and expectations of shared future ones.⁴⁴ Central to identity and conflict is the issue of framing, which is defined as cognitive short cuts utilised by people to make sense of complicated situations. Frames help individuals understand their surroundings and portray them to others.⁴⁵ Identity frames focus specifically on how people view conflict situations. Going back to Galtung’s triangle, an identity helps shape the attitudes people have and the way that they behave, as well as the sides they take when a contradiction arises. When an individual feels threatened by a conflict situation this tends to strengthen their group affiliations.⁴⁶ In the conflicts addressed in this report, ethnic groups mobilised against what they regarded as threats to their group’s existence or ethnic homelands, in a time of great insecurity.

These competing identity frames are vital to understanding conflict and the

40 Paul Wehr, ‘Conflict Mapping.’ In Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess (eds), *Beyond Intractability*. (Bolder: University of Colorado, 2006) http://www.beyondintractability.org/bi-essay/conflict_mapping/

41 Johan Galtung, ‘Theories of Conflict: Definitions, Dimensions, Negations, Formations.’ (2009). 105.

42 See Appendix A.

43 Johan Galtung, ‘Theories of Conflict: Definitions, Dimensions, Negations, Formations.’ (2009). 105.

44 Marc Howard Ross, ‘Psychocultural Interpretations and Dramas: Identity Dynamics in Ethnic Conflicts.’ *Political Psychology* 21. (2001): 160.

45 Sanda Kaufman, Michael Elliott and Deborah Shmueli, ‘Frames, Framing and Reframing.’ In Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess, *Beyond Intractability*. (Bolder: University of Colorado, 2003) <http://www.beyondintractability.org/bi-essay/framing/>

46 Robert Gardner, ‘Identity Frames.’ In Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess, *Beyond Intractability*. (Bolder: University of Colorado, 2003) http://www.beyondintractability.org/bi-essay/identity_frames/

reasons for its intractability. In addition, insights made in the area of social and cultural psychology can provide a more advanced understanding of how frames shape ethnic conflict.⁴⁷ Psychocultural interpretations are shared, deeply rooted worldviews that stem from the human need to make sense of experience. This often leads to distortions as the need for certainty overrides the need for accuracy. They provide simple, coherent narratives that can be used to explain past events and predict future action.⁴⁸ In many conflicts, parties do not agree on when the conflict started, what it is about, or who is involved. Given the emotional intensity people attach to interpretations it is often difficult for them to acknowledge the opposing side's perspective; yet, reconciliation attempts need to begin with acknowledgement of the other party's point of view.⁴⁹ Once this is better understood by both sides then the other dynamics of the conflict can be addressed. Psychocultural interpretation theory provides a theoretical framework for understanding the shared narratives ethnic groups have in conflict situations.

Collectively these theories enable the researcher to understand the dynamics of the conflict and to appreciate how the people involved in the conflict understand the different conflict elements. The perspectives people have shape their opinions and actions, and form the basis of the conflict itself. The better these are understood, the more effectively the conflict can be addressed.

1.5.2 Literature on the Conflicts: Ethno-Political Conflict, Geopolitics and Grassroots Dynamics

There has been a significant amount of academic literature addressing Georgia's two ethno-territorial conflicts; however, these works have often been focused on macro perspectives. Using John Paul Lederach's levels of leadership, Tier I ('Top Leadership') has received by far the most attention when addressing inter-ethnic conflict, Tier II ('Middle-Range Leadership') has received less attention, and Tier III ('Grassroots Leadership') has often been missing from analysis.⁵⁰ Recently this has been challenged, however. There have been several works addressing popular attitudes toward the conflicts among IDPs and people living in Ossetia and in Abkhazia.⁵¹ This work seeks to contribute to this literature by conducting research grounded at a grassroots level with the specific aim of aiding future conflict transformation projects.

This section reviews the main currents in the literature surrounding these conflicts. It proceeds in four parts: inter-ethnic conflict and intra-state wars; geopolitical considerations; status and conflict transformation; and, finally, attitudinal dynamics and public opinion.

Inter-ethnic and intra-state wars: Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was a renewed interest in intra-state wars. Emil Souleimanov has argued that



Useful resource:

Johan Galtung,
'Theories of Conflict:
Definitions, Dimensions,
Negations, Formations'.
(2009)



Useful resource:

John Paul Lederach,
'Building Peace:
Sustainable
Reconciliation in
Divided Societies'.
(Washington, DC:
United States Institute
of Peace Press, 1997)

47 Psychocultural interpretation theory merges psychoanalytic ideas about human development with the anthropological emphasis on shared culture to explain the development of shared worldviews. Marc Howard Ross, 'Psychocultural Interpretation Theory and Peacebuilding in Ethnic Conflict.' *Political Psychology* 16. (1995): 524.

48 Ross, 'Psychocultural Interpretations and Dramas.' 160-161.

49 Ross, 'Psychocultural Interpretation Theory.' 531-532.

50 John Paul Lederach, 'Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies.' (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997). 39.

51 Kabachnik, Regulska and Mitchneck, 'Displacing Blame'; O'Loughlin, Kolossov and Toal, 'Inside Abkhazia'; John O'Loughlin and Gerard Toal, 'Inside South Ossetia: A Survey of Opinion in a De Facto State.' *Post Soviet Affairs* 29. (2013).

ethnicity was an integral element of Georgian political discourse in the late 1980s.⁵² President Gamsakhurdia's inflammatory rhetoric strengthened ethnic identification in the country and heightened conflicting interests.⁵³ Christoph Zurcher echoed Souleimanov's conclusions by arguing that in Georgia, each group mobilised in reaction to the other, and the Abkhaz and South Ossetians national projects were a defence mechanism against an increasingly nationalistic Georgia.⁵⁴ Soviet ethno-federalism gave them the territorial boundaries, institutions, and symbols needed for separatist aspirations; all that was required was mobilisation and this came in reaction to Georgia's nationalistic rhetoric. Both Souleimanov and Zurcher have shown that the conflicts, rather than being a product of ancient hatreds, arose in a particular context and in a particular political climate. Peace-building efforts, therefore, should focus on transforming the estrangements along ethnic lines caused by the country's post-Soviet experience.

Geopolitical considerations: A second major strand in the literature focuses on the geopolitics of the region. Particularly since the August 2008 war, this dimension of the conflict has complicated the situation described by the literature on intra-state wars. Ghia Nordia has argued that the war arose from a range of issues, including President Putin's desire to restore Russia as a regional power and the West's increasing involvement in the Caucasus.⁵⁵ A consensus has emerged among third parties that Georgia, Russia, the West and the breakaway states all share responsibility for the war.⁵⁶ Nordia argued that the war in 2008 has led to a conflict transformation, but not in the sense usually implied by the phrase. The war exacerbated the polarisation between Georgia and Abkhazia/South Ossetia and turned Russia into a main conflict party, resulting in Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts being overshadowed by the Georgian-Russian geopolitical contest.⁵⁷ This report seeks to understand how the 'transformation' described by Nordia has shaped grassroots perceptions of these conflicts.

Political status and conflict transformation: Aside from geopolitics, the predominant political issue in these conflicts is the official status of the two territories. Both sides refuse to compromise on this area. The literature on conflict transformation has discussed ways to overcome this deadlock. Celine Francis' regarded the Georgia-Abkhazian conflict as predominantly a clash of desired statuses.⁵⁸ She argued that grassroots initiatives could give voice to those in society who are supportive of a peaceful solution that could in turn overcome the political stalemate by influencing policy makers.⁵⁹ Through dialogue, both sides can gain a greater understanding of their respective goals, interests and fears, which can help find a middle ground in the conflict over desired statuses. This report builds on Francis' findings to suggest ways that grassroots peace-building efforts could overcome the political stalemate on status that has existed for over two decades.

A report authored by Archil Gegeshidze and Ivlian Haindrava used interviews with experts on the conflict to produce a comparative analysis of perspectives

52 Souleimanov, 'Understanding Ethno-Political Conflict.' 21.

53 Ibid. 90-94.

54 Christopher Zurcher, 'The Post-Soviet Wars.' 142-144.

55 Nordia, 'The August War of 2008.' 722.

56 Sergey Markedonov, 'International Experts View of Abkhazia.' 67.

57 Nordia, 'The August War of 2008.' 229.

58 Celine Frances, *Conflict Resolution and Status: The Case of Georgia and Abkhazia (1989-2008)*. (Antwerp: Brussels University Press, 2010). 20.

59 Ibid. 23.

and to suggest ways that these issues could be transformed by 'rethinking the paradigm'.⁶⁰ Like Francis, they agreed that the issue of status predominates over all other concerns; yet, they stated that a resolution of the conflict would require a solution to an array of humanitarian, social, and economic problems. Agreeing on status alone would not end these conflicts.⁶¹ Due to the irreconcilability of the conflicting parties' goals, the aim should be transformation rather than resolution. There needs to be a transformation of the relations, interests and discourses as well as the problems themselves. What is needed, they argued, is a deep and impartial analysis of the past, repudiation of violence, the overcoming of unequal relations and the expansion of dialogue space through including new actors. The absence of trust between the different parties remains a major obstacle in this process.⁶² Gegeshidze and Haindrava's work provided an innovative exploration of how this protracted conflict could be transformed; however, its focus is on analysing academic opinion. To achieve sustainable grassroots conflict transformation popular perceptions need to be analysed.

Attitudinal dynamics and public opinion: Several works have sought to look at the attitudinal dynamics of these conflicts. Peter Kabachnik, Joanna Regulska, and Beth Mitchneck have argued that in the Georgian-Abkhazian dispute, blame is displaced onto larger, abstract geopolitical entities such as Georgia and Russia. For the Abkhazians it is the Georgians who caused the conflict whereas for the Georgians the Russians are to blame.⁶³ Through blaming Russia, Georgians deny Abkhazians agency in the conflict, overlooking their perspective and the possibility that they came up with separatist demands of their own accord, rather than being mere puppets with Russia pulling the strings.⁶⁴ This narrative of Russian culpability erases the complexity of the situation. In interviews with Georgian IDPs from Abkhazia, the authors noted that the lack of animosity toward the Abkhaz among the Georgian IDPs was striking.⁶⁵ The current report builds on their findings by incorporating non-IDP Georgians into the analysis. It also expands beyond issues of blame to address in more detail how group interpretations alter understanding of conflict dynamics.⁶⁶

Adding to work on grassroots conflict dynamics, O'Loughlin, Kolossov and Toal carried out an extensive survey to reveal prevailing public sentiments in the two de facto states. In Abkhazia, the authors found that the main difference after 2008

60 Archil Gegeshidze, 'Introduction.' In Archil Gegeshidze and Ivlian Haindrava, 'Transformation of the Georgia-Abkhazian Conflict: Rethinking the Paradigm.' Conciliation Resources: European Union (2011). 5.

61 They argue that conflict resolution attempts prior to 2008 amounted to a zero-sum game with neither side willing to back down on its demands. Ivlian Haindrava, 'Conflict Resolution Policies before August 2008.' In Archil Gegeshidze and Ivlian Haindrava, 'Transformation of the Georgia-Abkhazian Conflict: Rethinking the Paradigm.' Conciliation Resources: European Union (2011). 11-14.

62 Archil Gegeshidze and Ivlian Haindrava, 'Prospects for the Transformation of the Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict.' In Archil Gegeshidze and Ivlian Haindrava, 'Transformation of the Georgia-Abkhazian Conflict: Rethinking the Paradigm.' Conciliation Resources: European Union (2011). 40.

63 Kabachnik, Regulska and Mitchneck, 'Displacing Blame.' 123-126.

64 Ibid. 131.

65 Ibid. 134.

66 In another work addressing attitudes toward ethno-territorial conflict, Kabachnik argues that Georgian discourse on Abkhazia and South Ossetia centres on 'cartographic anxieties', which he defines as a preoccupation with the loss of territory. This perspective, fuelled by political rhetoric and imagery, posits that the loss of the two territories harms national identity. Peter Kabachnik, 'Wounds that Won't Heal: Cartographic Anxieties and the Quest for Territorial Integrity In Georgia.' Central Asian Survey 30. (2012). He has also shown that similar anxieties exist in Abkhazia by arguing that national symbols and maps play a vital role in legitimising the territory's statehood. Peter Kabachnik, 'Shaping Abkhazia: Cartographic Anxieties and the Making and Remaking of the Abkhaz Geo-body.' Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies 14. (2012): 402-403. Kabachnik's works shows the incompatibility – on a cultural level – of the two different state building projects at the centre of this conflict.

“ This report seeks to build on an emerging literature that places emphasis on the grassroots dynamics of these conflicts through looking at popular opinion and understanding. It uses theory that focuses on the cultural aspects of ethnic conflict to reveal how competing interpretations shape understanding of past events, group interests, and future prospects.”

was a greater sense of security: prior to the war and Russian recognition, Abkhazia faced a remilitarising Georgia as an unrecognised *de facto* state, but afterwards it was recognised and its borders protected by Russian troops.⁶⁷ The survey found that among the Abkhaz, Armenians, and Russians living in the territory there was a strong sense of solidarity with the Abkhazian state and belief in its legitimacy; among the Georgians/Mingrelians, however, this was not the case.⁶⁸ Abkhazia's non-Georgian residents appear to accept the military situation (Russian presence) because of the territory's geopolitical situation.⁶⁹ All non-Georgian ethnic groups were in favour of independence, albeit with some variation.⁷⁰ The authors argued that the findings reveal a complexity that should challenge simplistic assumptions that regard Abkhazians as mere pawns in the geopolitical game. They concluded by saying that non-Georgian Abkhazians are 'contentedly irreconcilable to the Georgian state'.⁷¹

In contrast, in South Ossetia the population showed considerably less optimism about their state and its future.⁷² Around 75 per cent of South Ossetians surveyed reported that they have 'mostly bad' or 'very bad' feelings towards the Georgians, whereas 90 per cent had 'very positive' or 'mostly positive' feelings toward the Russians.⁷³ The authors concluded by stating that South Ossetia is more than just an occupied territory and 'glib' portrayals of it as such need to be avoided.⁷⁴ Both of these surveys reveal a diversity of opinion that needs to be acknowledged by the Georgian side prior to any attempt at reconciliation. This report builds on their findings by contrasting competing interpretations of the conflict situation.

Collectively this literature has illustrated several elements to the conflict that complicate peace-building efforts. The geopolitical situation – especially since 2008 – has overshadowed the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgia-Ossetian conflicts. In practical terms, this reduces the chances for dialogue between the two sides due to a lack of opportunities for communication. In attitudinal terms, it means that the grievances and elements of contestation between the two sides are overlooked as individuals focus on Russian influence.

Peace-building efforts need to focus on improving grassroots dialogue between Georgia and the two breakaway territories and transforming the pervasive one-dimensional view of the conflict. This report seeks to build on an emerging literature that places emphasis on the grassroots dynamics of these conflicts through looking at popular opinion and understanding. It uses theory that focuses on the cultural aspects of ethnic conflict to reveal how competing interpretations shape understanding of past events, group interests, and future prospects.

67 O'Loughlin, Kolossov and Toal, 'Inside Abkhazia.' 14.

68 Ibid. 22.

69 Ibid. 31.

70 While 79 per cent of Abkhaz favoured independence, Armenians were evenly split with 51 per cent wanting to be part of the Russian Federation and 44 per cent wanting independence. Likewise, Russians were also split with 58 per cent wanting independence and 38 per cent wanting to be part of Russia. Ibid. 31.

71 Ibid. 33-34.

72 O'Loughlin, 'Inside South Ossetia: A Survey of Attitudes in a De Facto State.' 152.

73 The negative attitudes towards the Georgians in South Ossetia are much more hostile than the attitudes of the non-Georgian groups in Abkhazia where roughly 50 per cent of Abkhaz, Armenian and Russians viewed the Georgians in a 'good' or 'mostly good' way. Ibid. 156-7.

74 Ibid. 163.

1.6 Research Questions

The above literature has illustrated how perceptions and interpretations form an integral part of Georgia's two ethno-territorial disputes. Moreover, the situation on the ground results in there being a complete lack of dialogue between the opposing sides. This report has three main aims: first, it will assess the dynamics of the conflicts using Galtung's triangle framework; second, through detailed, narrative interviews it looks at how the conflict is understood by the opposing sides; and, third, using an assessment of Generation For Peace's current capacity in Georgia, the report suggests ways that the conflicts could be addressed.

Conflict Mapping:

1. What is the nature of the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts?

- What parties are involved in these conflicts?
- What are the main features of these conflicts?

Galtung's triangle:

- Contradictions: What are the contradictions that have led to these conflicts and how are these expressed?
- Behavioural: What actions or words fuel these conflicts?
- Attitudinal: What norms, values and beliefs contribute to these conflicts?
- How are these dynamics understood by the opposing sides?

2. How do the different sides interpret these conflicts? How does this shape the conflict?

- How are the origins, causes, consequences and longevity of these conflicts understood by Georgians?
- What perceptions do Georgians have of the Abkhaz and Ossetians and their role in the conflict? What perceptions do Georgians have of themselves and their own role in the conflict?
- How do people's age, gender, and background shape understanding of the conflict?

Organisational Analysis and Recommendations:

3. Based on the evaluation of previous programmes in the country, what capacity do GFP volunteers currently have in Georgia? What is needed for the organisation to address the grassroots level of Georgia's two ethno-territorial conflicts?

- What are GFP's current capabilities in the country?
- What are the main areas for improving GFP's capacity in Georgia?
- What conflicts in Georgia could be addressed by the organisation in the near future?
- How could Generations For Peace address the conflict in Abkhazia and South Ossetia?
- What type of programme would be most suited to addressing this conflict?

1.7 Methodology

This report used qualitative data gathered through individual semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions.⁷⁵ The fieldwork lasted three weeks in July-August 2014; during this time, the researcher interviewed a total number of 35 people, although three of these were not used in the analysis. The main profile of interviewees, separated by respondent categories, is presented in Table 1.1 below.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they allowed for a detailed, nuanced understanding of the ideas and perspectives of the conflict held among those involved. At the same time, interviews presented myriad difficulties such as poor recollections, misunderstandings, and power dynamics between the interviewer and the interviewee. The researcher strived to overcome these problems by explaining the nature of the research and by creating a relaxed environment prior to the start of the interview. All interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the interviewees. Another challenge was language barriers and translation. To avoid misunderstandings, the interview scripts used simple language and the researcher had synonyms ready in case a particular word was misunderstood.⁷⁶ These interviews, designed around Galtung's triangle framework along with other themes identified through the secondary literature, aimed to uncover how people understood the conflict as well as possible ways it could be transformed.

Respondent classification	Number interviewed (n=35)	Number Analysed (n=32)
Georgians from Tbilisi	14	12
IDPs based in Tbilisi	9 (7 interviews)	9 (7 Interviews)
GFP Delegates and Pioneers	7	7
Georgian academics	3	3
Abkhazians and S. Ossetians	4	3

Table 1.1: Total sample breakdown

These categories were chosen firstly to gain an understanding of how the conflict is perceived in Tbilisi (where GFP has activities), and secondly to understand how the conflicts are understood by those groups directly affected by them – namely, IDPs and Abkhazians/Ossetians. GFP Delegates and Pioneers were interviewed to assess current capacity and future goals. Due to practical constraints, the research focused on looking at the Georgian perspective through interviewing a representative sample of the Tbilisi population.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ In this researchers' opinion, the information provided by questionnaires lacks the detail and flexibility needed in order to gain a nuanced understanding of competing interpretations. Focus groups were ruled out as a research method; the snowballing technique used to gather respondents meant it would have been difficult to organise group interviews. In the end, however, the research did include one focus group with an IDP family.

⁷⁶ Interviews conducted in Russian, with a translator present, represented further difficulty. Prior to these, the researcher met with the translator to run through the interview questions and explain the research aims. The researcher had these interviews transcribed so that the final text used for the analysis will be translated directly from the spoken language rather than through an interpreter in an interview setting.

⁷⁷ Ideally, the research would have included an equal number of Georgian, Abkhazian, and Ossetia respondents to gain a balanced understanding of the different perspectives that exist in the conflict. However, given that the fieldwork was based in Georgia it was difficult to find respondents in the two territories. The researcher was unable to visit the territories due to safety concerns and therefore had to conduct interviews using Skype.

Number of people	Age	Gender	Occupation
4	18-29	2 men and 2 women	Any
4	30-49	2 men and 2 women	2 private and 2 public sectors workers
4	50+	2 men and 2 women	2 private and 2 public sector workers

Table 1.2: Sample of Georgians from Tbilisi

For the Georgians from Tbilisi sample (presented in Table 1.2), dividing the group by age categories showed how different age groups view the conflict. Those in the highest age category lived part of their adult lives under Soviet rule and remembered the pre-conflict situation in Georgia, whereas those in the youngest category had no experience of Soviet rule and grew up with these conflicts. Division of the population by gender was aimed at both providing a representative sample and at establishing whether this variable affected perception of the conflict. The final category – occupation – represented an attempt to differentiate people by their professional backgrounds.⁷⁸ The researcher chose to divide the sample population over 30 by those who work in the public and private sector.⁷⁹ The thinking behind this decision was that those in the public sector have an investment in public institutions and are more likely to follow the government's line, whereas those working in the private sector, often working for international organisations, had more of a perspectival detachment from the state. Given the dramatic reforms that Georgia has seen in the past ten years this distinction is not unproblematic; however, it provided a useful and realistic means of dividing a small sample population by background.

Number of people	Age	Gender	Occupation
4	18-29	3 women and 1 men	Any
2	30-49	2 women	2 private and 2 public sectors workers
3	50+	2 women and 1 men	2 private and 2 public sector workers

Table 1.3: Sample of IDPs living in Tbilisi

In addition to interviewing Georgians from Tbilisi, the researcher interviewed IDPs from Abkhazia and South Ossetia living in the Georgian capital (presented in Table 1.3). This sample was not as representative as it was intended to be, and this demonstrates the weaknesses in the snowballing technique used.⁸⁰ However, the

⁷⁸ Initially this was going to be achieved through educational qualifications; however, due to the Tbilisian population being generally well educated this method of differentiation proved unhelpful. Dividing the sample by income or profession was deemed too difficult, especially given the snowballing method the researcher used to gain access to the interviewees.

⁷⁹ Given that those aged 18-30 are more likely to be students or at the beginning of their working lives, they were not distinguished by occupation.

⁸⁰ Content analysis discussed in Yan Zhang and Barbara B. Wildemuth, 'Qualitative Analysis of Content' In B. Wildemuth, 'Application of Social Science Research Methods in Information and Library Science'. (Westpoint: Libraries Unlimited, 2009). 2.

sample was dispersed almost evenly by age and provides a point of contrast to the views of Georgians living in Tbilisi, as interviewing IDPs provided a perspective of individuals directly affected by the wars.

Finally, the researcher managed to speak to one man and one woman from Abkhazia and one man from South Ossetia. Although this sample was not adequate enough to be used to draw independent conclusions on the Abkhazian and South Ossetian perspectives, it is used in the report alongside the aforementioned secondary literature to contrast it with the view of Georgians and IDPs.

For the part of the report that deals with GFP capacity in Georgia, the researcher interviewed six Delegates and one Pioneer and held a workshop following these interviews with four of those volunteers. The interviews also asked questions on the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation as well as areas that they felt could realistically be addressed in the future. The workshop built on the answers respondents had given in the interviews by going into more details on current weaknesses and the ways to overcome them.

1.7.1 Method of Analysis

This research used the qualitative content analysis method. This provided a means of understanding and organising the interview data to make it comparable. Content analysis can be defined as a qualitative data reduction method that takes a volume of text and attempts to identify core consistencies or meanings.⁸¹ After studying the data, the researcher identified units of analysis by looking at themes or ideas that occurred regularly in the text. This was achieved through an inductive process: the themes that arose were rooted in the data itself. As the data was collected, the researcher started to identify certain core themes or ideas evident in interview responses. By working from the bottom up, this method ensured that the means of analysing the findings were drawn directly from the data collected. This method was especially useful when looking at perspectives people have on ethno-territorial conflict in Georgia. These recurring themes form the basis of group interpretations, and the method of analysis used therefore coincides with theory on identity frames and psychocultural interpretation.

⁸¹ Content analysis discussed in Yan Zhang and Barbara B. Wildemuth, 'Qualitative Analysis of Content.' In B. Wildemuth, 'Application of Social Science Research Methods in Information and Library Science'. (Westpoint: Libraries Unlimited, 2009). 2.







2.

Findings



2.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses data from the interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, IDPs residing in Tbilisi, and Abkhazians and South Ossetians. The structure follows that used in the interview questions, dividing this chapter into five sections. The first section has two different focuses. For the Georgians from Tbilisi, it analyses what conflicts they think exist in Tbilisi; for the IDPs, it focuses on memory and the IDPs' understanding of what life was like before the war. This latter section is important because it informs IDPs' subsequent perceptions and shapes their understanding of conflict causation. The remaining sections are: people's opinions of the origins, causes, consequences and longevity of the conflicts; their understanding of the different conflict dynamics; people's perceptions of geopolitical and state-level factors; and, finally, expectations about the future.⁸² While the sample from Abkhazia and South Ossetia was too small to offer concrete findings, the data collected from them is contrasted in this chapter to information provided by the Georgians and IDPs.

To the researcher's knowledge, this is the first time that someone has studied the prevailing public sentiments on these conflicts among the Tbilisi population. This sample should not be regarded as representative of the Georgian population, however. Tbilisi is wealthier than the rest of the country.⁸³ Moreover, it is more geographically removed from both conflict regions in comparison to Georgia's other major cities, such as Gori, Kutaisi or Batumi. Within Tbilisi, however, attempts were made to make the sample as representative as possible by accounting for age, gender and occupational background (as shown in Table 1.1 and Table 1.2). In terms of the variables used for the sample, neither age nor background produced clear differences in opinion overall. However, age did reveal results that are more mixed: on certain questions, there was a clear difference in understanding by age.

⁸² Graphs are used to display the most common answers to questions or differences based on the age variable, the total number of answers given is often larger than the sample itself, due to respondents giving more than one answer.

⁸³ Stephen F. Jones, 'Georgia through a Glass, Darkly.' Open Democracy. 18 November 2013. Accessed 15 July 2014. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/stephen-f-jones/georgia-through-glass-darkly>

Unsurprisingly, IDPs demonstrated a more specific knowledge of conflict events. Unlike the residents of Tbilisi, IDPs were directly impacted by the conflicts, leaving livelihoods and property behind in the respective territories. Some of the younger IDPs interviewed have no memories of living in the territories or the war itself. This means that their parents or relations have informed their opinions and perceptions. Only one IDP interviewed came from South Ossetia, so the majority of analysis here focuses on Abkhazia.⁸⁴

The overall argument that emerges from this section is that Russia's role in the conflict dominated Georgians' and IDPs' understanding. This results in a simplistic interpretation of events that overlooks Georgian complicity and denies the Abkhazians or Ossetians a full role in the conflict process. Analysis reveals that there were extremely divergent views of the conflict among the different sides: there were disagreements over the history of the conflicts, who is to blame, and who is preventing attempts at reconciliation. Moreover, the contradiction over territory at the core of both these conflicts remains unresolved in people's understanding. To change this, transformational dialogue is needed so that both sides can appreciate the other's needs and find a way for them to be reconciled.

2.2 Section One: Understanding of Conflict

2.2.1 Georgians from Tbilisi: Conflict in Tbilisi and Georgia

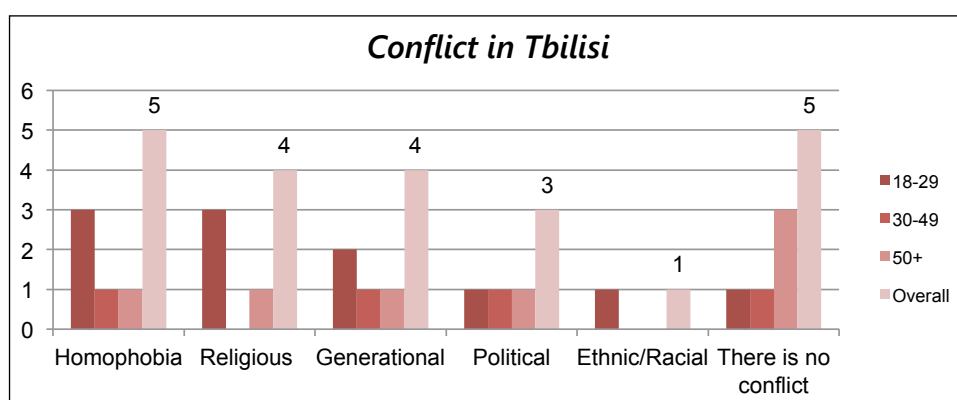


Chart 2.1: What conflicts exist in Tbilisi (Georgians from Tbilisi)

Question: In your opinion, what conflicts exist in Tbilisi?

The question above was asked of all Georgian respondents in Tbilisi. It aimed to reveal how people understand the term conflict as well as what conflicts, if any, existed in Tbilisi and the rest of Georgia. The responses showed a clear distinction based on the age variable. The most common response in terms of a form of conflict was homophobia. This was especially the case among younger people.⁸⁵ People aged 18-30 who mentioned this conflict linked it to religion and generation, citing the Orthodox Church and older people as a major source of prejudice.⁸⁶ In their responses people referred to violence against LGBT rights activists at a demonstration in 2013 on the International Day Against Homophobia.⁸⁷ Two of

⁸⁴ One respondent, although technically not an IDP, grew up in Abkhazia, left to go to university in Georgia, and does not wish to return. Therefore, her interview is included in this category. Older IDPs tended not to have returned to Abkhazia but several of the younger IDPs interviewed had visited Abkhazia since the war, usually to see family who remained there.

⁸⁵ Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July-11 August 2014.

⁸⁶ Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July-11 August 2014.

⁸⁷ Amnesty International, "Georgia: Homophobic violence mars Tbilisi Pride event." 17 May 2013. Accessed 9 February 2014. <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/georgia-homophobic-violence-mars-tbilisi-pride-event-2013-05-17>

the respondents, aged 18-30, described it as a 'shameful day' for the country.⁸⁸ The situation regarding the rights of sexual minorities in Georgia forms part of a wider political conflict between the political elites pursuing an EU trajectory (and the conditionality that entails) and the conservative influence of the Orthodox Church.⁸⁹ Homophobic violence is apparent in Georgian society: in the wake of the 2013 demonstration, Human Rights Watch noted 34 incidents of violence towards LGBT people.⁹⁰ The data indicated that younger people viewed this as a major conflict in Tbilisi.

Respondents also discussed political conflict in terms of the divisions between political parties; however, this was described as happening within the confines of legitimate political processes.⁹¹ Ethnic or racial conflict was mentioned in detail by only one respondent who spoke of negative stereotypes towards Armenians and Azerbaijanis and their lack of integration in Tbilisi society.⁹² No respondents discussed gender-based conflict.

It was equally common to hear that there was no conflict in Tbilisi. This was especially the case among the 50+ category. This category incorporated a range of responses, however. The first type of response stated firmly that there was no conflict in Tbilisi. Another response was definitional, stating that there was tension – among political groups, for example – but nothing that could be defined as conflict.⁹³ Although the interviews used a broader definition of conflict, older people were less responsive to this term than younger respondents.

Another idea on this theme was that conflict is not native to Georgia. Authors have noted how Georgians have a self-image of themselves as hospitable, tolerant, and welcoming, which fuels the idea that conflict is forced on the country from outside.⁹⁴ Three respondents discussed this theme: one from each age category. A 57-year-old man summed up the view:

*The Georgian nation is very tolerant [...] all the conflicts are brought from outside [...] look at the old town in Tbilisi, there are many different churches, mosques – this shows that Georgia is a tolerant, multicultural country and always has been.*⁹⁵

A 41-year-old man expressed a similar view, he argued that Georgia's history had made the country particularly accepting. He said, 'Georgians are very welcome[ing] people, they are tolerant towards nations and other peoples. Because of our history, [...] we have big experience with other peoples'.⁹⁶ These responses revealed a particular self-perception among the Georgians that has a bearing on how they understand conflict and the history of conflict on Georgian territory. In regarding themselves as hospitable, the Georgians hindered their own acknowledgement of complicity in past violence.

88 Interview 6 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014; Interview 8 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014.

89 Democracy & Freedom Watch, 'Georgian court acquits priest accused of anti-gay violence.', 3 August 2013. Accessed 9 February 2014. <http://dfwatch.net/georgian-court-acquits-priest-accused-of-anti-gay-violence-34858>

90 Human Rights Watch, 'World Report 2014: Georgia.' Accessed 35 August 2014. <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/georgia>

91 Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July-11 August 2014.

92 Interview 6 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014.

93 Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July-11 August 2014.

94 Kaufman, 'Modern Hatreds.' 94.

95 Interview 20 (Georgian from Tbilisi), respondent's residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 2 August 2014.

96 Interview 17 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Georgian Partnership for Road Safety Offices, Tbilisi, Georgia. 1 August 2014.

An additional question in this section was whether there is conflict elsewhere in Georgia that does not exist in Tbilisi (excluding the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts). Four out of 12 respondents stated that it was the same in Tbilisi or that it was hard for them to know.⁹⁷ However, three respondents discussed Islamophobia, especially in Ajaria in Georgia's South West, where there is a sizable Muslim population. All the people who discussed this were female, two from the youngest category and one from the oldest. The two respondents aged 18-30 cited examples of people opposing the building of mosques and not regarding Muslims as Georgian as they are not Christian.⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch reported that in 2013 there were reports of several attacks on Muslims by Christians in Georgian villages.⁹⁹ If GFP expanded to other Georgian regions, Islamophobia could be a potential conflict to address.

In summary, while younger people mostly considered homophobia, generational or religious conflicts to be present in Tbilisi, older people generally believed that there were no conflicts in the city. In expressing the view that no conflict exists in Tbilisi, answers occasionally spilled over into characteristics of the Georgians as hospitable and tolerant. These findings reveal that there is no overwhelming consensus among Tbilisi residents on what conflicts exist in Georgian society.

2.2.2 IDPs: Perceptions of Abkhazia

This section focuses on memory and the IDPs' understanding of what life was like before the war. IDPs' memories or perception of the two territories did not feature in the interview questions, but many spoke of what Abkhazia was like prior to the conflict. These descriptions described Abkhazia as a happy place where various groups lived together harmoniously. One 35-year-old woman said, 'I remember the 13 years [of my life when] we lived happily together. I use to play in the garden with Abkhazian children and I have good, sweet memories'.¹⁰⁰ A 49-year-old ethnically Abkhaz woman said, 'I was born and grew up in Abkhazia. We [the Abkhaz and the Georgians] grew up together. We had the best time'.¹⁰¹ Abkhazia was also depicted as a prosperous place, which contributed to the peaceful situation. A 23-year-old woman – a child when her family fled the territory – stated, 'People were happy and harmonious living together [...] people were wealthy and had everything they need because of tea, tourism and citrus'.¹⁰² A 73-year-old woman reiterated this sentiment: 'I remember the prosperity, the nature, the living – everything, everything was going so well... you could not do wrong there [...] everything was good, this territory is unforgettable for me'.¹⁰³ In their interviews, Kabachnik, Regul'ska, and Mitchneck found a similar idealisation of the past that overlooks the grievances and animosity that fuelled the conflict.¹⁰⁴ Through regarding the past as a joyous, prosperous, and harmonious time, the narrative put forward by the IDPs missed the problems and tensions that existed. It also led to the simplistic assumption that that ideal could easily be regained

97 Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July-11 August 2014.

98 Interview 6 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014; Interview 12 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Ori Beli Hostel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 30 July 2014; Interview 31 (Georgian from Tbilisi), respondent's residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 11 August 2014.

99 Human Rights Watch, 'World Report 2014: Georgia.'

100 Interview 30 (IDP), Subway restaurant, Tbilisi, Georgia. 8 August 2014.

101 Interview 21 (IDP), respondent's friends residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 4 August 2014.

102 Interview 29 (IDP), Café near the Bridge of Peace, Tbilisi, Georgia. 7 August 2014.

103 Interview 35 (IDP), respondent's hostel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 12 August 2014.

104 Kabachnik, Regul'ska, and Mitchneck, 'Displacing Blame.' 127.

“ The idea that the conflict appeared out of nowhere and led to a destructive war that ravaged unsuspecting communities fails to acknowledge actions taken on both sides. This nostalgic view of Abkhazia resulted in a collective memory that idealised the past.”

once the geopolitical situation changed.

This idea of a paradise lost was often followed, in people's descriptions, by disbelief with what happened. The war was represented as a sharp rupture that no one could have foreseen. Implicit in this narrative was the idea that it was brought to Abkhazia from outside: the happy, harmonious life described would have continued were it not for outside forces meddling with the territory and pitching friend against friend. A couple who fled Abkhazia with their family in 1993 stated:

We had such good relationships between Georgians and Abkhazians when the war first started and people began to kill each other we could not imagine that it was war. None of us could imagine that such a conflict could arise because we had a perfect situation and perfect relations.¹⁰⁵

In this view, the seeming harmony in Abkhazia ended abruptly and it took everyone by surprise. A 23-year-old woman described her family's experience by saying:

We left and we were thinking that [...] right after a few days it would be solved and we would go back. That's why we didn't take our luggage with us. But as you can see it is already 20 years and we cannot go back.¹⁰⁶

The idea that the conflict appeared out of nowhere and led to a destructive war that ravaged unsuspecting communities fails to acknowledge actions taken on both sides. This nostalgic view of Abkhazia resulted in a collective memory that idealised the past. Thus, while there was no overwhelming consensus on what conflicts exist in Tbilisi among the Georgians from Tbilisi sample, for the IDPs the situation in Abkhazia and their memory of what the territory was like before war featured heavily in their discussion of conflict.

2.3 Section Two: Origins, Causes and Consequences of the Conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia

This section aimed at gathering detailed, narrative data on how respondents understand the two conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia: their origins, causes, consequences, and the reasons for their longevity. In line with this report's argument, Russia's role dominated both samples' responses. This was a psychocultural interpretation that linked diverse and complex historical events into a simple narrative. This narrative stated that Russia always wanted a way to undermine Georgia should it ever become independent. Answers had some variation, yet geopolitical considerations trumped all other factors throughout. By contrast, the Abkhaz and Ossetian view focused on the Georgians' disrespect for their political rights and, later, what they perceived to be Georgians' murderous aggression. Thus, there was a disparity in the competing interpretations regarding who is responsible for these conflicts.

¹⁰⁵ Interview 13 (Focus Group) (IDP), respondent's residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 30 July 2014.

¹⁰⁶ Interview 29 (IDP), Café near the Bridge of Peace, Tbilisi, Georgia. 7 August 2014.

2.3.1 Origins

Question: In your opinion, what are the origins of the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia?

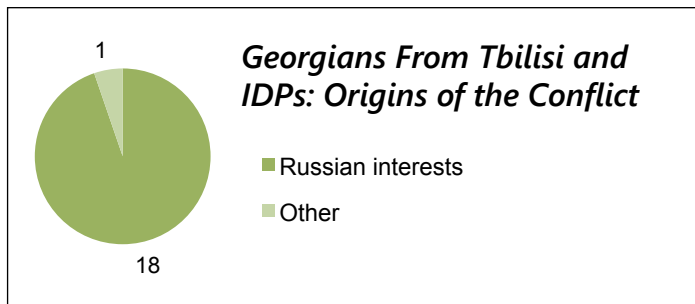


Chart 2.2: Origins of the conflict in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Georgians From Tbilisi and IDPs)

In response to the question listed above, 11 out of 12 Georgians from Tbilisi and all IDP respondents discussed Russian interests as being the origin of the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, albeit with different motives.¹⁰⁷ Among the Georgians from Tbilisi sample, the answer to the question was often quite firm: 'I think the answer is simple, it is Russia'; or 'Russia [...] wanted [the] territories, so everything started from that. [There are] no other reasons, no other causes'.¹⁰⁸ Russia's presumed motives for taking the territories included a desire to maintain influence in the region, its wish for Georgia not to be independent, and the Russian establishment's ambition to incorporate Abkhazia into Russian territory.¹⁰⁹ One 26-year-old man articulated the latter motive by saying that 'Russia always wanted Abkhazia, because it was their dream. Because they have good holidays in Abkhazia and have fun there. That was the reason why they took Abkhazia'.¹¹⁰ The narrative depicted Georgia's oversized neighbour as greedily coveting the most attractive parts of Georgian territory and taking it for its own simply because it can. The Georgians regarded themselves as having been powerless to prevent this outcome.

These explanations mostly overlooked the Abkhaz or the Ossetians' role in the conflict. When these groups were acknowledged, they were depicted as puppets with Russia pulling the strings. A 19-year-old male stated, 'somehow Russia was capable of empowering them [Abkhazians and South Ossetians] and saying to them that it is better to separate from us'.¹¹¹ The language used suggested that the Abkhaz or Ossetians did not reach this decision of their own accord. The separatist sentiment among people living on the territories was presented as a product of Russia manipulation. Another respondent echoed this point by saying that in the Soviet period the Russians 'changed the historical books and socialised people from a young age with an anti-Georgian mentality'.¹¹² This interpretation took a deterministic view of the conflict by assuming that the outcome was what Russia always wanted. Moreover, it portrayed the people who live on the territories as having no agency or, at the very least, as being passive dupes easily bent to Russia's will.

More historically rooted explanations provided by the Georgians from Tbilisi

¹⁰⁷ Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July-11 August 2014; Interviews with IDPs, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July-12 August 2014.

¹⁰⁸ Interview 8 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014; Interview 20 (Georgian from Tbilisi), respondent's Residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 02 August 2014.

¹⁰⁹ Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July-11 August 2014.

¹¹⁰ Interview 24 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 6 August 2014.

¹¹¹ Interview 8 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014.

¹¹² Interview 27 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Tbilisi Hospital, Tbilisi, Georgia. 7 August 2014.

discussed the Soviet Union's nationality policy. Younger respondents tended to depict this as causing problems because once the larger imperial structures broke down small groups of people were left with the materials needed for statehood without actually having statehood itself.¹¹³ In some explanations, this amounted to a long-term strategy to undermine Georgian independence. The metaphor of 'mines' or 'bombs' that could be detonated by Russia when the need arose featured often in the discussion, especially among respondents over 30. One 63-year-old woman stated that:

*[The Russians] planted little mines, little historical mines at the beginning of the Soviet Union. They planted three autonomous republics. So, [...] if something were to go wrong they [could] detonate those mines and they did.*¹¹⁴

In this view, the autonomies of Abkhazia, Ossetia, and Ajaria were created to divide Georgia. A 58-year-old woman stated that, 'the Russians have been feeding this mine for explosion and they exploded it when they need[ed] it', for 'keeping small countries like ours or big countries like Ukraine in disorder'.¹¹⁵ This metaphor delegitimised the separatist aspirations of the Abkhaz and South Ossetians by further entrenching the deterministic view of the conflict.¹¹⁶

Among the IDPs, every respondent said that the origins of the conflict came from Russia's desire to maintain influence and control in the Caucasus.¹¹⁷ A frequent metaphor used in five out of seven interviews was that Russia wanted to 'split' the country in order to divide it and make it weaker. The 22-year-old IDP from South Ossetia stated that the Russians took the territory because 'they want [to] cut Georgia in[to] two sides: West and East'.¹¹⁸ This kind of emphasis on unity and strength is typical of post-colonial narratives.¹¹⁹ To fulfil its wish to weaken and divide Georgia, Russia, in the IDPs' interpretation, sought to create and provoke ethnic tensions. As with the Georgians, this was regarded as a long-term strategy: a shackle attached to the Georgian nation meaning that it could never be truly free from its erstwhile colonial master. An IDP family interviewed stated that 'Russia had been working on this for years, for decades, for a long time'.¹²⁰ Russia was depicted as creating divides where previously there were none. One 73-year-old woman said that 'the third party started it all' and that 'the Georgians and Abkhazians never argued about anything [...] they were friends and they had nothing to argue about'.¹²¹ As with the Georgians from Tbilisi, Russia, in this interpretation, was portrayed as driving a wedge between friendly peoples for its own private gain. To achieve this, two of IDP respondents pointed out, Russia

113 Interview 6 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014; Interview 12 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Ori Beli Hostel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 30 July 2014.

114 Interview 33 (Georgian from Tbilisi), respondent's residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 11 August 2014.

115 Interview 31 (Georgian from Tbilisi), respondent's residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 11 August 2014.

116 Kaufman also notes this metaphor in his study of ethnic conflict from the beginning of the 2000s Kaufman, 'Modern Hatreds.' 94. The idea that the Bolshevik government, when they were establishing the Soviet State in the 1920s, had in mind a future-orientated strategy for a time when the Union no longer existed, seems unlikely. Recent historical work has sought to refute Georgian nationalists' claims that autonomous republics were designed with the specific aim of undermining future Georgian sovereignty by arguing that the creation of the South Ossetia Autonomous Region in the 1920s was a peace-building attempt from below following the conflict at the time rather than an imperial divide and rule strategy. Saparov, Arsène, 'From Conflict to Autonomy: The Making of the South Ossetian Autonomous Region 1818-1922.' Europe-Asia Studies. 62 (2010).

117 Interviews with IDPs, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July-12 August 2014.

118 Interview 11 (IDP), Ori Beli Hostel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July 2014.

119 Broers, 'Filling the Void.' 286.

120 The family were the only respondents to use the 'mine' metaphor among the IDP respondents Interview. 13 (Focus Group) (IDP), Respondent's residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 30 July 2014.

121 Interview 35 (IDP), respondent's hostel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 12 August 2014.

pushed Abkhazians to make them believe that they should be independent. One woman said, 'the cause of the conflict is that Russia gave the Abkhaz a language, a history and a culture' so that they would want to be independent.¹²² This view not only denied the Abkhaz agency in their wish to be independent from Georgia but also asserted that what makes them culturally distinct from the Georgians is a fiction created by Russia to divide people. It considered Abkhaz claims to an identity to be illegitimate as it was created by an outside power for the sole purpose of weakening Georgia.

In summary, Russia's role dominated the way Georgians and IDPs understood these conflicts. This interpretation provided a simple, coherent reading of complex historical events: the perpetrator was Russia and its motive was to undermine Georgian independence. While the legacy of Russian imperialism and Russia's continuing influence in the region has shaped these conflicts, this view mostly overlooked other dimensions. When grievances among the Abkhaz or Ossetians were acknowledged they were perceived as a product of Russian meddling. A 19-year-old male respondent encapsulated this view by saying, 'Abkhazia, Georgia, and Ossetia were one family and Russia is not part of the Georgian family and they interrupted us'.¹²³ Russia, in this narrative, took on the role of a geopolitical home-wrecker that divided the Georgian family for its own selfish needs.

This interpretation contrasted sharply with the Abkhaz and Ossetian view. The Abkhaz interpretation focuses on periods of grave national threat such as the forced deportations in the 19th and 20th centuries and perceived attempts by the Georgians to assimilate them.¹²⁴ Demographics dominate this argument. While the Georgians emphasise that they were majority on Abkhazian territory before the war, the Abkhaz emphasise how Soviet policy brought in Georgian migrants that eventually outnumbered them.¹²⁵ The Abkhaz man interviewed expressed this view:

*[In the Soviet period] the status was downgraded. [Abkhazia] became part of the Georgian republic and from then on the Abkhazian population became a minority due to the policy of bringing ethnic Georgians into Abkhazia.*¹²⁶

He went on to say that this created a feeling among the Abkhaz that they were being 'pushed out' by the Georgians.¹²⁷ Alongside this, the Abkhaz believed they were suffering oppression at the hands of the Georgians. Both Abkhazians interviewed expressed this sentiment. The woman interviewed stated that:

*[A] major part of the population were Georgians and they had all the important positions in government, also they began to repress Abkhazians' language in schools and [the] conclusion was that [a] lot of Abkhazians forgot their own language.*¹²⁸

The South Ossetian man described the origins of the conflict as Georgia's desire to 'nullify autonomies' after the collapse of the Soviet Union.¹²⁹ This showed that

122 Interview 29 (IDP), Café near the Bridge of Peace, Tbilisi, Georgia. 7 August 2014.

123 Interview 8 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014.

124 Rachel Clogg, 'The Politics of Identity in Post-Soviet Abkhazia: Managing Diversity and Unsolved Conflict.' Nationalities Papers 36. (2008): 322.

125 Peter Kabachnik, 'Shaping Abkhazia.' p. 338.

126 Interview 14 (Abkhazian), Hotel Central (Skype Call), Tbilisi, Georgia. 30 July 2014.

127 Interview 14 (Abkhazian), Hotel Central (Skype Call), Tbilisi, Georgia. 30 July 2014.

128 Interview 25 (Abkhazian), Hotel Central (Skype), Tbilisi, Georgia. 6 August 2014.

129 Interview 10 (South Ossetia), Hotel Central (Skype call), Tbilisi, Georgia. Started on 29 July 2014; completed on 31 July 2014.

“ After looking at the perspectives of all three groups on the origins of the conflict, it is clear that interpretations based on victimisation and powerlessness dominated understanding of these conflicts. The Georgians’ and IDPs’ view held that Russia never wanted them to be independent and so divided Georgian territory to weaken the Georgian nation; the Abkhaz and Ossetian view asserted that the Georgians oppressed them and sought to assimilate and deny them their autonomy.”

the Abkhaz and Ossetians felt marginalised and threatened on their own territory. Notably, Russia does not feature at all in this interpretation; rather, the origins of the conflict lie with Georgian policy.

After looking at the perspectives of all three groups on the origins of the conflict, it is clear that interpretations based on victimisation and powerlessness dominated understanding of these conflicts. The Georgians’ and IDPs’ view held that Russia never wanted them to be independent and so divided Georgian territory to weaken the Georgian nation; the Abkhaz and Ossetian view asserted that the Georgians oppressed them and sought to assimilate them and deny them their autonomy. Each group has a self-perception of victimhood in these two competing post-colonial narratives.¹³⁰

2.3.2 Causes

Question: In your opinion, what are the causes of the conflict?

Questions were asked both about the origins of the Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts, as well as about the causes of these conflicts. There was some overlap in responses, but the different questions were maintained to distinguish between the historical development of the existing conflicts and more proximate factors that led to fighting in the 1990s.

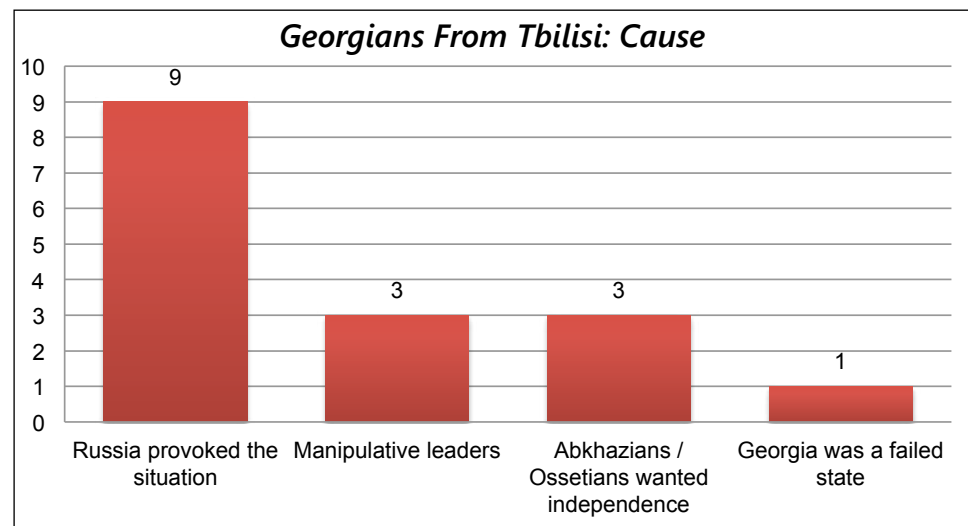


Chart 2.3: Causes of the conflict in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Georgians from Tbilisi)

The response to the question about causes included a diverse array of actors and factors. Four respondents discussed the role of manipulative leaders acting in self-interest. In this view, leaders were motivated by the pursuit of power and the goal of controlling resources.¹³¹ These leaders were able to take advantage of the chaotic situation in which nationalistic ideas prevailed to mobilise people and rally support to their cause.¹³² In most peoples’ descriptions, these leaders remained nameless. Only one respondent mentioned the role of Gamsakhurdia, post-Soviet Georgia’s first president.¹³³ In this view, the conflict arose out of a chaotic situation in which people were easily provoked.

¹³⁰ Notions of victimisation feature prominently in ethnic psychocultural interpretations of conflict. Ross, ‘Psychocultural Interpretation and Psychocultural Drama,’ 165.

¹³¹ Interview 6 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014.

¹³² Interview 17 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Georgian Partnership for Road Safety Offices, Tbilisi, Georgia. 1 August 2014; Interview 28 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 7 August 2014.

¹³³ Interview 27 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Tbilisi Hospital, Tbilisi, Georgia. 7 August 2014.

However, as Chart 2.3 demonstrates, Russia still dominated Georgians' explanations, with nine out of twelve respondents mentioning Russia in one way or another. The main views on Russia as a contributing factor in the conflict are presented in the chart below.

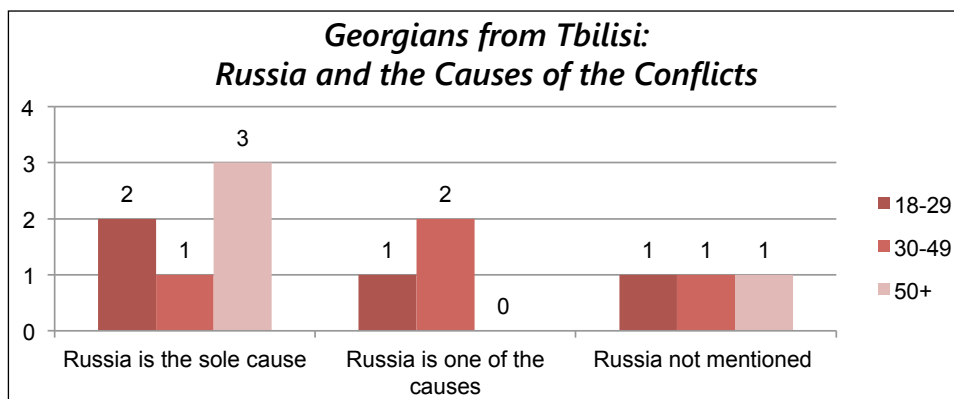


Chart 2.4: Russia and the causes of the conflict in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Georgians from Tbilisi)

Six respondents from the Georgians from Tbilisi sample cited Russian involvement as the sole cause of the conflict, especially among the 50+ category.¹³⁴ At times, this amounted to a denial that conflict existed between Abkhazians or Ossetians and Georgians. One 57-year-old man stated:

Between Georgians and Abkhazians there was not conflict, the conflict was between Georgians and Russians. Because the main problem was that Georgians wanted independence and [the] Russians did not want to give independence to them...[a]nd how did they do it? They make conflict in Abkhazia, Ossetia and they [said] that you are fighting with each other.¹³⁵

This view of the causes of the conflict depicted the wars of the 1990s as being forced on Georgia by an outside power working to undermine the country.

Moving beyond Russia, further discussion of the causes elicited a greater acknowledgement of the needs of the Abkhazians and South Ossetians. Three respondents mentioned their desire for independence.¹³⁶ In this view, the conflict arose from a desire among the Abkhaz and Ossetians to no longer be part of Georgia.¹³⁷ While one woman simply stated that this was the case, the other explained why she felt these grievances were illegitimate. She explained that both the Abkhaz and Ossetians had their own schools, were able to speak their own language, and had various privileges when they were part of Georgia. Both groups had 'no reason to argue with us, but they were always trying to find [one].'¹³⁸ This view did not include the role of Russia, but it portrays the grievances of the two groups that caused the conflict as incomprehensible.

The IDPs' responses to this question revealed a more detailed understanding of the conflict situation. Their responses are presented in the chart below.

¹³⁴ Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July-11 August 2014.

¹³⁵ Interview 7 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014.

¹³⁶ Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July-11 August 2014.

¹³⁷ Interview 27 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Tbilisi Hospital, Tbilisi, Georgia. 7 August 2014; Interview 33 (Georgian from Tbilisi), respondent's residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 11 August 2014.

¹³⁸ Interview 33 (Georgian from Tbilisi), respondent's residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 11 August 2014.

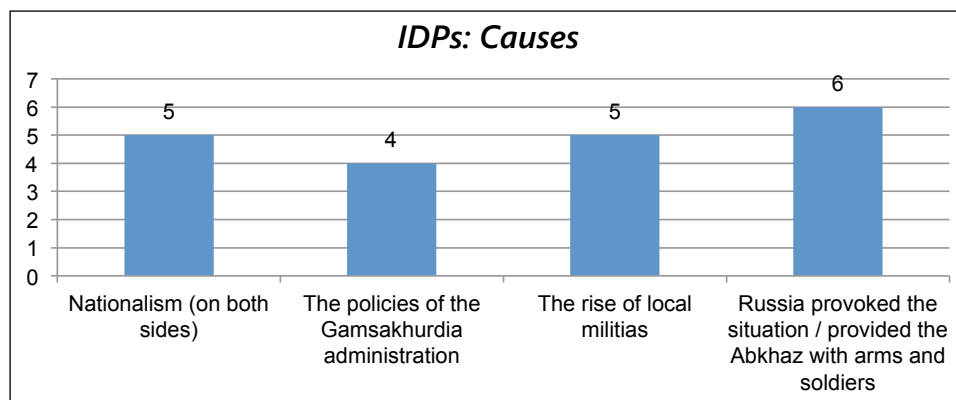


Chart 2.5: Causes of the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (IDPs)

A chief factor was the nationalism that arose in the last years of the Soviet Union. Five out of seven respondents stated that Georgian nationalism frightened or upset the Abkhazians and Ossetians. However, IDPs' recognition of nationalism as a contributing factor was not limited to the Georgians; Abkhazian and Ossetian nationalism was also cited as contributing to the conflict by the IDPs. The IDPs from South Ossetia said, '[T]he Ossetians wanted to separate from Georgia but the Georgian government did not grant them this...[so the] Ossetians start[ed] war in Tskhinvali'.¹³⁹ The IDPs from Abkhazia echoed this view. A 73-year-old woman stated that [the Abkhaz] were always stating that Abkhazian territory was theirs, not Georgia's.¹⁴⁰

Among the IDPs, there was also widespread criticism of Gamsakhurdia and his policy towards ethnic minorities.¹⁴¹ Georgian militias, which entered Abkhazia at the beginning of the war, were cited as a major cause of escalation and violence. One 49-year-old woman said that 'everything started with militias who entered Abkhazia officially to protect the railway, but in reality they were repressing the Abkhazians and robbing them'. She went on to describe these groups as 'drug-addicts and prisoners'.¹⁴² The IDPs presented the militias as symbolic of the lawlessness and chaos of the time, causing both sides to be more aggressive to each other.¹⁴³ The IDPs showed a greater awareness of Georgians' complicity and contribution to the violence; however, these militias were portrayed as immoral lowlifes distinct from the larger Georgian population.

While competing nationalisms were regarded as contributing to the escalation of the conflict, the IDPs from Abkhazia stressed Russia's role in the conflict by provoking the Abkhazians, and giving them arms and military assistance.¹⁴⁴ The Abkhaz's military success and the brutality of the conflict was both explained through Russian involvement. The Abkhaz recapture of the region's capital, Sukhumi, in 1993 was portrayed as a result of Russian assistance:

*[Sukhumi] was not occupied by Abkhazians it was occupied by the Russians. Abkhazians in this army [were a] minority. It was Russians, Chechens and many different types of [North] Caucasian people who were hired by [the] Russians.*¹⁴⁵



¹³⁹ Interview 11 (IDP), Ori Beli Hostel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July 2014.

¹⁴⁰ Interview 35 (IDP), respondent's hostel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 12 August 2014.

¹⁴¹ Interviews with IDPs, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July-12 August 2014.

¹⁴² Interview 21 (IDP), respondent's friends residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 04 August 2014.

¹⁴³ Interviews with IDPs, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July-12 August 2014.

¹⁴⁴ Interviews with IDPs, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July-12 August 2014.

¹⁴⁵ Interview 35 (IDP), respondent's hostel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 12 August 2014.

Four out of seven respondents mentioned the role of hired people from the North Caucasus who the Russians ordered to help the Abkhaz. Their presence was used to explain the acts of brutality in the conflict. In this view, the worst atrocities were not committed by the Abkhaz or Georgians, they were committed by Chechens and other people from the North Caucasus, because the 'Abkhazians would never do this'.¹⁴⁶ A 73-year-old woman recited a story of some people who removed the eyeballs from a dead Georgian soldier and presented them to his mother; she said, 'The Abkhazians didn't do it; it was hired people from the North Caucasus'.¹⁴⁷ A narrative that explains the atrocities of the conflict through the presence of external players detracts attention from the role played by Georgians and Abkhazians.

Displaying similarities to the IDPs' view, the Abkhaz and Ossetian perspective was focused on Georgian nationalism and military action. In Ossetia, the firebrand nationalism of Gamsakhurdia meant that Ossetians feared Georgia would not honour the status quo; a fear confirmed when Gamsakhurdia ordered a march on Tskhinvali, the South Ossetian capital.¹⁴⁸ The South Ossetian man interviewed for this research said that the conflict began when 'obvious nationalist Zviad Gamsakhurdia' became 'the head of the Georgian government,' and that 'his ideas brought the conflict [...] he is [the] one to blame'. He went on to describe the Georgian-Ossetian war as a conflict between 'nationalism and us'.¹⁴⁹ The Abkhaz people interviewed also placed the causes of the conflict on the actions of the Georgian government. The man stated that the conflict was caused by the 'invasion of 14 August 1992' when the 'Georgian army invaded Abkhazia' and mobilised everyone against the Abkhaz.¹⁵⁰ The woman interviewed said that it was 'unexpected when [the] Georgians attacked, because they [the Abkhazians] did nothing to provoke them'.¹⁵¹ In this view, unwarranted Georgian aggression triggered the wars of the early 1990s; the Abkhaz and Ossetians, facing an existential threat, had to defend themselves. In contrast to the Georgian narrative, Russia did not feature in their understanding of the causes of the conflict: blame lies with the Georgians and their destructive politics, which triggered violence and war.

Russia's actual role in both the Abkhazian and Ossetian wars is elusive. While the Georgians and IDPs placed great emphasis on this factor, the Abkhazians maintained that the conflict was fought independently of Russia. The truth, Thomas de Waal argues, lies somewhere in between these views. Local Armenians and Russians aided the Abkhaz fighters. The Abkhaz also were able to take weapons from a Russian military base in Abkhazia. Both conflicts took place during the disintegration of the Soviet state and military. The help that did come was probably in the form of freelance assistance. When the Abkhaz launched an attack to capture Sukhumi in late September 1993 – a point at which many of the IDPs interviewed for this research fled the Abkhazian capital – President Yeltsin faced crisis in Russia, which ended in fighting on the streets of Moscow.¹⁵² Russia, like Georgia, was in chaos in the wake of state collapse. Its involvement in the

“Russia’s actual role in both the Abkhazian and Ossetian wars is elusive. While the Georgians and IDPs placed great emphasis on this factor, the Abkhazian maintained that the conflict was fought independently of Russia. Russia’s involvement in the conflict cannot be denied, but it should not be regarded as a long-term, coherent strategy. To do so overlooks the complexity of the situation and the role played by a more diverse array of actors.”

146 Interview 11 (IDP), Ori Beli Hostel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July 2014.

147 Interview 35 (IDP), respondent's hostel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 12 August 2014. It is estimated that around 1,000 armed volunteers from the Russian North Caucasus joined the fighting after the Georgian army entered Abkhazians territory. Zurcher, 'The Post-Soviet Wars.' 119.

148 Soulemanov, 'Understanding Ethnic Conflict.' 122-123.

149 Interview 10 (South Ossetia), Hotel Central (Skype call), Tbilisi, Georgia. Started on 29 July 2014; completed on 31 July 2014.

150 Interview 14 (Abkhazian), Hotel Central (Skype Call), Tbilisi, Georgia. 30 July 2014.

151 Interview 25 (Abkhazian), Hotel Central (Skype), Tbilisi, Georgia. 6 August 2014.

152 All discussed in de Waal, 'The Caucasus.' pp. 159-160.

conflict cannot be denied, but it should not be regarded as a long-term, coherent strategy. To do so overlooks the complexity of the situation and the role played by a more diverse array of actors.

2.3.3 Consequences

Question: In your opinion, what are the consequences of the conflict in Abkhazia and South Ossetia?

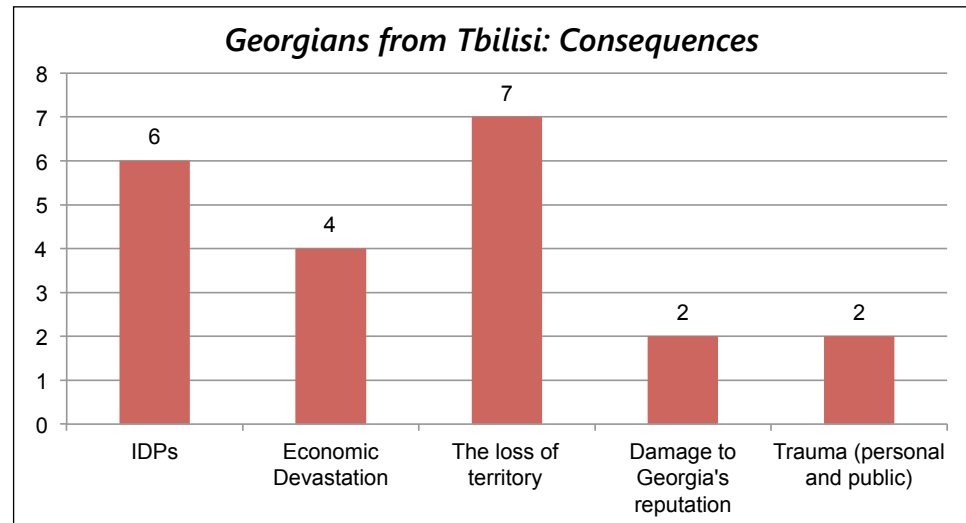


Chart 2.6: Consequences of the conflict in Abkhazia and South Ossetia for Georgia (Georgians from Tbilisi)

This question aimed to bring people's discussion of the conflicts up to the present day. Age was not a distinguishing factor in people's answers.¹⁵³ For the Georgians from Tbilisi, the most common response to the question on consequences was the loss of territory. This category incorporates a range of responses. The first described the loss of territory in terms akin to Kabachnik's cartographic anxieties, in which Georgia is not the size or shape it should be.¹⁵⁴ A 42-year-old woman described the situation as 'the violation of one space, Georgian space'.¹⁵⁵ A 57-year-old man said simply that Georgia has 'lost 25 per cent of its territory and there is [a] chance we might lose even more'.¹⁵⁶ Other respondents portrayed the loss of territory as an occupation by Russia. A 23-year old woman stated that '[a]fter 2008, it is really awful, I feel like I live in an occupied country'.¹⁵⁷ Since the war in 2008, the Georgian government has promoted the idea of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as occupied territories.¹⁵⁸ These responses revealed an emotional attachment to the territories themselves alongside a belief that they are rightly Georgian.

The responses on this theme also included a more nostalgic strand of thought, which was mournful about the loss of a good place to holiday, visit, or – at the very least – be able to access. A 41-year-old man gave an emotive response by saying:

¹⁵³ Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July–11 August 2014.

¹⁵⁴ Kabachnik, 'Wounds that Won't Heal.'

¹⁵⁵ Interview 27 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Tbilisi Hospital, Tbilisi, Georgia. 7 August 2014.

¹⁵⁶ Interview 20 (Georgian from Tbilisi), respondent's residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 2 August 2014.

¹⁵⁷ Interview 6 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014.

¹⁵⁸ Archil Gegeshidze, 'New Realities After the August 2008.' In Archil Gegeshidze and Ivlian Haindrava, 'Transformation of the Georgia-Abkhazian Conflict: Rethinking the Paradigm.' Conciliation Resources: European Union. (2011), 24.

*I lost part of my life, my space, and my people. I lost something that is very special to me, because I am [originally] from Western Georgia and I know Abkhazia... when I go back [to Western Georgia] I have a bad feeling because I know I cannot go any further.*¹⁵⁹

Abkhazia was depicted as a special location that is no longer accessible to Georgians, despite it being an integral part of their country. The loss of Abkhazia was regarded as the loss of a very good holiday destination. One 26-year-old hotel manager stated that he hoped one day he could 'go there for some rest or to make some investment'.¹⁶⁰ A 57-year-old man reminisced about holidays he had spent there as a child.¹⁶¹ The older generation remembered Abkhazia fondly while the younger generation – informed by their elders – had favourable impressions of the territory and hoped that one day they can visit. When discussing the loss of territories the desire to be able to move freely within what is considered Georgian space is a highly prominent motif in people's responses. The loss of that freedom is considered a tragic consequence of the war.

Six respondents from the Georgians from Tbilisi sample discussed IDPs, with two people from each age category mentioning this consequence. The situation was described in terms of the impact it had had on displaced peoples' lives. One 23-year-old woman said that 'they are living in a really bad situation. They can't go back and they don't have any power over their property'.¹⁶² In Tbilisi IDPs are the most visible consequence of the war. Three respondents described the burden their situation placed on the country. A 63-year-old woman stated, 'we couldn't handle the problem, we couldn't handle so many refugees. So, they were really hard times'.¹⁶³ Another respondent echoed this view by saying, '[the consequence is] a big number of refugees, which is also a big problem for the Georgian economy'.¹⁶⁴ Half of the people who discussed IDPs linked their situation to broader economic problems. The economic damage of war was presented as holding Georgia back. An enormous burden was placed on the Georgian people and government at a time when change and rejuvenation was most needed.¹⁶⁵

Other themes in peoples' responses were trauma and damage to Georgia's reputation. Two people discussed the emotional impact the conflicts had on a personal and public level. One woman said that, '[i]t was trauma for society and it remains that way. Because we live in fear that someday there will be [another] war'.¹⁶⁶ Two people also mentioned that it harmed Georgia's international reputation, due to the country being associated with war.¹⁶⁷

“ When discussing the loss of territories the desire to be able to move freely within what is considered Georgian space is a highly prominent motif in people's responses. The loss of that freedom is considered a tragic consequence of the war. The economic damage of war was presented as holding Georgia back. An enormous burden was placed on the Georgian people and government at a time when change and rejuvenation was most needed. ”

159 Interview 17 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Georgian Partnership for Road Safety Offices, Tbilisi, Georgia. 1 August 2014.

160 Interview 24 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 6 August 2014.

161 Interview 7 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014.

162 Interview 12 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Ori Beli Hostel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 30 July 2014.

163 Interview 33 (Georgian from Tbilisi), respondent's residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 11 August 2014.

164 Interview 28 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 7 August 2014.

165 Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July-11 August 2014.

166 Interview 6 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014.

167 Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July-11 August 2014.

“ In contrast, among IDPs, the most common response to the question was that the wars ruined relationships. This reflects their personal investment in these conflict. Another consequence people stated was the loss of their homes or homeland: both the actual loss of where they used to live as well as the metaphorical loss of a place where they belong.”

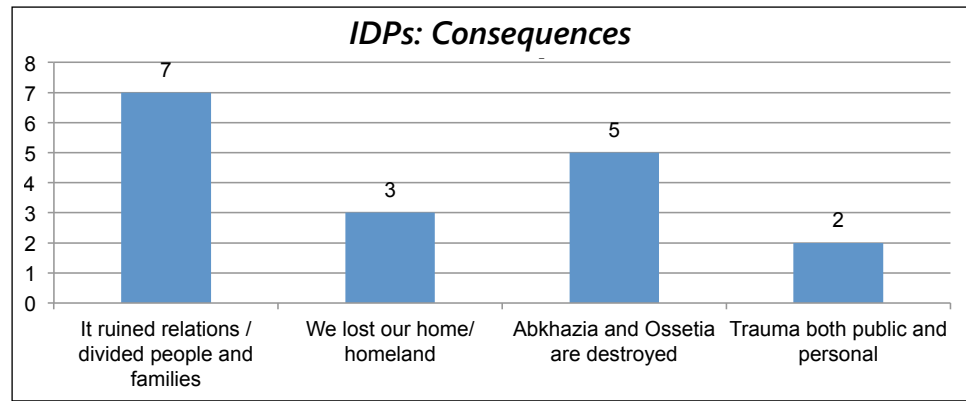


Chart 2.7: Consequences of the conflict in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (IDPs)

In contrast, among the IDPs, the most common response to the question was that the wars ruined relationships. This reflects their personal investment in these conflicts. All respondents mentioned this; the war divided communities, friends, and families. The idea was linked to the perception people had of Abkhazia before the war.¹⁶⁸ Also attached to this was the theme that Abkhazia is destroyed. A 21-year-old woman, who lived in Abkhazia until 2010, said that today, ‘it looks exactly how it did after the war, everything is ruined or destroyed’.¹⁶⁹ The consequences of division and destruction formed a sharp contrast to the pre-war situation. Both sides were depicted as losing, as the beautiful and harmonious place they once inhabited no longer exists.

Another consequence people stated in their responses was the loss of their homes or homeland. This incorporated both the actual loss of where they used to live as well as the metaphorical loss of a place where they belong. A 49-year-old woman expressed this sentiment by saying:

*We lost our homes, our homeland, where were we grew up, we couldn't have the future that we planned [...] We always have the hope that we will go back and this puts big pressure on us, like a depression.*¹⁷⁰

In these expressions, the idea of homeland was connected to identity. The IDPs from Abkhazia spoke of the loss of their territory, and the fact that it is now largely inaccessible to them, as a loss of part of who they are. Through understanding how they remember Abkhazia, discussed at the beginning of this analysis, it is easier to grasp what it is that they feel they have lost.

The interviewees from Abkhazia and South Ossetia discussed their estrangement from Georgia as a major consequence of the wars. All three said that the consequences for them were independence for their territories.¹⁷¹ The war was also depicted as creating a point of no return due to a deep, protracted estrangement. The man from Abkhazia stated that:

*Georgia became very far away from Abkhazia. People here participate in the life of the Northern Caucasus, Russia, Turkey, Greece, and other countries; Georgia for them is a black hole. And [I] imagine it is the same way from the other side.*¹⁷²

The respondent from South Ossetia repeated this idea of distance from Georgia by

¹⁶⁸ Interviews with IDPs, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July-12 August 2014.

¹⁶⁹ Interview 29 (IDP), Café near the Bridge of Peace, Tbilisi, Georgia. 7 August 2014.

¹⁷⁰ Interview 21 (IDP), respondent's friends residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 4 August 2014.

¹⁷¹ Interviews with Abkhazians and Ossetians, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July-6 August 2014.

¹⁷² Interview 14 (Abkhazian), Hotel Central (Skype Call), Tbilisi, Georgia. 30 July 2014.

saying that, 'the final result I can say [is] that Ossetians will never want to become the part of Georgia again, I [have] live[d] here for 20 years and I know it for sure'.¹⁷³ While the Georgians depicted the consequences as a loss of territory, the people who live in them described the conflicts as strengthening their resolve to separate from Georgia. For the Abkhazian woman another consequence was the territory's isolation. She said that '[w]e are isolated from the world, because of Georgia, we can't get visas, we can't get education abroad'.¹⁷⁴ This isolation – caused, in this view, by Georgian policy, rather than Russian occupation – further entrenches division and ill feeling.

2.3.4 Longevity

Question: In your opinion, why have these conflicts lasted for as long as they have?

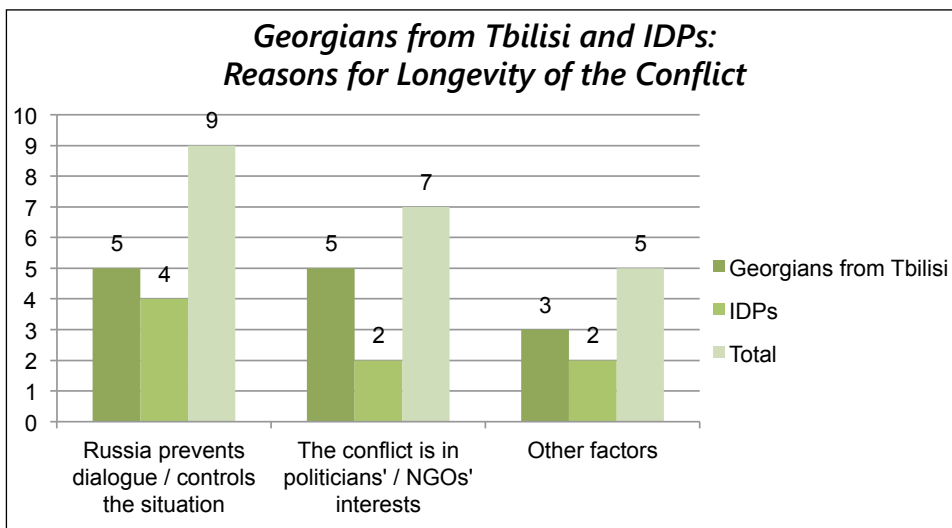


Chart 2.8: Reasons for conflict longevity in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Georgians from Tbilisi and IDPs)

As with the discussion of consequences, this question aimed at bringing respondents' answers to the present day as well as appreciating what people thought the mechanisms behind the conflict were. The two most common responses were that Russian involvement hinders any progress and that the conflict is in the interests of politicians. Five out of 12 respondents in the Georgians from Tbilisi sample mentioned Russia in their answers.¹⁷⁵ Russia was depicted as hampering any progress by preventing dialogue between the different sides. The understanding was that Russia does not want the situation to improve, and can use its considerable resources to prevent it from doing so. The second most common response was that the conflict serves people's interest.¹⁷⁶ This could either be the state: 'politicians don't want it to stop, if the conflict stopped they would have no work'¹⁷⁷; or, international organisations, 'they are earning lots of money from it [...] organisations like the UN [...] they [NGO workers] are coming for fun and having good salaries and "working"'.¹⁷⁸ These reveal a lack of faith in the ability of politicians or NGOs to bring about meaningful change: an assessment based on over 20 years of little progress. This, along with Russia's unwillingness to allow for

173 Interview 10 (South Ossetia), Hotel Central (Skype call), Tbilisi, Georgia. Started on 29 July 2014; completed on 31 July 2014.

174 Interview 25 (Abkhazian), Hotel Central (Skype), Tbilisi, Georgia. 6 August 2014.

175 Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July-11 August 2014

176 Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July-11 August 2014.

177 Interview 26 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Tbilisi Hospital, Tbilisi, Georgia. 7 August 2014.

178 Interview 24 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 6 August 2014.

“ The interviewees from Abkhazia and South Ossetia discussed their estrangement from Georgia as a major consequence of the wars. While the Georgians depicted the consequences as a loss of territory, the people who live in them described the conflicts as strengthening their resolve to separate from Georgia.”

“ The responses of both the Georgians from Tbilisi and IDPs suggest that people consider events completely out of their control. While there was acknowledgment that the longevity of the conflict arises from a neat complete lack of dialogue among the conflicting sides, most people considered themselves to be powerless to change this situation. The Abkhaz people explained the longevity of the conflicts through the Georgian government’s refusal to compromise and accept their status – or at least sign a peace treaty that would offer the Abkhaz protection.”

dialogue, can explain the longevity of these conflicts in the view of the Georgians. Other explanations included the general lack of dialogue among the different sides and the presence of negative attitudes among both sides.¹⁷⁹

IDP responses were similar to the Georgian sample: the majority (four out of seven) said Russia prevents any progress. Two respondents expressed scepticism with NGO work.¹⁸⁰ The man from the IDP family expressed this view:

*No one wants the conflict to be finished because this is a source of money. Even, for example, you [the interviewer] would not be here without this conflict. So, because of this conflict there exist lots of NGOs, lots of missions, and lots of jobs. No one wants peace.*¹⁸¹

The responses of both the Georgians from Tbilisi and IDPs suggest that people consider events completely out of their control. In this view, the conflict will continue for as long as it serves people’s interests. While there was acknowledgement that the longevity of the conflict arises from a near complete lack of dialogue among the conflicting sides, most people considered themselves to be powerless to change this situation.

The two Abkhaz people interviewed explained the longevity of the conflicts through the Georgian government’s refusal to compromise and accept their status – or at least sign a peace treaty that would offer the Abkhaz protection. Once this happens, they said, progress could be made towards resolving the issues at the heart of the conflict.¹⁸² This illustrated a gulf in understanding regarding who is perpetuating the conflict among the different sides.

2.4 Section Three: Understanding of Conflict Dynamics

This part of the analysis builds on the narratives and interpretations analysed in the previous sections to look at how they shape people’s understanding of conflict dynamics. Using the framework provided by Galtung’s ABC triangle (encompassing contradictions, attitudes, and behaviours), this section provides a perspectival map of the conflict using data gathered from the interviews.

2.4.1 Contradictions

The contradiction at the core of the conflict is over territory. This has been demonstrated in the previous sections, especially in Section 2.3.3. In this case, the structural aspect of the conflict involves a clash over the desire for territorial integrity among the Georgians and the right to self-determination among the Abkhaz and Ossetians. The Georgians generally conceive these territories as essential parts of their country. Several statements people made demonstrated this stance:

*Interview 8: Abkhazia and South Ossetia have always been parts of Georgia [...] Abkhazia and South Ossetia are part of Georgia, they are Georgia’s.*¹⁸³

179 Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July–11 August 2014; Interviews with IDPs, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July–12 August 2014.

180 Interviews with IDPs, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July–12 August 2014.

181 Interview 13 (Focus Group) (IDP), respondent’s residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 30 July 2014.

182 Interview 14 (Abkhazian), Hotel Central (Skype Call), Tbilisi, Georgia. 30 July 2014; Interview 25 (Abkhazian), Hotel Central (Skype), Tbilisi, Georgia. 6 August 2014.

183 Interview 8 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014.

*Interview 24: Abkhazia is Georgia's and it will be Georgia's again. I think the day will come when it will be ours again.*¹⁸⁴

*Interview 20: The territories are naturally part of Georgia. The fact that they are no longer part of us is a problem for [all] of us.*¹⁸⁵

The language used emphasised unity and ownership. The fact that Georgia is not complete was deemed harmful and wrong – a historical injustice. Metaphors such as homeland or nation often form a powerful part of psychocultural interpretations.¹⁸⁶ The strong emotions that people attach to these cultural ideas makes it very difficult for groups to acknowledge other perspectives, especially when their own actions may be at the root of other groups' anxiety.¹⁸⁷ In the Georgian case, it was very difficult to accept the other group's demands while the territories are so deeply embroiled in the nation's identity and associated with the nation's fortunes.

As with the Georgians from the Tbilisi, the main contradiction of these conflicts expressed by the IDPs was over territory. This was mixed with the IDPs' desire to return to their homes. In five out of seven interviews people discussed their want to return home. The fact that Georgians were forcibly moved from these territories and can no longer live there is cited as a great injustice; this is compounded by the fact that both Abkhazia and South Ossetia are, in their view, historical parts of Georgia. A 35-year-old woman said, '[i]t is Georgia's territory. Georgia's original territory. [It is] wholly Georgian territory, all part of the ancient land of Georgia. How should it be that it is only for Abkhazians [to have]?'¹⁸⁸ The idea of it being a historical injustice was repeated elsewhere. A 23-year-old IDP woman argued, 'There are lots of historical sources and documents that prove that Abkhazia belongs to Georgia'.¹⁸⁹ This idea of ownership proven by historical record further entrenches the idea that Abkhazia is rightfully Georgia's. The IDP from South Ossetia echoed this sentiment by saying what is now South Ossetia was 'always part of Georgia'.¹⁹⁰ While none of the IDPs interviewed expressed the idea that Abkhazians or Ossetians should not live on the territories, many believed it was unfair that the outcome of the war meant that the territories belong only to the Abkhaz or Ossetians.

The other side of this contradiction, as described by the Georgians from Tbilisi, was that the Abkhaz and Ossetians do not want to be part of Georgia and chose to be closer to Russia. Some respondents did not know why this was the case.¹⁹¹ Others acknowledged why, but did not believe that the reasoning behind it was legitimate.¹⁹² Among the IDPs, there was greater acknowledgement of the other side of this contradiction at the centre of the conflict. A 73-year-old woman recalled that 'they were always saying Abkhazia is theirs, not Georgia's'.¹⁹³ A 23-year-old respondent noted the competing interpretations of the conflict by saying that 'the 27th September, [the day] that we recognise as losing Sukhumi and Abkhazia,

184 Interview 24 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 6 August 2014.

185 Interview 20 (Georgian from Tbilisi), respondent's residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 2 August 2014.

186 Ross, 'Psychocultural Interpretation Theory.' 529.

187 Ibid. 532.

188 Interview 30 (IDP), Subway restaurant, Tbilisi, Georgia. 8 August 2014.

189 Interview 29 (IDP), Café near the Bridge of Peace, Tbilisi, Georgia. 7 August 2014.

190 Interview 11 (IDP), Ori Beli Hostel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July 2014.

191 Interview 8 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014.

192 Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July-11 August 2014.

193 Interview 35 (IDP), respondent's hostel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 12 August 2014.

they celebrate as gaining independence'.¹⁹⁴ The IDPs showed little resentment towards the Abkhaz themselves. Their anger and frustration homed in on the situation rather than their former neighbours. Their explanations showed a greater understanding of the situation than among the Georgians from Tbilisi. A 49-year-old IDP woman of Abkhazian descent summed up the contradiction at the centre of the conflict by saying that both 'sides were fighting to defend their homelands'.¹⁹⁵

In contrast, all three respondents from Abkhazia and South Ossetia stated firmly that they want independence but that the Georgians refused to accept this.¹⁹⁶ The woman from Abkhazia expressed her frustration at the situation: '[E]veryone thinks that Abkhazia wants to be part of Russia, that it is under protection of it, but it's not true, we do not want and need to be part of Russia, we want to be independent'.¹⁹⁷ When asked what was at stake for the Abkhazians in the conflict, the man responded by saying:

*When they [the Georgians] invaded they basically killed every single Abkhaz person they encountered, so for people here it is survival [...] the resumption of violence is the number one fear in Abkhazia.*¹⁹⁸

The Georgian desire to restore 'territorial integrity' entirely contradicted the fact that the Abkhaz want to be independent and seek protection from future Georgian aggression. However, this opinion was not universal on either territory. For example, in a 2011 poll 73 per cent of people living in Abkhazia fully supported independence, 24.3 per cent felt it would be better if Abkhazia joined Russia, and just 0.6 per cent respondents, most of whom were Georgian-Mingrelian, desired for Abkhazia to be part of Georgia again.¹⁹⁹ Therefore, while the sentiments expressed in this research may not be representative of all Abkhazians, an overwhelming majority does hold these opinions.

2.4.2 Attitudes

The Georgians cited attitudes as a major source of conflict, especially those held by the Abkhazians and South Ossetians towards Georgians. Georgians could either not understand why the Abkhaz or Ossetians wanted to be separate from them, or explained the situation by assuming that inhabitants of the disputed territories were manipulated or indoctrinated. The below comments summarise the view:

*Interview 6: I hear that in Abkhazia information is not free... In Abkhazia they are taught that we are enemies. They are afraid of meeting us.*²⁰⁰

*Interview 26: Some Abkhazians think that Georgians everyday wake up and think [about] how to invade Abkhazia.*²⁰¹

*Interview 27: The propaganda – that Georgians are enemies – works so well that it is quite widespread, absolutely on the grassroots.*²⁰²

194 Interview 29 (IDP), Café near the Bridge of Peace, Tbilisi, Georgia. 7 August 2014.

195 Interview 21 (IDP), respondent's friends residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 4 August 2014.

196 Interviews with Abkhazians and Ossetians, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July-6 August.

197 Interview 25 (Abkhazian), Hotel Central (Skype), Tbilisi, Georgia. 06 August 2014.

198 Interview 14 (Abkhazian), Hotel Central (Skype Call), Tbilisi, Georgia. 30 July 2014.

199 Kirill Shevchenko and Islam Teskushev, 'Abkhazia in Public Opinion Polls.' In Islam Teskushev et al (eds), 'Abkhazia: Between the Past and the Future.' (Prague: Median Orient, 2013). 128.

200 Interview 6 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014.

201 Interview 26 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Tbilisi Hospital, Tbilisi, Georgia. 7 August 2014.

202 Interview 27 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Tbilisi Hospital, Tbilisi, Georgia. 7 August 2014.

While this revealed an awareness of how the Abkhaz and Ossetians feel, it implied that they have been forced to come to these conclusions by an outside power or their own governments. This detracted credibility from their fears and grievances. Moreover, it removed the need to consider why they feel that way. However, the respondents did speak of the situation with sadness and expressed a desire to want to change it through better communication.²⁰³

The IDPs also cited negative attitudes among the Abkhazians and Ossetians as a major source of the conflict. The IDPs showed a more nuanced understanding of why these negative attitudes existed, rather than regarding it as a product of Russian propaganda. A 49-year-old woman astutely summed up the situation by saying that '[t]he big problem between Georgians and Abkhazians is that all Georgians remember is the positive, whereas all [the] Abkhazians remember is the negative' and that what the 'Abkhazians remember is the short war, but the Georgians remember the long history'.²⁰⁴

IDPs' discussion of attitudes was full of descriptions and personal stories about how the Georgians are disliked and hated. The IDP from South Ossetia described the situation by saying:

*The younger generation, growing up after the war, are told that if you don't eat your food the Georgians will come and kill you. When they have grown up, they are full of hate and it is difficult to change this. Some people have no idea how Georgia looks or what a Georgian looks like. They have no contact and no sight of Georgians and this is why they think that Georgians want to kill them and [why they have] bad stereotypes.*²⁰⁵

This response acknowledged that a lack of communication and misinformation was at the source of these hostile attitudes. Similar themes dominated the responses of IDPs from Abkhazia. A 21-year-old Georgian woman told a story about how she was playing with an Abkhaz child. When the child found out she was Georgian he was surprised, as he thought that they 'looked ugly and were bad'.²⁰⁶ Another IDP woman recalled a story when she bought a tee shirt on a visit to Abkhazia saying 'I am an Abkhazian'. People living nearby told her to be careful and not to wear it when she returned to Georgia, as she would be killed.²⁰⁷ These stories, whether or not they are exaggerated for effect, reveal a widespread perception among the IDPs that the Georgians are disliked and feared by people in the two territories.

Interestingly, four out of seven IDP respondents – including all people in the oldest category – said that they were ready to forgive Abkhazians. This was not an interview question so more may have felt this sentiment, but not expressed it directly. A 23-year-old woman said, 'I know certainly that all the IDPs are ready to forgive and go back. I am ready and my family is ready to forgive the people who killed my grandfather'.²⁰⁸ However, they acknowledged that the Abkhaz or Ossetians are unwilling to do the same.

203 Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July-11 August 2014. The Georgian government expresses similar ideas that the Abkhaz and Ossetians' opinions cannot be trusted due to the apparent daily onslaught of propaganda they face. When the academics who conducted the public opinion survey in Abkhazia approached Georgia's Minister for Reintegration he informed them that their project was controversial as asking questions to people under this kind of 'informational pressure' would produce misleading results. O'Loughlin, Kossolov and Toal, 'Inside Abkhazia.' 5.

204 Interview 21 (IDP), respondent's friend's residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 04 August 2014.

205 Interview 11 (IDP), Ori Beli Hostel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July 2014.

206 Interview 23 (Georgian who grew up in Abkhazia, categorised as IDP), Hotel Central (Skype), Tbilisi, Georgia. 05 August 2014.

207 Interview 29 (IDP), Café near the Bridge of Peace, Tbilisi, Georgia. 7 August 2014.

208 Interview 29 (IDP), Café near the Bridge of Peace, Tbilisi, Georgia. 7 August 2014.

“ While expressing willingness to forget and forgive, IDPs refused to recognise Abkhaz grievances. They were willing to forgive what had happened in the conflict, yet they left the reasons why it occurred unaddressed. Nevertheless, the IDPs’ view gave greater agency to the Abkhazians’ role in the conflict than that expressed by the Georgians from Tbilisi, even if it did regard their grievances as unfounded.”

One woman said this situation was only getting worse, when she was visiting Abkhazia she saw ‘every day on television reminders of the war, in this sense, time is against us. We [in Abkhazia] live in an informational vacuum. Time is against us and we are losing the informational war’.²⁰⁹ In this view, while the Georgians are ready for peace, the Abkhaz face daily propaganda reminding them of the war.

Another theme on the attitudinal dynamics of the conflict was that Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetians relations had always been harmonious and the Georgians treated ethnic minorities in both territories well.²¹⁰ Among the Georgians from Tbilisi sample three out of four respondents over 50 stated this. In response to the question, ‘Why is the conflict important to the Abkhazians and Ossetians?’ a 57-year-old man stated, ‘[There] is a mistake in your question... this conflict was not a conflict between Abkhazians [or Ossetians] and Georgians. The war was between Russians and Georgians.’²¹¹ Another 57-year-old man said, ‘[T]he attitudes and behaviour of the Georgians [are] not to blame. Georgians never wanted the war... they wanted the opposite. They were always friendly with them and treated them well’.²¹² This view absolved the Georgians of any complicity in the conflict by depicting it as forced upon two friendly peoples by a meddling outside power.

Linked to this, four IDP respondents – including all respondents in the oldest category – stated that they did not understand why the Abkhaz had any grievances. The perspective on the past was that the Abkhaz were a privileged people who had everything that they needed. The couple from the family that was interviewed concurred:

*[The] Abkhazians widely spread the idea that Georgians oppress us and [that] they were somehow more aggressive towards us [Georgians to the Abkhaz]. On the contrary, Abkhazians had big privileges, they were excluded from military service, and high government positions were belonging only to Abkhazians.*²¹³

A 73-year-old woman agreed with this view:

*[T]heir rights have never been restricted. I do not remember any violation of their rights, any restriction of their rights. What did they want more [of], I couldn’t imagine what...why? Because they had the best conditions of living, ever.*²¹⁴

The inexplicable nature of the Abkhaz actions only served to confirm, for the respondents, that Russia was pulling the strings and manipulating the Abkhaz. While expressing a willingness to forget and forgive, IDPs – especially older ones – refused to recognise Abkhaz grievances. They were willing to forgive what had happened in the conflict, yet they left the reasons why it occurred unaddressed. Nevertheless, the IDPs’ view did give greater agency to the Abkhazians’ role in the conflict than that expressed by the Georgians from Tbilisi, even if it did regard their grievances as unfounded.

209 Interview 21 (IDP), respondent’s friend’s residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 4 August 2014.

210 Interview 7 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014; Interview 20 (Georgian from Tbilisi), respondent’s residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 2 August 2014; Interview 33 (Georgian from Tbilisi), respondent’s residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 11 August 2014.

211 Interview 7 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014.

212 Interview 20 (Georgian from Tbilisi), respondent’s residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 2 August 2014.

213 Interview 13 (Focus Group) (IDP), respondent’s residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 30 July 2014.

214 Interview 35 (IDP), respondent’s hostel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 12 August 2014.

Due to Abkhazia and South Ossetia being much smaller societies the impact of war was far greater than in undisputed Georgian territory, and the memory of it forms a key component of national life.²¹⁵ The Abkhazian man interviewed described the situation in the territory: '[I]t is a very small society and everyone knows each other. So, whenever you lose a soldier at a funeral there are a lot of relations, it is all connected to each other. People here have solidarity.'²¹⁶ The destroyed buildings that dominate the landscape also serve as potent reminders of the war.²¹⁷ However, the idea that the Abkhazians or Ossetians hate and fear Georgians was challenged by the Abkhaz woman interviewed:

*When I speak to Georgians, they always say that we want to come to Abkhazia but [that] they will kill us, and I say to them all the time that no such thing will happen, we will be glad to host Georgians, Armenians, everyone who is not aggressive.'*²¹⁸

Undoubtedly, there was a fear among people on both territories about what the Georgians might do in the future. However, the claims about indoctrination and hatred are unhelpful as they detract attention away from the issues that cause insecurity by implying that these sentiments are planted there rather than being triggered by feelings.

2.4.3 Behaviour

Due to the conflicts having being 'frozen' for many years, behavioural dynamics featured less prominently in peoples' answers. The most notable points on this dimension from both the Georgians from Tbilisi and the IDPs currently resident in Tbilisi was the lack of action and communication among Abkhazians, Ossetians, and Georgians. Seven out of 12 respondents in the Georgians from Tbilisi sample stated that the lack of communication perpetuated negative stereotypes and that Georgians did not know what the Abkhaz or Ossetians thought or wanted due to a lack of information.²¹⁹ One 23-year-old summed up the feeling by saying 'nobody is thinking about these people [...] we [have] never met Ossetians and we don't know how they live for twenty years or even more'.²²⁰ The lack of action was seen as further entrenching the conflict by leaving the other two dimensions identified in the ABC triangle – negative attitudes and irreconcilable contradictions – unaddressed.

Likewise, the lack of communication was discussed in five out of seven interviews with IDPs. A 21-year-old woman expressed this opinion by saying, 'the biggest problem that fuels this conflict is [that] they do not know who we are and we do not know who they are'.²²¹ This was coupled with a belief that no one has the will or desire to address these conflicts. A 73-year woman said that 'ordinary people' do not care about these conflicts any more. They care 'about everyday life and concerns'

215 O'Loughlin Kolossov and Toal, 'Inside Abkhazia'; O'Loughlin and Toal 'Inside South Ossetia,'

216 Interview 14 (Abkhazian), Hotel Central (Skype Call), Tbilisi, Georgia. 30 July 2014.

217 Clogg, 'The Politics of Identity in Post-Soviet Abkhazia,' 306.

218 Interview 25 (Abkhazian), Hotel Central (Skype), Tbilisi, Georgia. 6 August 2014.

219, Interview 12 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Ori Beli Hostel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 30 July 2014; Interview 6 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014; Interview 33 (Georgian from Tbilisi), respondent's residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 11 August 2014.

220 Interview 12 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Ori Beli Hostel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 30 July 2014.

221 Interview 23 (Georgian who grew up in Abkhazia, categorised as IDP), Hotel Central (Skype), Tbilisi, Georgia. 5 August 2014.

“ The responses revealed that a lack of dialogue and communication was widely regarded, especially among younger respondents, as a major source of perpetuation of the conflict. There was also hope about what dialogue could achieve, with younger people seemingly very willing to engage in programmes that aim to bring the two sides together.”

and no one has the ‘will’ to do anything.²²² This lack of action was regarded as prolonging the conflict and moving the prospect of reconciliation further away.

It is important to note that respondents in the sample of Georgians from Tbilisi demonstrated a strong willingness to talk and communicate with Abkhazians and Ossetians. In line with the argument put forward by Kabachnik, Regulaska and Mitchneck regarding IDPs, it can be concluded that the Georgians from Tbilisi showed remarkably little hostility or anger towards people living on the territories. In a typical statement, a 26-year-old man said, ‘I don’t have a problem with Abkhazian people, Ossetian people. I like them. I would like to be friendly with all of them.’²²³ This showed a willingness to build relationships with people in the two de facto states. All people in the lowest age category expressed sadness that they could not communicate or a frustration that they could not make friends with people who lived on the territories. A 23-year-old woman said:

[What is most upsetting is] the loss of each other. I would give everything to talk to [an] Abkhazian. Once I met an Abkhazian girl in Prague, but I was so shocked that I couldn’t even talk. For years, I have been thinking about meeting them to find out if we like the same music or literature andsoon.’²²⁴

These responses revealed that a lack of dialogue and communication was widely regarded, especially among younger respondents, as a major source of perpetuation of the conflict. There was also hope about what dialogue could achieve, with younger people seemingly very willing to engage in programmes that aim to bring the two sides together.

This theme also featured in the responses of the Abkhazians and Ossetians interviewed. The lack of dialogue and compromise was cited as a major reason for the conflicts’ continuation.²²⁵ The Abkhazian man described this behavioural dynamic:

You have two realities: one here and one on the other territory in Georgia and [in] this sense [they] became alien to each other... what happens here usually does not go on in Georgia and what happens in Georgia usually does not go on here.’²²⁶

On both sides there was a recognition that the lack of communication further entrenches the contradictions and negative attitudes.

2.5 Section Four: State / Geopolitical level

This section aimed to get people’s perspective on how the geopolitical dimension shaped the conflict. This is important, because these conflicts are predominantly framed in geopolitical terms and, therefore, understanding how this shapes people’s interpretations is needed in order to plan a peace-building intervention. Russia dominated the discussion of state and international politics for both the Georgians from Tbilisi and the IDPs. Georgian and IDP respondents often referred to Russia using the euphemisms ‘the third party’, ‘the outside force’, or ‘our neighbour’.²²⁷

222 Interview 35 (IDP), respondent’s hostel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 12 August 2014.

223 Interview 26 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Tbilisi Hospital, Tbilisi, Georgia. 7 August 2014.

224 Interview 6 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014.

225 Interviews with Abkhazians and Ossetians, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July-6 August 2014.

226 Interview 14 (Abkhazian), Hotel Central (Skype Call), Tbilisi, Georgia. 30 July 2014.

227 Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July-11 August 2014.

The IDPs also discussed their frustration with the Georgian government and their feelings of social exclusion due to government inaction.²²⁸

2.5.1 Without Russia...

Question: Without Russian involvement, what would the conflicts be like?

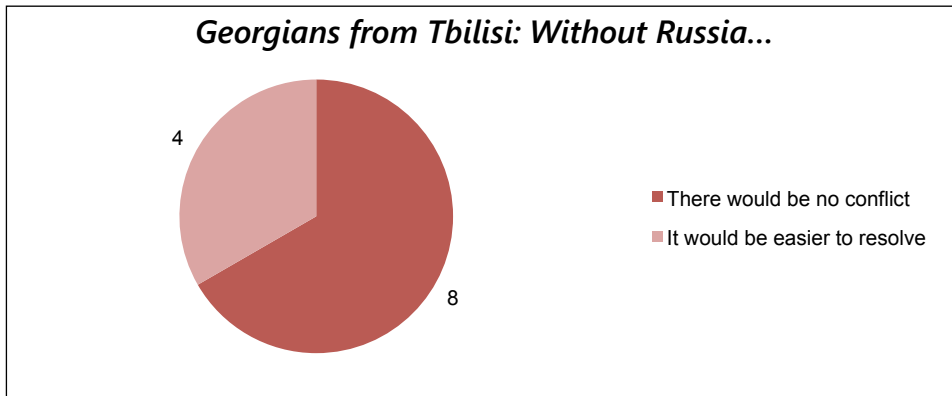


Chart 2.9: Without Russia what would the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia be like (Georgians from Tbilisi)

In response to the question above, eight respondents in the Georgians from Tbilisi sample stated that there would be no conflict, while four respondents stated that dialogue would be easier and there would be less negative stereotypes. This illustrated the extent to which people regard Russian involvement as the sole reason for the conflict continuation. Four respondents gave answers that placed causation entirely on Russian involvement by suggesting that once Russia was out of the picture, problems could be solved easily:

Interview 24: [Without Russia] it could be solved by ourselves, in one day. It would take just twenty-four hours to solve the problem.²²⁹

Interview 26: [Without Russia] There would not be any conflict at all. The conflict would not exist at all.²³⁰

Interview 7: This conflict will finish the day after Russia is destroyed.... [when] Russia will finish its imperial life.²³¹

This perspective ignored other elements of the conflict such as fears, grievances, and animosity among the different sides. It depicted a situation in which Russia was the only factor holding back a united future. Russian intervention represented a sharp rupture to what was and what should be peaceful, friendly relations. Of the eight respondents who believed that the conflict would not exist without Russian involvement, four of them were keen to point out that they did not have issues with the Russian people, but with the Russian government, specifically President Putin.²³² In this view, it is just a handful of neo-imperialists in the Kremlin – headed by Putin – who are the source of Georgia’s territorial woes.

Other responses were less one-dimensional and acknowledged that problems would still exist if Russia was removed from the situation; however, opportunities

228 Interviews with IDPs, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July-12 August 2014.

229 Interview 24 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 6 August 2014.

230 Interview 26 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Tbilisi Hospital, Tbilisi, Georgia. 7 August 2014.

231 Interview 7 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014.

232 Interview 8 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014; Interview 24 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 6 August 2014.

for peace building would be greater.²³³ These responses acknowledged that problems went beyond Russian involvement. Only a third of the sample took this view, two of whom were in the younger category – both female – and one in each of the other age categories.²³⁴ This view was more constructive for peace-building efforts as it appreciates that there is work to be done beyond challenging perceived Russian neo-imperialism.

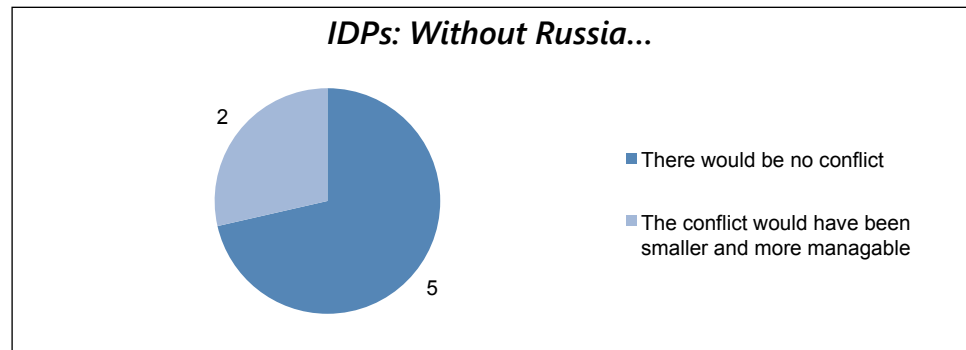


Chart 2.10: Without Russia what would the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia be like (IDPs)

Among the IDPs, in five out of seven interviews respondents stated that without Russia the conflict would not exist and two said that it would have been smaller and more manageable.²³⁵ Like the Georgians, the IDPs framed the situation as one of powerlessness in the face of Russian aggression and governmental whim. In this view, the Russians always wanted the territories; the people who lived on them, Abkhazians and Georgians alike, were unable to stop them. This narrative depicted Russia as a common enemy that had wrought suffering on both sides.²³⁶

Another recurring theme that arose when discussing Russia with both the Georgians from Tbilisi and the IDPs was that Russia does not respect or look after the Abkhazians or Ossetians. This narrative was imbued with the idea that they were better off under Georgian rule. A 42-year-old-woman expressed this view saying that 'Russia is [...] eating Abkhazia better than we ever could. In Abkhazia now they do not have Abkhazian schools, they do not have Abkhazian language – everything is Russian.'²³⁷ This view, discussed by four – especially older – respondents assumed that the Russians are trying to assimilate the two peoples, swallowing them up into Russian territory. The implication was that under Georgian rule their identity, culture, and traditions were respected. The narrative depicted the situation as a transition from rule by a benevolent country to rule by a malevolent one.

The IDP respondents expressed this view in even stronger terms. A 73-year-old woman said:

The main problem for Abkhazians is Russia. The Abkhazian people are cornered by Russia. They want to rebuild their country but they cannot because Russia will not allow them to. Everything is devastated, the cities

233 Interview 12 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Ori Beli Hostel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 30 July 2014; Interview 6 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014.

234 Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July–11 August 2014.

235 Interviews with IDPs, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July–12 August 2014.

236 Gegeshidze found a similar theme in his work based on interviews with experts on the conflict. Gegeshidze, 'Conflict Resolution Policy After 2008.' In Archil Gegeshidze and Ivian Haindrava, 'Transformation of the Georgia-Abkhazian Conflict: Rethinking the Paradigm.' Conciliation Resources: European Union (2011). 30.

237 Interview 27 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Tbilisi Hospital, Tbilisi, Georgia. 7 August 2014.

*and buildings are still devastated and destroyed... I have heard rumours that some people say it was better with Georgia.*²³⁸

The idea that the Abkhazians are waking up to the real nature of the side they 'chose' was also a recurring theme. The couple from the IDP family said that Abkhazians had to come back to Georgia because under Russian control, 'demographically: they will soon be destroyed'.²³⁹ A 21-year-old argued that the Russians are trying to 'get rid of the Abkhazians'. She recalled a story of Russian military personnel abusing Abkhazians in a bar and telling them to go back to the mountains from where they came.²⁴⁰ A 23-year-old respondent described how she had heard about Russian-only settlements in Abkhazia, which she believed could be the beginning of the 'genocide of the Abkhazian people'. Soon, she predicted, Russia would take the area completely.²⁴¹ Implicit in this view was that Abkhazia needs to return to Georgia because the Georgians cared for it better and protected the Abkhaz's rights. By portraying Russia as a malicious imperial power slowly working to liquidate the Abkhaz people, the IDPs construed the Russians as a common enemy.

The Georgian and IDP interpretation of Russia's role was further entrenched by current events in Ukraine, which served to confirm Georgians' belief that Russia is looking to expand and control post-Soviet space. Although only six respondents among the Georgians from Tbilisi and IDP samples explicitly discussed events in Ukraine, many more discussed Russia's desire to regain control over post-Soviet space, its desire to prevent countries from joining NATO or the EU, and its manipulation of conflicts in neighbouring conflicts to serve strategic ends.²⁴² The fears expressed by one 23-year woman sums up this view:

*I was afraid [that the war in 2008] would go on and next time they would occupy my state and come to Tbilisi... [then] I will have to live in an occupied place, from where I can't go out anywhere. My mother has an uncle in Ukraine, who lives in Donetsk now and he is stuck there and he can't [leave] [...] [What is happening in Ukraine] is just further evidence that Russia used us all, they see our country as just some place on the map, and a zone of influence and that is all. It is just more evidence that we live in a very awful place on earth: where somebody rules your life and can change it in a second.*²⁴³

Russian foreign policy exacerbated feelings of powerlessness. Events in Ukraine further detracted attention away from the complexities and ethnic component of these conflicts. By seeing them as just another part of President Putin's grand scheme to rebuild the Soviet Union people, took a deterministic view of these conflicts and overlooked the agency of the people, communities and ethnicities involved.

Discussion of events in Ukraine often spilt over into a frustration with the West and its unwillingness to help Georgia or Ukraine. One 19-year-old man said simply, 'I see everyone [in the West] say that they support, but I do not see any action'.²⁴⁴ The West is depicted as unwilling to challenge Russia due to its own interests.

238 Interview 13 (Focus Group) (IDP), respondent's residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 30 July 2014.

239 Interview 13 (Focus Group) (IDP), respondent's residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 30 July 2014.

240 Interview 23 (Georgian who grew up in Abkhazia, categorised as IDP), Hotel Central (Skype), Tbilisi, Georgia. 5 August 2014.

241 Interview 29 (IDP), Café near the Bridge of Peace, Tbilisi, Georgia. 7 August 2014.

242 Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July-11 August 2014.

243 Interview 6 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014.

244 Interview 8 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014.

“ The Georgian focus on Russia was at odds with the responses of the Abkhaz and Ossetians, the people who – according to the Georgian and IDPs narrative – are being occupied and assimilated by the Russians. In their view, Russian military presence in the territory provides security against a Georgian side that has proven itself to be untrustworthy. The military presence was regarded as an unfortunate necessity.”

One 57-year-old man argued this, along with giving the researcher a stark warning:

In Europe people live in good houses, they smoke by a fireplace, they drink cognac and don't want to live without heating and electricity. Europe cannot live without Russia and they say very good, very good you occupied Abkhazia and very good, very good you occupied Ossetia... [and] they do nothing [...] When there was war in Georgia, Ukraine did nothing. And today the same thing happened in Ukraine. Tomorrow Russia will go to Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Czech Republic and into East[ern] Europe. Then it will go to Germany and then it will go to... of course, England will be one of the last countries because it is very far [away]... but, it will come. Because somebody has to stop it. If there is fire here and this fire is a danger for me you look and say I cannot extinguish this fire. You see it and you see it is bad, but do nothing. Be sure that this fire will come to you. [It will get] bigger, bigger and bigger and then it will be impossible to destroy this fire. This fire will eat you... Today [the] fire is Russia. There is only one possibility to stop Russia. All over the world people will not only say but do something... If Russia was destroyed and stopped dividing small countries, I think that the conflicts will stop all overtheworld.²⁴⁵

This statement revealed the fear people have of resurgent Russian power. It also revealed that Georgia's two ethno-territorial disputes are regarded as part of wider geopolitical threat, rather than an intra-state ethnic war. The very legitimate anxiety triggered by events in Ukraine result in NATO and the West being seen as the only solution.²⁴⁶ For as long as the conflict is regarded as just geopolitical, then the only solutions people suggest will involve governments and militaries.

It also needs to be noted that the Russia of 2014 is very different from the Russia of the early 1990s when the country was politically unstable and severely weakened, with a declining economy. The interpretation the Georgians have of the conflict, of a continually powerful Russia working to undermine Georgian independence, does not coincide with historical events. Through seeing Russia as a constant menace, the Georgian interpretation misses the more complex, grassroots dynamics of these conflicts. What is happening now alters perceptions of the past.

The Georgian focus on Russia was at odds with the responses of the Abkhaz and Ossetians, the people who – according to the Georgian and IDP narrative – are being occupied and assimilated by the Russians. The Abkhazian man explained the feeling towards Russia's role:

Abkhazia was attacked many times since the end of [the war in 1993] and that ceasefire was violated many times and the people here regard the security [now] to be connected to [the] presence of Russian troops because there is an agreement between Abkhazia and Russia.²⁴⁷

In this view, Russian military presence in the territory provides security against a Georgian side that has proven itself to be untrustworthy. With regard to the situation in Ukraine, the South Ossetian respondent expressed an entirely different perspective to that voiced by the Georgians. He stated he is 'really worried about the situation [in] Ukraine' because 'if something will happen [to] Russia' then the 'Georgian [government] will bomb everything in South Ossetia'. He went on to

245 Interview 7 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014.

246 Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July-11 August 2014.

247 Interview 14 (Abkhazian), Hotel Central (Skype Call), Tbilisi, Georgia. 30 July 2014.

say he did not believe the Georgian government when they 'promise[d] peace and friendship'. The current calm existed only because the Georgian government feared Russia and therefore did not act. If something were to happen to Russia, South Ossetia, in his view, would be in a very vulnerable position.²⁴⁸ This demonstrates that for the Abkhazians and South Ossetians, Russia's role in the conflict was linked to the prevention of violence. It also showed a complete lack of trust in the intentions of the Georgian government.

This should not be taken to mean that respondents from Abkhazia and South Ossetia spoke positively of Russia's role; instead, the military presence was regarded as an unfortunate necessity. The Abkhazian woman complained that they have still not received the support Russia promised them after the 2008 war.²⁴⁹ The man from South Ossetia expressed scepticism about Russia's intentions. He said, 'Russia says that they love Ossetians [...but] I think it's only political interest and has nothing to do with love and respect'.²⁵⁰ Nevertheless, while they expressed doubts about Russia's intentions for the territories, none of them expressed concerns regarding assimilation or described their present situation as an occupation.

2.5.2 The Georgian Government

Question: How do you see the role of the Georgian government in these conflicts?

The prevailing sentiment among the Georgians from Tbilisi with regard to their government's policy toward the two territories was that the government was not doing enough. Four respondents expressed this view, while two others stated that they did not know what government policy was.²⁵¹

Among the IDPs four out of seven respondents felt that they had been let down by the government since they became displaced.²⁵² Bad housing, inadequate financial aid, poor education and job opportunities, and lack of integration into society were the main points raised in these complaints.²⁵³ One respondent said that the government has 'not treat[ed] us like human beings'.²⁵⁴ The government, they argued, did not have the will or the desire to solve their problem. All respondents in the highest age category said they suspected the government did not want them to return to their home territories. One man stated that the government does not want the IDPs to return because they are sources of income and aid.²⁵⁵

Among the Abkhazians and South Ossetians interviewed, however, the Georgian government was characterised as being responsible for the conflict. The South Ossetian respondent explained his view of the situation by stating:

“Bad housing, inadequate financial aid, poor education and job opportunities, and lack of integration into society were the main points raised in IDPs' complaints.”

248 Interview 10 (South Ossetia), Hotel Central (Skype call), Tbilisi, Georgia. Started on 29 July 2014; completed on 31 July 2014.

249 Interview 25 (Abkhazian), Hotel Central (Skype), Tbilisi, Georgia. 6 August 2014.

250 Interview 10 (South Ossetia), Hotel Central (Skype call), Tbilisi, Georgia. Started on 29 July 2014; completed on 31 July 2014.

251 Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July-11 August 2014.

252 This was not directly linked to the interview question, so more may have shared this view, but not expressed it.

253 Interviews with IDPs, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July-12 August 2014.

254 Interview 35 (IDP), respondent's hostel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 12 August 2014.

255 Interview 13 (Focus Group) (IDP), respondent's residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 30 July 2014.

“ In Abkhazian and Ossetian view, the Georgian government was perpetuating the conflict by refusing to respect or agree to the Abkhazians or Ossetians demands. This contradicts the Georgian view, which predominantly blamed Russian meddling for the continuation of the conflict. ”

[T]here was not a single positive activity from [the] Georgian government from beginning to the end, they acted to Ossetians just like Russians did with [the] Georgians, [the] politics of [a] big brother to [a] little one.²⁵⁶

All three respondents cited the Georgian government's refusal to recognise their territories or respect their autonomy as a major source of conflict perpetuation. The Abkhazian man interviewed stated that the Georgian government's refusal to sign a non-violence treaty and to recognise Abkhazia as independent means that the 'humanitarian spheres' of the conflict remained unaddressed.²⁵⁷ The Abkhazia woman went into more detail by saying that:

[The Georgian government] do[es] nothing for peace, Abkhazians always wanted peace but they [also] wanted to be independent, sovereign country but [the] Georgians would never agree to that and never signed a peace treaty, if they didn't want to take Abkhazia by force they would have signed that [peace treaty]. We are asking that if you are not recognising us as independent [then] at least do not isolate us from the world.²⁵⁸

In this view, the Georgian government was perpetuating the conflict by refusing to respect or agree to the Abkhazians or Ossetians demands. This contradicts the Georgian view, which predominantly blamed Russian meddling for the continuation of the conflict.

2.6 Section Five: The Future

The questions in this section were divided between what people felt was likely to happen and what would be their ideal solution. This distinction was inspired by the idea of envisioning: while people in conflict situations may disagree violently on current goals, they are able to come together on how they see an ideal future.²⁵⁹ This distinction is useful even when looking at just one perspective as it reveals the gulf between expectations and hopes. After asking people what they thought likely to happen and then what they desired to happen, the researcher asked them how these desired changes could be achieved. Their responses, therefore, mixed practicality with idealism.

2.6.1 Likely Future

Question: What do you think is the most likely thing to happen in the future?

Among the Georgians from Tbilisi sample, people's responses to this question did not vary greatly. These responses are presented in Chart 2.10 below. The most common response, especially among older individuals, was that nothing could be achieved until Russia was weakened. This view held that no progress could be made until Russian policy changed or President Putin was removed. In this view, whatever the Georgians attempted, the more powerful Russia would be one-step ahead of the game and would hinder any reconciliation. Linked to this theme was the idea that the question could not be answered because it is out of individuals' control.



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256 Interview 10 (South Ossetia), Hotel Central (Skype call), Tbilisi, Georgia. Started on 29 July 2014; completed on 31 July 2014.

257 Interview 14 (Abkhazian), Hotel Central (Skype Call), Tbilisi, Georgia. 30 July 2014.

258 Interview 25 (Abkhazian), Hotel Central (Skype), Tbilisi, Georgia. 6 August 2014.

259 Máire A. Dugan, 'Envisioning.' Beyond Intractability. In Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess (eds) (Bolder: University of Chicago. 2003). Accessed 9 July 2014. <http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/visions>

Three people stated that they did not know what would happen because it would be decided by governments.²⁶⁰ These responses revealed a feeling of powerlessness among people.

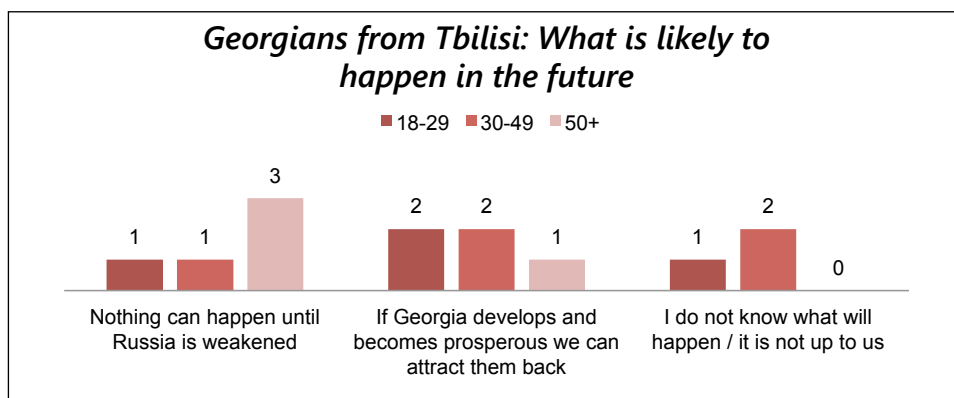


Chart 2.11: What is likely to happen in the future to these conflicts (Georgians from Tbilisi)

The idea that nothing can happen until there is regime change in Russia was a widespread view in Georgia. One academic interviewed for this research expressed this situation in very clear terms:

[T]oday we deal with an organised Russia. With a KGB officer in power and KGB generals in power [who] dream about the restoration of the Soviet Union and about capturing new states [...] It is like Nazi Germany after the collapse in the First World War, after 20 years [there] was the renaissance of Germany in the form of Nazism. The same processes we see here after 20 years of Soviet collapse. We see radical nationalism in Russia and radical nationalist propaganda in Russia supporting the floor under Putin's wings, so in these conditions there is no hope [while] Putin is alive. God created one wise thing: a human being dies. Therefore [a] dictator dies [...] Putin, I hope, will die. He's 61 or 2 years old. He will die and then Russians will have another chance. If Putin is smart enough [to] leave a successor like in North Korea then Russians will look at [the] new successor for the next 30 years until this successor dies, and then at this moment the Russian nation will have [another] chance [...] if they don't use this chance there is no chance to resolve these conflicts in Abkhazia and Ossetia.²⁶¹

This view, even among the academic community, held that no progress could be made until Putin is removed and Russia changes; the outcome of the conflicts in Abkhazia and Ossetia rests on the fate of one man.

The other common response, with five out of 12 people saying this, was that if Georgia became a prosperous democracy, it could win back the territories with the promise of a better future. This falls into the line with the position taken by the Georgian government, backed by the West's calls for 'strategic patience'.²⁶² This view coincided with the idea that Russia was not helping the Abkhazians or Ossetians and was instead trying to assimilate them. Due to this, eventually they

²⁶⁰ Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July-11 August 2014.

²⁶¹ Interview 13 (Focus Group) (IDP), respondent's residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 30 July 2014.

²⁶² 'Strategic patience' is the idea that winning the territories back through force is impossible and that Georgia should focus on a soft power approach. Following the war with Russia in 2008, the Americans advocated this policy as they were unwilling to become more involved in a situation that could potentially bring them into conflict with Russia. O'Loughlin, Kossolov, and Toal, 'Inside Abkhazia.' 19.

will become frustrated with their Russian overlords and wish to reintegrate with a rejuvenated Georgia. One 41-year-old man stated, '[w]e can help with education, with healthcare, we can bring them to European spaces, [and] we can help them in many directions'.²⁶³ A 48-year-old man said, '[a]fter ten or fifteen years the border will be opened' and that when that happens he would put his 'personal money' into helping 'rebuild Abkhazia'.²⁶⁴ One 26-year-old man cited how much development there had been in Batumi (Georgia's main coastal city) and how Georgia could do the same with Abkhazia once the Abkhaz allowed them back.²⁶⁵ This understanding, however well-intentioned it may be, did not account for the fact that the Abkhazians and Ossetians want to be independent – or, at least, not part of Georgia. It overlooked the contradictions at the centre of the conflict.²⁶⁶

For IDPs, the situation was different. IDPs' expectations about the future were contradictory: six out of seven respondents said that the only hope lay with grassroots dialogue as governments had failed to address the issue, yet six out of seven also said that any improvement to the situation was beyond their control and could not be achieved until Russia was weakened.²⁶⁷ One man summed up the pessimistic sentiment by asking the English interviewer:

*Have you finished the conflict with Ireland yet, when do you plan to finish that conflict? Whatever happens, it [will] not be decided by Georgians and Abkhazians, it will be decided on a higher political level.*²⁶⁸

This feeling of helplessness was matched by a concern that relations are irreparable. One woman said simply, '[W]hen I go back [to Abkhazia] and I see the people hate us and have bad attitudes towards us, my hope [of finding a solution] goes'.²⁶⁹ For many IDPs, after over 20 years of being displaced, faith in governments or hope for any reconciliation appears to have faded.

For the third group, the Abkhaz and Ossetians, the perception of what was likely to happen in the future rested on the actions of the Georgian government. All three respondents held the view that if Georgia declared the territories independent, they would have better relations and cooperation.²⁷⁰ However, this is considered unlikely to happen. The Abkhazian woman stated:

*Regarding to current situation, logical conclusion is war, again, because I can see what is happening between Armenia and Azerbaijan, same conflict, one side wants peace, but with their terms and other side doesn't want peace at all. Georgia is trying to get South Ossetia and Abkhazia, they are asking NATO and [the] USA [for help to do that].*²⁷¹

This revealed a fear among the Abkhazians that increases their distrust of the Georgian government.

263 Interview 17 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Georgian Partnership for Road Safety Offices, Tbilisi, Georgia. 1 August 2014.

264 Interview 26 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Tbilisi Hospital, Tbilisi, Georgia. 7 August 2014.

265 Interview 14 (Abkhazian), Hotel Central (Skype Call), Tbilisi, Georgia. 30 July 2014.

266 O'Loughlin, Kossolov, and Toal's survey in Abkhazia found that the overwhelming majority of people felt that their economic situation was far better than Georgia's, despite the fact that few of them could actually make comparisons having not visited recently. O'Loughlin, Kolossov and Toal, 'Inside Abkhazia' 14.

267 Interviews with IDPs, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July-12 August 2014.

268 Interview 13 (Focus Group) (IDP), respondent's residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 30 July 2014.

269 Interview 29 (IDP), Café near the Bridge of Peace, Tbilisi, Georgia. 7 August 2014.

270 Interviews with Abkhazians and Ossetians, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July-6 August 2014.

271 Interview 25 (Abkhazian), Hotel Central (Skype), Tbilisi, Georgia. 6 August 2014.

2.6.2 The Ideal Situation

Question: In your perfect world, what would be your ideal solution to these conflicts?

Although this question aimed to get people's 'perfect world' scenarios, several people still gave practical responses. For the Georgian sample, answers were diverse, yet recurring themes were friendship, unity, peace, compromise, and freedom of movement. These themes are listed below along with the number of times they were mentioned by the Georgian sample from Tbilisi:

Theme mentioned	Number of mentions
Friendship	8
Unity	6
Peace	3
Compromise	3
Freedom of movement	2
Independence for Abkhazia and South Ossetia	0

Table 2.1: Recurring themes mentioned by Georgians from Tbilisi when discussing ideal solutions

The overriding idea in people's responses was to have peaceful, friendly relations again. One 63-year-old woman suggested:

[T]he ideal solution would be for elderly people to sit down at tables on the border and talk about how many things they have in common, they have so many things to remember, they have traditions, they were friends and they were relatives, they need to be remember this.²⁷²

The idea of people living side by side in a harmonious situation featured in respondents' answers for all age categories; yet, this was especially the case among the 18-29 category in which all respondents mentioning friendly relations in their ideal scenario.²⁷³ One 23-year-old woman epitomised this view by saying, 'I would be happy [to] live in a federation, but only if the three societies lived happily ever after' and that 'the most important thing is to bring people together'.²⁷⁴ People's responses revealed a widespread acknowledgement of the importance of dialogue and rebuilding relationships.

Another overriding theme was unity, which came alongside peace, friendship, and compromise. Those who mentioned a solution to the territorial issue all wished for Abkhazia and South Ossetia to be returned to Georgia, but expressed a willingness to grant them extensive powers. Three out of six respondents who discussed unity expressed how they were happy to compromise with the Abkhazians or Ossetians and grant them a large degree of autonomy in order to achieve this. However, an ideal solution with Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states featured in none of the answers. The idea of unification was expressed as an option that would enable all sides to have a better future.

“An ideal solution with Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states featured in none of the Georgian sample answers.”

²⁷² Interview 33 (Georgian from Tbilisi), respondent's residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 11 August 2014.

²⁷³ Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July-11 August 2014.

²⁷⁴ Interview 6 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014.

“ The overriding theme (for IDPs) was returning home and living together, just as they had done before the war. Uniting Georgia was again depicted as an essential component of this outcome. People’s answers placed firm emphasis on the want and need to rebuild relationships. In contrast, the Abkhaz and Ossetian view emphasised independence that would lead to peace and better opportunities for all sides. ”

For the IDPs, the negativity about what was likely formed a sharp contrast to ideal futures. Respondents’ answers were diverse, yet recurring themes were returning home, living together again, being part of the same country (with a great deal of devolved powers given to Abkhazia), and peace.

Theme mentioned	Number of mentions
Returning home	6
Friendship/living together again	6
Unity (of Georgia)	5
Peace	2
Compromise	2
Independence for Abkhazia and South Ossetia	0

Table 2.2: Recurring themes mentioned by IDPs when discussing ideal solutions

The overriding theme was returning home and living together, just as they had done before the war. A 73-year-old woman said:

This is our goal, our wish – we dream about it – to go back, to have [a] future [there] [...] I just want to reunite Georgia back to its territory and after this I will lead the people – my friends and my comrades and everyone I know – back to Abkhazia.²⁷⁵

Uniting Georgia again was depicted as an essential component of this outcome. People’s answers placed firm emphasis on the want and need to rebuild relationships, as is evidenced in the following quotation by a 21-year-old female IDP:

[I]f it were up to me I would end this conflict in peace and we would be reunited again as we were before. I do love Georgians and I do love Abkhazians. If it would be up to me, we would live together again.²⁷⁶

In contrast to the views expressed by the Georgians and IDPs, the Abkhaz and Ossetian view emphasised independence that would lead to peace and better opportunities for all sides. The Abkhazian woman and South Ossetian man’s responses are included below:

Interview 25: For me, declaring [a] peace treaty, [and for Georgia to] stop isolating us from world, I don’t wish miracles and I know that Georgia will never declare us as independent but if they will agree on those two terms it will be a relief for both sides. [W]e understand that Georgia is interested in friendship with Abkhazia, Abkhazia would be also interested from economical point of view, both sides would be satisfied [...] All of Abkhazian citizens’ dream, no matter the ethnicity, is to be independent, to live in peace and to have opportunities like all mankind does, even [the] kids, they want peace and independence.²⁷⁷

Interview 10: [The] ideal solution is declaring Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent countries, practically all Georgia does is [to] make the Russian influence to grow more and more in this region. If Georgia would just declare them, Ossetia and Abkhazia would have a choice, at this

²⁷⁵ Interview 35 (IDP), respondent’s hostel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 12 August 2014.

²⁷⁶ Interview 23 (Georgian who grew up in Abkhazia, categorised as IDP), Hotel Central (Skype), Tbilisi, Georgia. 5 August 2014.

²⁷⁷ Interview 25 (Abkhazian), Hotel Central (Skype), Tbilisi, Georgia. 6 August 2014.

*point Georgia depends only on [the] aggressive solution and Abkhazians and Ossetians are afraid of it, because you know that modern war is not a joke. So, everything depends on Georgia, Abkhazia and Ossetia have no choice, when they [the Georgians] are blaming Russia in all this, it is irrelevant, because Georgia has responsibility and only he can resolve it.*²⁷⁸

In both these views, the ideal rested on the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent. For the respondents, progress can only be made once this is achieved. The Abkhazian woman added that if the Caucasus could 'live in peace we would bloom and develop into [a] great and powerful region'.²⁷⁹ In this view, the only factor preventing this is the stubborn policy of the Georgian government.

2.6.3 What can be done to improve the situation?

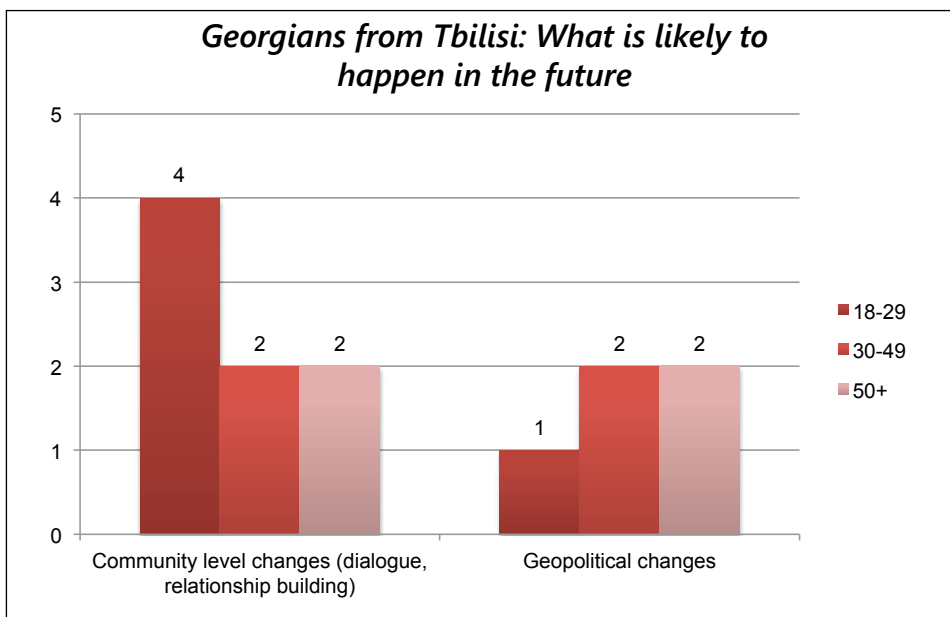


Chart 2.12: How could the conflict situation be improved (Georgians from Tbilisi)

Promisingly, among the Georgians from Tbilisi, no one advocated the use of force to gain back the territories. One 19-year-old respondent stated that he had often considered it, yet realised now that it would be fruitless.²⁸⁰ Two responses dominated: one solution was at a community level and the other on a geopolitical level. All people in the lowest age category agreed that there needed to be improved dialogue among the different sides. One respondent stated that both were needed.²⁸¹ The same 19-year-old said that 'it is all about people [...] people should take actions and people should start to rebuild this bridge'.²⁸² A 23-year-old echoed this idea, saying, 'There needs to be a readiness for listening. Just [to] go anywhere and learn about other's cultures'.²⁸³ Older people's responses were more mixed. Some repeated the calls for increasing dialogue and friendship and others said that Russia needs to be stopped and that this could only be achieved once the West, EU and/or NATO back Georgia or come up with a more unified

278 Interview 10 (South Ossetia), Hotel Central (Skype call), Tbilisi, Georgia. Started on 29 July 2014; completed on 31 July 2014.

279 Interview 25 (Abkhazian), Hotel Central (Skype), Tbilisi, Georgia. 6 August 2014.

280 Interview 8 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014.

281 Interview 24 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 6 August 2014.

282 Interview 8 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014.

283 Interview 12 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Ori Beli Hostel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 30 July 2014.

stance on the issue.²⁸⁴

All IDP respondents over 50 said that they should be allowed to go back to Abkhazia, and that they did not need any help from international organisations or the government. They felt they could fix relationships by themselves – it would not take long to remind the Abkhazians what they have in common.²⁸⁵ This view, while promising in its belief that ordinary people can make a difference, overlooks the grievances from which the conflict arose and the change that has happened since the war took place over 20 years ago. In six out of seven interviews respondents emphasised that through forging relationships, they could rebuild mutual trust and understanding, which would enable them to forgive. Once they had reached that stage, one woman said, ‘no-one can stand in our way’.²⁸⁶ Only one respondent believed that help from the US and EU was needed. People’s responses reveal that they are hopeful about what could be achieved if they were allowed back to Abkhazia, but they are unhopeful about whether that will become a reality.

2.7 Conclusion

Responses from both the sample of Georgians from Tbilisi and the sample of IDPs illustrate that Russia and geopolitics dominate understanding of the conflicts. The historical dimensions of the conflict are simplified using the idea that Russia never wanted Georgia to be free; the conflicts arose from Russia’s pursuit of this goal. Analysis of the conflicts’ contemporary dimensions illustrates that both groups continue to regard Abkhazia and South Ossetia as essential parts of the Georgian nation. There was a widespread view that the Abkhaz and Ossetians are manipulated and taught to fear Georgians. This was coupled with an acknowledgement that the lack of communication among the different sides perpetuates the conflict and furthers its intractability.

Among the Georgian sample, while neither the gender nor the background variables produced notable differences overall, age features as a distinguishing factor for certain questions. The 50+ category was more likely to deny that conflict exists in Tbilisi, while those in the 18-29 group mostly believed that a number of conflicts were present in the city, notably homophobia. Older respondents were more likely to emphasise Russia’s role in the situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and deny that there had been any conflicts between Georgians and ethnic minorities living on Georgian territory. Respondents above 30 were more likely to believe that no progress could be made until Russia was weakened or challenged. Those in the youngest age category placed a stronger faith in the ability of dialogue and communication to bring about change, and demonstrated a strong willingness to participate in this process.

The IDPs demonstrate a more detailed understanding of the conflict dynamics than the Georgians. Their collective memory of Abkhazia as an ideal place full of prosperity, friendship and unity, overlooks the grievances that gave rise to the conflict and leads to the simplistic assumption that they would be able to easily return to that point once the geopolitical situation changes. IDPs also placed a greater emphasis on Russia’s current role in the territory, depicted it as assimilation or, in one respondent’s words, the beginnings of genocide. Russia took on the role

²⁸⁴ Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July-11 August 2014.

²⁸⁵ Interviews with IDPs, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July-12 August 2014.

²⁸⁶ Interview 30 (IDP), Subway restaurant, Tbilisi, Georgia. 8 August 2014.

of a common enemy that wrought damage on both peoples. In terms of the age variable, while people in the youngest category emphasised that the Abkhazians or Ossetians are taught to hate and fear the Georgians, people over 50 were more likely to deny their grievances and believe that the pre-war situation will be easy to recreate. Coupled with this, all people in the 50+ category believed that they could easily return to the pre-war situation, if they were allowed to return. Younger people expressed a strong desire to be allowed back and to have the opportunities to rebuild relationships. In addition to this, in four out of seven interviews IDPs discussed their deprivation and feelings of social exclusion. Given the number of IDPs in a country of such a small population, this undoubtedly has a great impact on Georgian society. Therefore, a programme with IDPs is certainly an area worth addressing in the future.

The results show that there was a widespread acknowledgement, especially among the younger Georgians and IDPs, that there needs to be dialogue on a grassroots level. Currently, the conflict is dominated by two irreconcilable nationalist narratives that disagree on the nature of the conflict and who the main parties are. Through grassroots dialogue, both sides can become aware of the other's interpretation of the conflict and aware of their own side's complicity in events. Once this has been achieved, the more substantial areas of the conflict can be approached. The Georgian-Abkhazian and the Georgian-Ossetian sides need to come to a point of mutual understanding. In Georgia there seems to be a strong willingness to achieve this, especially among younger people.

“ Currently, the conflict is dominated by two irreconcilable nationalist narratives that disagree on the nature of the conflict and who the main parties are. Through grassroots dialogue, both sides can become aware of the other's interpretation of the conflict and aware of their own side's complicity in events. Once this has been achieved, the more substantial areas of the conflict can be approached. ”





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3.

Generations For Peace Findings



3.1 Introduction

In order for this research to have practical value, it is important to assess what organisational capacity GFP has in Georgia. This helps to recommend ways that the organisation could address the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts in the future. By merging analysis of the conflicts with an assessment of current capacity, this report is able to present practical future goals for GFP.

GFP's activities in Georgia started in 2012 with Advocacy For Peace Events and subsequent training of volunteers. In the summer of 2014, there were 45 trained Delegates and two certified Pioneers in the country. In 2013–2014, these individuals held a programme with socially excluded children living at SOS Children's Village, in Tbilisi, Georgia. The programme aimed to enhance the children's self-esteem and self-confidence by enabling them to feel more included in their social environment.²⁸⁷ The Participatory Evaluation (PE) for this programme took place in Tbilisi in May 2014.

For this research, seven GFP Delegates and Pioneers were interviewed: six women and one man. A workshop was held for four of them at the end of the research period. The aim of this workshop was to go over the weaknesses they had raised in the interviews and facilitate a discussion of how these could be overcome. The workshop was also used as an opportunity to ask them how they had found the research process and if they had gained anything from it.

The structure of this chapter follows that of the interviews, in which Delegates and Pioneers responded to questions about their views on the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts, their own experiences, GFP's strengths and weaknesses in Georgia, main areas for improvement, ideas for future programmes (including with Abkhazia and South Ossetia), and how they found involvement with research. This serves as a form of feedback for the organisation. Given that GFP is a volunteer movement that relies on the Delegates and Pioneers to plan, organise and implement programmes, understanding how they feel is vital before any recommendations can be made.

²⁸⁷ All information taken from, Generation For Peace, 'Georgia: Country Conflict Analysis.'

3.2 Delegates' and Pioneers' Interpretation of the Conflict

Delegates' and Pioneers' responses largely conformed to those of the Georgians from Tbilisi. Six out of seven respondents believed the origin of the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia lay in Russia's desire to control Georgia and not allow it to be independent. Three respondents discussed Russia's desire to take the most attractive parts of the Georgian territory, and four respondents discussed how Russia manipulated ethnic groups living on Georgian territory to turn them against their Georgian neighbours.²⁸⁸ Discussion of the contemporary dynamics of the conflict was dominated by the central contradiction: the Georgians consider Abkhazia and South Ossetia to be integral parts of their nation, while Abkhazians and South Ossetians do not want to be part of Georgia. As with the Georgians from Tbilisi and IDP sample, discussion of negative attitudes among the Abkhazians and Ossetians towards the Georgians was a dominant theme here, with four out of seven respondents mentioning it.²⁸⁹ On the geopolitical level, four out of seven respondents believed the conflict would not exist without Russia. As with the Georgians from Tbilisi sample, the themes of unity and friendship dominated people's discussion of their ideal futures. When discussing the future, Delegates and Pioneers placed a firm emphasis on the need for dialogue, with four out of seven respondents stressing this.²⁹⁰

The most notable difference between the Georgian sample and the Delegates and Pioneers was the discussion of conflict in Tbilisi. These responses are presented in Chart 3.1.

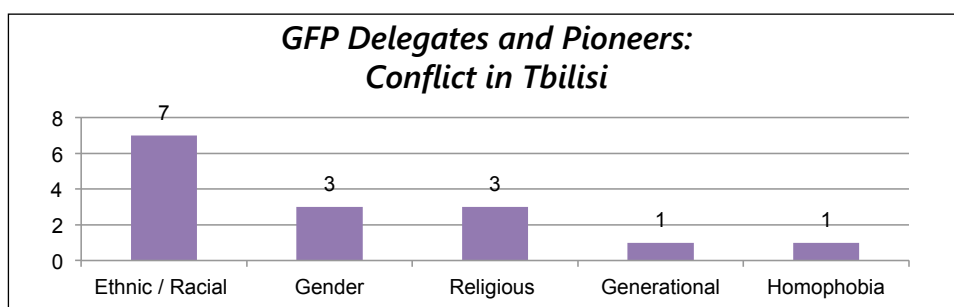


Chart 3.1: What conflicts exist in Tbilisi (GFP Delegates and Pioneers)

The most frequently mentioned conflict was ethnic or racial, with every respondent discussing this. Respondents stated that there are negative stereotypes towards ethnic groups and a general lack of tolerance in Georgian society. This prejudice is mostly aimed at Azerbaijanis and Armenians, but three respondents also discussed people's hostility towards Russians.²⁹¹ In comparison, in the Georgians from Tbilisi sample, only one respondent mentioned ethnic conflict.²⁹² Another notable difference was discussion of gender-based conflict. This, in the respondents' view, manifests itself in the form of violence against women and a lack of respect towards women in the public sphere.²⁹³ While Georgians from Tbilisi overall did not consider either of these to be major conflicts in their city, for the GFP Pioneers and Delegates they represented the main conflicts in Tbilisi. Thus, a programme

“ The most frequently mentioned conflict was ethnic/racial; in comparison, in the Georgians from Tbilisi sample, only one respondent mentioned ethnic conflict. Another notable difference was discussion of gender-based conflict; while Georgians from Tbilisi did not consider this to be major conflict in their city, for the GFP volunteers this represented the main conflict in Tbilisi.”

288 Interviews with GFP Delegates and Pioneers, Tbilisi, Georgia. 25 July-11 August 2014.

289 Interviews with GFP Delegates and Pioneers, Tbilisi, Georgia. 25 July-11 August 2014.

290 Interviews with GFP Delegates and Pioneers, Tbilisi, Georgia. 25 July-11 August 2014.

291 It should be noted, however, that the volunteers were in the process of planning a programme addressing ethnic prejudice, so it is safe to assume that this conflict would have been at the forefront of their minds when answering the question. Interviews with GFP Delegates and Pioneers, Tbilisi, Georgia. 25 July-11 August 2014.

292 Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July-11 August 2014.

293 Interviews with GFP Delegates and Pioneers, Tbilisi, Georgia. 25 July -11 August 2014.

addressing one of these conflicts could serve the purpose of raising awareness among the Tbilisi population.

3.3 Delegates' and Pioneers' Experience of GFP

Delegates and Pioneers were asked about their experience with GFP and what they felt had been the greatest successes so far. Their experiences were quite diverse: some respondents had been involved with the organisation since it began in Georgia two years ago while others had only received their training a few months before the fieldwork took place. Those who mentioned the International Training Camp held in Sochi, Russia, in March 2014, spoke positively of the experience saying that it had been helpful and informative, and that they now have a much better idea of the organisation's aims and their role within it. They also said that they found meeting people from around the world, who were working on similar activities to them, extremely useful.²⁹⁴ One woman said she 'felt like she was a member of GFP internationally' after the Sochi Camp.²⁹⁵ In the workshop, GFP's new Programming Framework was also discussed, which was introduced to Georgians at a Refresher Workshop held in the region in 2013.²⁹⁶ The feedback was that the Framework enabled them to feel much more confident in what they were doing and it made it easier to plan and organise programmes. The Monitoring and Evaluation Grid included in the Programming Framework helped them to reflect on their work and assess its impact. The Delegates and Pioneers said that non-GFP people who had been involved with the programme commented that it was a different and innovative approach to use. They concluded by saying that there are plenty of organisations that attempt peace building but GFP's approach was 'very different and very effective'.²⁹⁷ This feedback provides a confirmation that volunteers in Georgia are pleased with both the training provided by GFP and the programming methodology used by the organisation.

In terms of their greatest success so far, all Delegates and Pioneers discussed the 2013-2014 programme held with residents of the SOS Children's Village. The prevailing sentiment was of a great sense of achievement matched with a belief that their efforts had brought about tangible change. One Delegate summed up the view in her interview:

*The six-month programme in SOS village was very successful. All the children and teachers were involved. It was well organised. We were very organised. The result was really, really huge. What we planned we achieved: raising their motivation, making them more active. Everything we did for them we saw results.*²⁹⁸

Another Delegate expressed a similar view:

*They [the children] had different attitudes, after the programme they changed – I felt that, and I saw that. That's why I like GFP [...] I feel that my time and energy is not lost [...] you can feel happy because when you know that the change has been good, you feel good. GFP can really changesociety.*²⁹⁹

294 Interviews with GFP Delegates and Pioneers, Tbilisi, Georgia. 25 July-11 August 2014.

295 Interview 1 (GFP Delegate), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 25 July 2014.

296 Information taken from discussion with Lama Hattab, GFP Programmes Director, GFP HQ Amman, Jordan. 16 July 2014.

297 Workshop with GFP Delegates and Pioneers, Solo Hotel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 9 August 2014.

298 Interview 2 (GFP Delegate), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 25 July 2014.

299 Interview 4 (GFP Delegate, Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia. 26 July 2014.

After feeling uncertain about the impact of the programme, they felt reassured after the PE in May 2014. One Delegate said after PE, 'we saw that we had results'.³⁰⁰ These comments show that the programme increased the confidence of the Delegates and Pioneers, as well as their belief that they are able to bring about positive change in their society. There was a real feeling among those interviewed that their programme had improved the life skills of the children involved. The experience of designing and implementing the programme was also described as a learning process for the volunteers, enabling them to feel more confident about future programmes. This finding is a very promising prospect for the possibility of future – more ambitious – activities in Georgia.

3.4 Strengths and Weaknesses

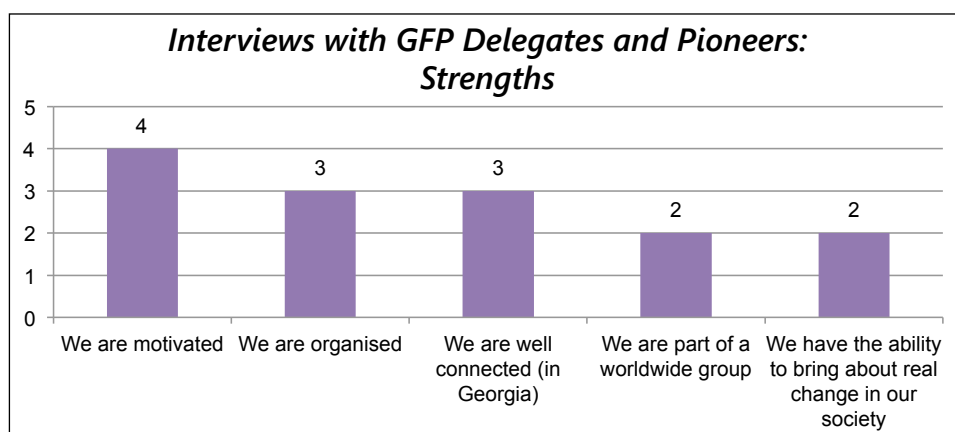


Chart 3.2: Strengths of GFP in Georgia (GFP Delegates and Pioneers)

In terms of strengths, interview respondents discussed motivation, organisation, and connections (both within Georgia and internationally) as major strengths, yet discussion of these did not go beyond stating that this was the case.³⁰¹ In the workshop, those present said that their combined experience and training meant that they 'really know what [they] are doing' and have learnt from past mistakes.³⁰² Other strengths, mentioned in the workshop, were their educational background, contacts, and a shared passion about GFP's core aims.³⁰³

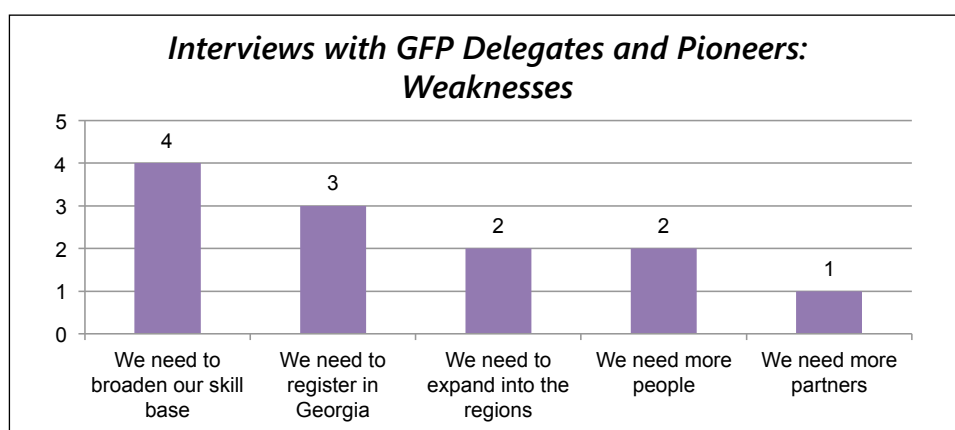


Chart 3.3: Weaknesses of GFP in Georgia (GFP Delegates and Pioneers)

Despite their confidence and sense of achievement, discussion of weaknesses dominated over strengths in people's interview answers. All seven respondents

³⁰⁰ Interview 3 (GFP Delegate), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 26 July 2014.

³⁰¹ Interviews with GFP Delegates and Pioneers, Tbilisi, Georgia. 25 July-11 August 2014

³⁰² Workshop with GFP Delegates and Pioneers, Solo Hotel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 9 August 2014.

³⁰³ Workshop with GFP Delegates and Pioneers, Solo Hotel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 9 August 2014.

said the need for more volunteers was a major weakness; however, this incorporated a range of reasons. Four out of seven respondents stated that they do not have enough time due to work and study commitments and that recruiting more Delegates would reduce that burden and enable them to have more ambitious projects. Two respondents stressed that they need to find people who are more motivated and committed.³⁰⁴ In the workshop, it was said that the number of volunteers is not the problem; it is how devoted to their work those volunteers are.³⁰⁵ Another need was different backgrounds and skills within the group. In the workshop, the lack of diversity among the Delegates and Pioneers in terms of their geographical location, qualifications, and age was cited as a major weakness. Yet, this was also regarded as a strength in the sense that they are close-knit group who can trust each other.³⁰⁶ Another point mentioned in both the interviews and workshop was their poor ability to advertise and raise awareness of the organisation's activities. One respondent stated, '[w]e are quite weak at advocating. Lots of people do not know we exist'.³⁰⁷ In the workshop, this was discussed further. Through advocacy, the participants agreed, they would be able to find more volunteers, funding and partners and, in doing so, overcome many of the aforementioned weaknesses.³⁰⁸

Discussion of weaknesses revealed a strong awareness among the Delegates and Pioneers of what needs to be done to make GFP more effective in Georgia. Although the researcher facilitated the interviews and workshop, most Delegates and Pioneers had already considered these problems as well as the ways that they could be overcome prior to this exercise.

3.5 Main Areas for Improvement

After asking Delegates and Pioneers about weaknesses, the interview went on to discuss what should be the main areas for improvement. Two of the responses were linked to the idea of diversifying the volunteer base. The most common response was to broaden the skill base of the group by recruiting more volunteers. This was discussed in more detail at the workshop.³⁰⁹ Delegates and Pioneers agreed that in order to advocate and network, they needed an IT specialist as well as people with experience of working in human resources, public relations and accountancy/economics.³¹⁰ The other point regarding diversification was the need to expand to other Georgian regions, yet maintain close links with Tbilisi.³¹¹ While this skill range may be ambitious, all of these skills would improve Delegates' and Pioneers' ability to achieve their future goals and improve their outreach.

304 Interviews with GFP Delegates and Pioneers, Tbilisi, Georgia. 25 July-11 August 2014.

305 Workshop with GFP Delegates and Pioneers, Solo Hotel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 9 August 2014.

306 Workshop with GFP Delegates and Pioneers, Solo Hotel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 9 August 2014.

307 Interview 5 (GFP Pioneer), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 26 July 2014.

308 Workshop with GFP Delegates and Pioneers, Solo Hotel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 9 August 2014.

309 Interviews with GFP Delegates and Pioneers, Tbilisi, Georgia. 25 July-11 August 2014.

310 Workshop with GFP Delegates and Pioneers, Solo Hotel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 9 August 2014.

311 Interviews with GFP Delegates and Pioneers, Tbilisi, Georgia. 25 July-11 August 2014.

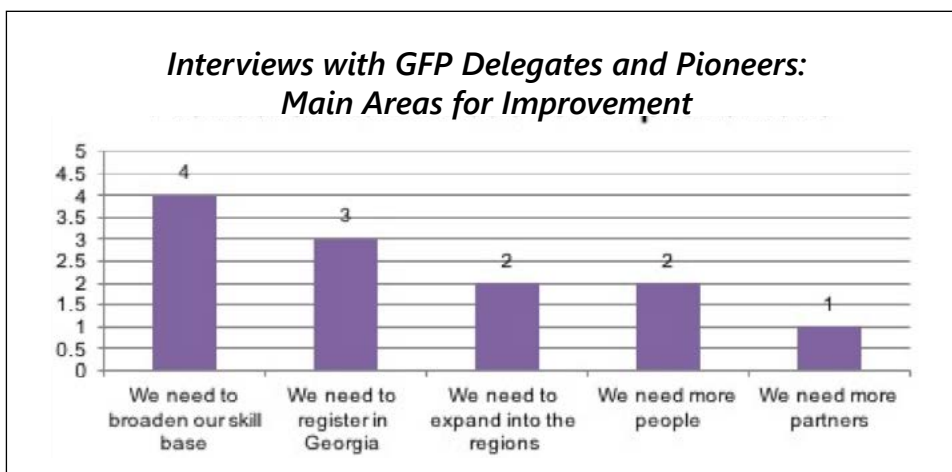


Chart 3.4: Main areas for improvement for GFP in Georgia (GFP Delegates and Pioneers) [n = 7]

Another major point on the theme of improvements was the need for GFP to register in Georgia. This was mentioned by three people in the interviews and discussed in detail during the workshop.³¹² Registration would help overcome the aforementioned weaknesses, and assist in finding partners and funding; it would add legitimacy to the organisation. One respondent mentioned that in Tbilisi there are often volunteer recruitment fairs and forums, and only registered NGOs or charities can have a table at one of these events.³¹³ If GFP is going to expand and organise more ambitious programmes, all participants at the workshop agreed, they will need to register in Georgia.

3.6 Future Programme Ideas

When asked about future programme ideas, Delegates and Pioneers discussed designing a programme that addresses prejudice toward ethnic minorities in Tbilisi, specifically Armenians and Azerbaijanis. One Delegate explained the idea:

In Georgia lives a lot of Armenians and Azerbaijanis, we have stereotypes against them, especially children. So we want to run a programme with them so that the three ethnic groups can work together.³¹⁴

The Delegates and Pioneers said that this programme would enable them to build on the skills they developed with the previous programme and expand their focus to ethnic conflict – which is, in one respondent's words, 'the big problem in our society'.³¹⁵ The idea for the programme focuses on the cultural dynamics of this conflict, which fuels prejudices and negative attitudes. The programme could take place in Tbilisi. Another idea expressed during the interviews was to hold a programme with IDPs. One Delegate described this idea:

We want to organise a programme similar to the one we had in SOS village but in [a refugee camp]. In Tbilisi it would be quite easy to organise a programme with refugees and IDP people... Teaching would be good for them, teaching English or computer skills – empowerment. This would be a very good idea for refugees but we still need the resources. Empowerment would be perfect for IDPs.³¹⁶

³¹² Interviews with GFP Delegates and Pioneers, Tbilisi, Georgia. 25 July–11 August 2014.

³¹³ Workshop with GFP Delegates and Pioneers, Solo Hotel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 9 August 2014.

³¹⁴ Interview 2 (GFP Delegate), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 25 July 2014.

³¹⁵ Interview 5 (GFP Pioneer), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 26 July 2014.

³¹⁶ Interview 2 (GFP Delegate), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 25 July 2014.

This was corroborated by the fact that the IDPs interviewed for this research expressed that they felt excluded from the rest of society, had received poor education, and lacked sufficient job opportunities.³¹⁷ This programme would be located outside of Tbilisi, but within travelling distance. Both these programme ideas represented feasible and realistic options that would enable GFP volunteers to expand their capacity to help people in their community. Moreover, the focus on ethnic prejudice or the social exclusion of the displaced would bring them closer to the ultimate goal – as stressed in this research – of a programme addressing Georgia's two ethno-territorial disputes.

3.7 Programmes Addressing the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian Conflicts

The final questions in the interview asked Delegates and Pioneers about their thoughts on the conflicts in Abkhazia and Ossetia and if it would be possible to have a programme there. Only four out of seven respondents gave responses of note. The resounding answer was that at their current capacity they would be unable to, a conclusion the researcher agrees with. Delegates and Pioneers expressed several concerns with regard to addressing these conflicts and anticipated several problems. A major theme was the logistics of such a programme. One Delegate said simply, 'they cannot come here and we cannot go there'.³¹⁸ Another suggested that this could be overcome by holding the programme on a neutral territory, but this would involve a huge cost.³¹⁹ Another problem was that they have no contacts in either of the territories and that even if they found people to contact they might be unwilling to cooperate with them.³²⁰ On top of this, one Delegate expressed concerns about the language barrier: most people in the territories – especially younger people – speak Russian and none of the current Delegates and Pioneers have fluent Russian language skills.³²¹ Another expressed concerns about the magnitude of the conflict: '[W]hen you talk about really large conflicts it is really hard to see how [it can be addressed]. It is like a puzzle and you only have one piece. It is too big'.³²² They all agreed that they needed to hold a few more programmes before they could seriously consider addressing the Georgian-Abkhazian or Georgian-Ossetian conflicts.

3.8 Delegates' and Pioneers' Involvement in the Research

Given the intractability of the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts and the widespread perception that nothing can be achieved until Russia is weakened, the Delegates and Pioneers expressed concern or scepticism with regard to the research aims and the idea of organising a programme that addresses these conflicts. However, their involvement in the research process appears to have altered that perception somewhat. Several Delegates were heavily involved with the research through finding contacts, helping with translation, and interpretation during interviews. Those who were involved stated that they had found what might be termed participatory research helpful.

317 Interviews with IDPs, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July-12 August 2014.

318 Interview 1 (GFP Delegate), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 25 July 2014.

319 Interview 3 (GFP Delegate), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 26 July 2014.

320 Interview 5 (GFP Pioneer), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 26 July 2014.

321 Interview 5 (GFP Pioneer), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 26 July 2014.

322 Interview 4 (GFP Delegate, Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia. 26 July 2014.

They learnt more about the conflicts, the competing perspectives within the conflicts, and how these might be addressed by GFP. At the workshop, the Delegates and Pioneers who participated were asked how they had found the research and if it had been helpful for them. One participant stated, '[A]fter the research I understood that in the future we might have [a] chance to manage a GFP programme with Abkhazia and Ossetia, which I thought was absolutely ridiculous before'.³²³ Another said, 'I learnt the different dimensions of this conflict, for me it was like conflict analysis on a personal, relational, cultural, and structural level. So, that was really helpful'.³²⁴ All those who participated in the research agreed that it had improved their understanding of the conflict dynamics and the ways it might be addressed by a future programme. The Georgian-Abkhazians and Georgians-Ossetian conflicts are certainly not easy to address due to the complexity of the geopolitical situation and a societal estrangement that has lasted longer than two decades; yet, the change of opinion among those involved in the research process in the few weeks that it took place provides hope for the prospect that these volunteers can address these conflicts in the future.

3.9 Conclusion

GFP in Georgia have a hard-working and imaginative core of volunteers who are pleased with their progress. They are ambitious and looking to expand GFP Georgia's scope in many directions, including an expansion of skill base, geographical reach, and issues to be addressed by future programmes. However, a number of them expressed very legitimate doubts about the feasibility of working with Abkhazians or South Ossetians. They also had concerns about the logistics of such a programme. Nevertheless, they expressed a strong desire to address these conflicts with future activities and, through participating in the research, become increasingly optimistic that this could happen.

In conclusion, the researcher believes that Delegates and Pioneers should continue with their plans to organise a programme addressing ethnic prejudice in Tbilisi. This will increase their abilities, capacity, and confidence. Alongside this, they should look to find ways to expand into other parts of Georgia. This will help diversify the background of GFP Delegates and Pioneers in the country as well as enable the organisation to address conflicts that exist elsewhere in Georgia. It would also be useful to have volunteers who live within closer geographical proximity to Abkhazia and South Ossetia if eventually a programme involving these two territories is organised. GFP volunteers will not be able to get to this stage alone, however, due to issues of trust, poor communications, and lack of contacts. GFP will need to build capacity in these two regions separately before a joint programme can be organised.

This chapter builds on the findings of this report to suggest ways to improve GFP Georgia's organisation capacity, as well as ways to address the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts. It utilises the analysis of conflict in Georgia to suggest potential structures for future peace-building programmes. The recommendations suggest practical goals while the conclusion deals with the implications of the report's findings.

323 Workshop with GFP Delegates and Pioneers, Solo Hotel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 9 August 2014.

324 Workshop with GFP Delegates and Pioneers, Solo Hotel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 9 August 2014.



4.

Conclusion and

Recommendations





The recommendations begin by suggesting programmes within Georgia GFP could address in the near future along with steps that can be taken to improve the organisation's capacity in the country. The next section considers the situation in Abkhazia and Ossetia: firstly, it discusses problems and then goes on to suggest programme ideas.

4.1 Recommendations

Possible Future Programmes: Short Term

- **A Programme Addressing Inter-Ethnic Prejudice in Tbilisi:** Delegates and Pioneers should continue with their plan to organise a programme addressing stereotypes of ethnic minorities in Tbilisi. This will increase their skills through running a programme that is relevant to the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia due to its ethnic and cultural elements. The programme should work to challenge negative attitudes, break down stereotypes, and foster social inclusion among ethnic minorities. Through this, Delegates and Pioneers can build on the experience they gained from the programme with the children living at SOS Children's Village.
- **A Programme Working with IDPs:** A programme working with IDPs would also be a way to achieve similar ends. IDPs form a significant part of the Georgian population and face poor living conditions, job opportunities, and social exclusion, as demonstrated in the responses of people interviewed for this research.³²⁵ A programme empowering IDPs and fostering their inclusion in Georgian society would certainly be a feasible goal for the group. There is a sizable IDP population in Tbilisi, where the GFP volunteers are based, and there are IDP camps located nearby to the city. As a major social problem in Georgia, having a programme addressing IDPs would be an excellent way to make a positive impact and raise awareness among the

³²⁵ Interviews with IDPs, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July-12 August 2014.

population of GFP activities.³²⁶ Getting people who are displaced involved in the organisation would also be useful for future programmes on Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

- **A Programme Addressing Homophobia:** In the interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, half the respondents mentioned homophobia as being a major conflict in their society.³²⁷ Human Rights Watch have noted the prevalence of homophobic violence in the country.³²⁸ A programme addressing this prejudice could be run in Tbilisi in partnership with other organisations working in the city to promote tolerance and acceptance of LGBT people.

Steps to Improve Capacity and Outreach

- **Expansion Outside of Tbilisi:** There is a need for the organisation to expand beyond Tbilisi. As revealed in the interviews, Georgia has conflicts – such as Islamophobia – that exist primarily outside of Tbilisi.³²⁹ An academic interviewed for this research mentioned that a major problem in regions with large Azerbaijanis and Armenians populations is a lack of integration into Georgian society among those groups. They often do not speak Georgian and face economic and social exclusion. A programme empowering them and providing life skills would be very beneficial for Georgian society, he said.³³⁰ Moreover, if the conflicts in Abkhazia or Ossetia are to be addressed, having volunteers who live near the territories would be extremely useful. Advocacy For Peace Events could be held in the cities of Gori (very close to South Ossetia), Kutaisi and Batumi (both reasonably close to Abkhazia). Some of the Delegates and Pioneers grew up in these regions and their contacts will certainly prove useful for this purpose.
- **Local Registration:** GFP needs to register in Georgia. Three respondents mentioned this in the interviews and this matter was discussed at length during the workshop.³³¹ This measure will add credibility to the organisation and increase its capacity to advocate, acquire funding, and make partnerships.
- **Increasing Diversity:** Delegates and Pioneers need to come from a more diverse background. GFP in Georgia mostly consists of an extended friendship group, many of whom are studying social science and humanities at the same university. While their closeness is a strength, the group lacks diversity in terms of background, qualifications, and age. This is a weakness as it does not include a wide array of worldviews, opinions, and experiences. Through having a more diverse group, GFP Georgia could expand its outreach.
- **Expanding Skills:** Most of the GFP Delegates and Pioneers have similar qualifications and skills. There is a need to broaden this range of skills to include an IT specialist, someone with knowledge about marketing or public relations, and a Russian speaker (preferably Russian speakers). This

326 UNHCR, 'Georgia.' Accessed 23 September 2014. <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e48d2e6.html>

327 Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July-11 August 2014.

328 Human Rights Watch, 'World Report 2014: Georgia.'

329 Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July-11 August 2014.

330 Interview 15 (Academic), Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia. 31 July

331 Interviews with GFP Delegates and Pioneers, Tbilisi, Georgia. 25 July-11 August 2014; Workshop with GFP Delegates and Pioneers, Solo Hotel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 9 August 2014.

will enable the group to increase its advocacy abilities and implement new programmes.

- **Greater Horizontal Connectivity:** It would be beneficial to foster greater communication among GFP Delegates and Pioneers internationally. This would allow for the exchange of ideas and experiences. Some volunteers mentioned feeling like they were part of an international GFP community and this could help foster that empowering view. GFP could set up a forum online for Delegates and Pioneers to communicate outside of International Camps or trainings.
- **Regional Exchanges:** The Caucasus is a patchwork of different ethnic and linguistic groups divided by mountains and several militarised borders. GFP currently have volunteers in Russia (including Chechnya), Azerbaijan, and Armenia, all of them active since 2010.³³² Conflicts in the region have notable similarities. Sometimes they have been directly linked – such as the wars in Abkhazia and Chechnya – and sometimes they share similar origins, namely Soviet nationality policy. Therefore, as GFP builds up capacity in the region, Delegates and Pioneers will be designing programmes that address similar issues. The exchange of ideas, past mistakes and experiences among these individuals would be beneficial. In a similar way to the recommendation above, GFP could help facilitate this exchange with a regional online forum or organise regional activities by bringing Delegates and Pioneers together from across the Caucasus.

Recommendations for GFP in Abkhazia and South Ossetia

The remainder of the recommendations focuses specifically on addressing the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts. Firstly, this section looks at the challenges the organisation is likely to face when addressing these conflicts and, secondly, it goes on to suggest ways to approach this challenging conflict situation.

Challenges of Working in Abkhazia and South Ossetia

- **Geographical Divide:** Getting either Abkhazians or Ossetians and Georgians in the same place will be challenging without holding a programme in another country. It is difficult for Georgians to visit Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and vice versa. On both sides, participants are likely to be unwilling or apprehensive about visiting the others' territory.
- **Lack of Trust:** There is a lack of trust within the conflict, especially among the Abkhazians and Ossetians towards the Georgians.³³³ This is certainly not unique in conflict situations, but it does compound the difficulties of the spatial divide because in order to bring people together there needs to be an element of trust.
- **Surveillance Problems:** Throughout the fieldwork, the researcher heard speculation about monitored communication and observation of social media by either the Abkhazian, Ossetian or Russian authorities; this

³³² Discussion with Lama Hattab, Programmes Director, Generations For Peace Headquarters: Amman, Jordan. 25 August 2014 .

³³³ Interviews with Abkhazians and Ossetians, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July-6 August 2014.

applied specifically to people living in Abkhazia or South Ossetia who were engaged in communications with Georgia. One Abkhaz man interviewed was afraid to talk and gave such limited answers that the interview could not be included in the sample.³³⁴ Although the researcher is unable provide evidence of surveillance, the fear generated by this perception appears to be very real.

- **Language Barriers:** According to an academic interviewed for this research, Georgian is not widely spoken among the non-Georgian population in Abkhazia. In the territory, Russian is the most widely spoken language.³³⁵ This will create difficulties as none of the GFP Delegates or Pioneers the researcher spoke to were fluent Russian speakers.
- **Divided Impact:** If a programme is to be held involving two groups of people in separate geographical locations, the evaluation process and measurement of impact could be problematic.

Overcoming Challenges in Abkhazia and South Ossetia

- **Building Capacity in Abkhazia and South Ossetia:** In order to implement a programme concerning Georgian-Abkhazian or Georgian-Ossetians divides, GFP would first need to build up capacity by advocating and recruiting volunteers in the two territories. Due to a lack of trust and the difficulties with communication, it would be extremely challenging to organise a programme from Georgia or for Georgian volunteers to expand operations into the two territories. Thus, although the eventual aim will be bringing the two sides together, to begin with capacity building needs to be worked on separately. This will help forge trust and increase opportunities for cooperation.
- **Programmes inside Abkhazia or South Ossetia:** Once GFP is in Abkhazia, a programme idea would be bring Georgians in the Gali region of Abkhazia and the Abkhaz together. Surveys show that Georgians who have returned feel excluded, politically and socially.³³⁶ A programme focusing on personal and relational dynamics could have a meaningful impact here. A similar programme could be organised in South Ossetia with the small Georgian community who remain there.

Programme Type: Dialogue For Peace

While the above section provides guidance on the type of changes that are necessary in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, it is important to specify what exact programme can be put in place in these regions. The researcher suggests that a Dialogue For Peace Programme (DP) would be the most appropriate type of programme in this situation. There is a need to raise mutual understanding of the other's perspective to forge trust, cooperation and build relationships. Dialogue For Peace (DP) allows the creation of a safe space for facilitated honest exchange that can contribute towards the six expressions of change prioritised by GFP: building acceptance, fostering cooperation, ensuring inclusion, developing

334 Interview 19 (Abkhazian), Hotel Central (Skype), Tbilisi, Georgia. 1 August 2014.

335 Interview 34 (Georgian from Tbilisi), respondent's residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 12 August 2014.

336 O'Loughlin, Kossolov, and Toal, 'Inside Abkhazia.' 24.

respect, taking responsibility, and building trust.³³⁷

It is also important to note that although this form of programme has been developed by GFP, it has not actually been used in practice.³³⁸ The Georgian situation represents a challenging, yet promising conflict context in which to trial this programme method due to the near complete lack of communication. Four key elements of this programme type are discussed below, along with a discussion about the impact this could have on the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts.

- **DP Opens Minds to Multiple Truths and Different Perspectives:** Through conversation DP can raise awareness of 'multiple truths', meaning that there can be many different perspectives in a conflict situation.³³⁹ As illustrated in this report there exist competing perspectives on the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts that are little understood by the different sides. Dialogue could transform this situation so that both sides acknowledge the other's view. For the Georgian side it will break down the one-dimensional view that Russia is solely responsible for this conflict.
- **DP Expands Views and Reduces Polarisation:** Conflicts lead to polarisations and oversimplified dichotomies of 'us' versus 'them'; this Manichean view reduces people's understanding of the complexity of the situation, which leads to assumptions and unhelpful generalisations regarding the other groups involved.³⁴⁰ In the case of the Georgian-Abkhazian and the Georgian-Ossetian conflicts, generalisations dominate people's understanding and the actions and attitudes of governments are often considered as akin to the actions and attitudes of the wider population. Dialogue could break down these simplifications and enable both sides to appreciate the diversity of stances that exist within the conflict.
- **DP Supports Improved Communication:** The absence of inter-group communication in conflict situations creates a lack of understanding that in turn fosters fear, stereotypes, and insecurities; the goal of DP is to establish constructive communication to raise conflict awareness and encourage cooperation.³⁴¹ In the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts, DP could alter this situation by breaking down stereotypes and reducing insecurities. A major source of the conflict – agreed upon by all sides – is the lack of communication between the different sides.³⁴²
- **Dialogue is not Debate:** Whereas in debates different sides want their perspective to dominate, dialogue endeavours to create new knowledge and a deeper appreciation of different perspectives.³⁴³ In Georgia's two ethno-territorial disputes there are issues – such as those over territory – on which people refuse to compromise. Dialogue For Peace can change this situation by facilitating an environment that can mellow peoples' convictions through broadening their perspectival horizons.

337 O'Loughlin, Kossolov, and Toal, 'Inside Abkhazia.' 24.

338 O'Loughlin, Kossolov, and Toal, 'Inside Abkhazia.' 24.

339 Generations For Peace, 'Dialogue For Peace.' 1-2.

340 Generations For Peace, 'Dialogue For Peace.'

341 Generations For Peace, 'Dialogue For Peace.' 3.

342 Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July-11 August 2014; Interviews with IDPs, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July-12 August 2014; Interviews with Abkhazians and Ossetians, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July-6 August 2014.

343 Generations For Peace, 'Dialogue For Peace.' 3.

Suggested Structure for a Dialogue For Peace Programme Addressing the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts

This final part of the recommendations suggest ways to structure a Dialogue For Peace Programme that is geared specifically to the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts.

- **An Intra-Group Programme Before an Inter-Group Programme:** This will be a useful way of raising awareness of the conflict among people. Structuring the programme in this way can facilitate discussions within relatively homogenous groups about what is important in the conflict, what are the conflict dynamics, and how these dynamics could be addressed by future peace-building programmes. A group where there is already a level of trust and cooperation will be simpler to organise and facilitate. It can also serve as a form of preparation for an inter-group programme.
- **Online Programmes:** Given the aforementioned border disputes and geographical separation at the core of these conflicts, it is very difficult to bring both sides together. One way to overcome this problem would be to hold programme activities online. In this scenario, DP remains a feasible option. Programmes done in this way could be as regular and run for as long as ordinary programmes.
 - **DP Online:** This can involve meeting at a regular time each week to have structured dialogue on previously agreed upon topics.³⁴⁴ The participants can use programmes such as Skype to hold webinars/online conferences. This can take the simple form of asking questions to each other, facilitated by GFP volunteers.
 - **Online Exchanges:** Sessions can be held that involve the exchange of stories, experiences, or interview responses filled in by different groups. For example, groups fill out questionnaires assessing their view of the conflict and then exchange them online to raise awareness of the other sides' view.
 - **Thematic Sessions:** These could be on history, politics, culture, economic development, or other interests. Each session can be centred on a different theme and then each group can take it in turns to either share texts with each other or make presentations. It can begin with less sensitive topics such as music, art, or food and then, as the programme continues, move onto issues linked to the conflict.
 - **Limitations:** While the suggestion of conducting programmes using the internet presents problems – for example, it is difficult to foster trust and cooperation online, and connectivity problems abound – these can be overcome. Both sets of groups involved in a programme can be located in a place that they feel safe, and conversation between them can be carefully facilitated. Given the constraints of the conflict situation, this may be the only way to bring to two sides together at a low cost. It represents a feasible way to connect geographically divided groups.

³⁴⁴ Although the DP booklet suggests that sessions should not be structured, using a loose structure will provide a guide that can help break down barriers and facilitate productive discussion. Generations For Peace, 'Dialogue For Peace.'

“ The findings demonstrate that since the war in 2008, the current geopolitical situation is discussed as if it has always been this way; this results in a deterministic view of the past. As the report demonstrates, this emphasis overlooks the other actors involved, reduces people’s capacity for self-reflection, and leads to overly simplistic interpretations of these conflicts; which, in turn, hinder people’s ability to act by making them feel powerless. Thus, the inability to look beyond the conflicts’ geopolitical dimensions needs to be overcome in order to bring about community-level transformation.”

4.2 Conclusion

This research has addressed the attitudinal dynamics of the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts using 32 semi-structured interviews with three distinct groups: Georgians from Tbilisi, IDPs, and Abkhazians and South Ossetians. It has built on previous literature by looking at the perspectives held on the conflicts by each of these groups. Along with that literature, it has sought to alter the focus of conflict analysis from a geopolitical to a grassroots level. The analysis of the Georgians from Tbilisi sample used the variables of age, gender, and background. This was then contrasted to the perspectives of IDPs and people living in the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Unlike previous works, the data gathered includes a thorough exploration of perspectives on the conflicts in their historical, contemporary, and potential future manifestations, with the ultimate aim of aiding the design of future peace-building programmes. The report has also made practical recommendations, specifically designed for GFP. To do this, the researcher interviewed seven of the organisation’s volunteers and held a workshop to assess GFP’s organisational capacity in the country. Thus, the report presents conclusions that are relevant to both academics and peace-building practitioners.

The main argument is that understanding of the conflict among the Georgians from Tbilisi and IDPs is dominated by geopolitical factors, specifically the role of Russia. What began as an ethnic conflict triggered by competing nationalisms in the 1990s, has turned into a key flashpoint of a regional geopolitical contest. This perception is further entrenched by events in Ukraine, which moves focus away from the community-level dynamics of these conflicts towards the actions of governments. The findings demonstrate that since the war in 2008, the current geopolitical situation is discussed as if it has always been this way; this results in a deterministic view of the past. As the report demonstrates, this emphasis overlooks the other actors involved, reduces people’s capacity for self-reflection, and leads to overly simplistic interpretations of these conflicts; which, in turn, hinder people’s ability to act by making them feel powerless. Thus, the inability to look beyond the conflicts’ geopolitical dimensions needs to be overcome in order to bring about community-level transformation.

The findings show that among the Georgians and IDPs the conflicts’ historical dimensions are widely considered to be a result of a long-term Russian strategy to weaken Georgia and undermine the country’s ability to be independent. This interpretation links diverse historical events into a clear, coherent narrative powered by a constant motive of Russian imperial interests. This view hinders understanding of the complexity of the situation. Moreover, it is very distinct from the Abkhaz and Ossetian view, which holds that these conflicts arose due to Georgian nationalism and mistreatment at the hands of the Georgians. These two competing interpretations need to be reconciled through dialogue in order to reach a stage of mutual understanding.

Respondents’ interpretation of the contemporary dynamics of the conflicts are symptomatic of how polarised the situation has become. The contradiction over the territory at the centre of these conflicts remains irreconcilable: while the Georgians continue to regard Abkhazia and South Ossetia as integral parts of their nation, the Abkhaz and Ossetians do not want to be part of Georgia and many of them support independence. This stalemate is furthered by a lack of mutual understanding and stereotypes between both sides, usually the idea that

the opposing group hates or fears them. The lack of communication perpetuates the contradictions and attitudes that fuel these conflicts. Moreover, it results in the creation of myths about the situation of the other group. The Georgians and IDPs' believe that the Abkhaz and Ossetians are being mistreated by the Russians, who are trying to assimilate them and take full control of their territories. This view clashes with the Abkhaz and Ossetian view, which considers their territories' close relation with Russia as a form of protection against future Georgian aggression.

All three groups' perception of the future rests on the actions and policies of governments; yet, future ideals, among the Georgians and IDPs, involved rebuilding relationships, trust, and a return to the pre-war situation. The Georgian view of the future, however peaceful, does not account for what the majority of the Abkhaz and Ossetians actually want. The Abkhazians and Ossetians, who are considerably less nostalgic about the past, expressed a desire for future cooperation and friendship, but mostly emphasised their desire not to be part of Georgia. In the conflicts, what is most striking is the lack of communication, which – as the findings show – fuels stereotypes, myths and simplifications about the opposing side. The Georgians and IDPs expressed a strong awareness of this causal process and, especially among younger respondents, a notable desire to alter this situation.

In these conflicts, Tier I (Top Leadership) in Lederach's model is in a deadlock with mutually irreconcilable aims that shows few signs of abating. Therefore, conflict transformation attempts have to depend on the grassroots. What is needed is a detachment of the Tier I (Top Leadership) and Tier III (Grassroots Leadership) to overcome the fatalism that pervades people's view of the conflict. This is already apparent among many of the respondents on all sides, who distinguish between governments and populations by stating that their ill feeling lies with the former not the latter. This sentiment can be utilised in order to rebuild connections, relationships, and trust at the community level. Future peace-building programmes need to encourage community-level actors' self-belief in their ability to bring about positive change.

This report has expanded on previous literature by providing a comprehensive analysis of how the conflict is understood by Georgians from Tbilisi and IDPs. To the author's knowledge, it is the first time a survey of prevailing sentiments towards the conflicts has been carried out among the Tbilisi population. Whereas Kabachnik, Regulaska and Mitchneck's work focused on IDPs from Abkhazia or O'Loughlin, Kolossov and Toal's surveys incorporated a range of issues such as state legitimacy and economic conditions, this report has presented detailed findings focused specifically on perceptions of the conflicts with the ultimate goal of providing practical recommendations.

There remain, however, several areas uncovered by this work that would improve understanding of the conflicts and the ability to design peace-building interventions, if explored further. Despite endeavouring to speak to a larger sample, this research was only able to include three interviews with people from Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This compounds a pre-existing problem in the literature and the international community, which privileges the Georgian perspective. More research needs to be carried out in Abkhazia and South Ossetia to gain a more detailed understanding of how people view these conflicts and what areas peace-building interventions could address.

Within Georgia, the research has been limited in terms of geographical scope.

“It is time to overcome the geopolitical situation by empowering grassroots actors to bring about change at their level and help rebuild trust in societies that have been deeply divided for more than two decades.”

A comprehensive survey of prevailing public sentiments towards these conflicts across Georgia would be a useful area for future research. Through this, it could be established which parts of the Georgian population programmes should target. Opinion surveys conducted in the regions could reveal a very different perspective towards the conflicts.

As events in Ukraine continue – a conflict which shows clear parallels to the Georgian situation, due to the emergence of two de facto states arising out of an ethnic conflict influenced by an outside power – there is a need for more comparative literature on conflicts in the region.³⁴⁵ The surveys carried out in post-Soviet de facto states across the region are positive steps in this direction. Comparative literature could establish commonalities in these conflicts that could aid the design of peace-building interventions through the exchange of knowledge on a regional level.

Keeping in mind these limitations, this report has provided a detailed analysis of how the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts are understood by those involved. This analysis can, in turn, improve conflict interventions. What is most striking in both the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts is the lack of dialogue and interaction, which is entrenched by militarised borders and unaddressed displacements. Altering this situation needs to be the top priority for peace-building practitioners. As Russian foreign policy and the geopolitics of the post-Soviet region increasingly dominate headlines around the world, the communities and people directly affected by the region’s ‘frozen’ conflicts should not be forgotten. It is time to overcome the geopolitical situation by empowering grassroots actors to bring about change at their level and help rebuild trust in societies that have been deeply divided for more than two decades.

³⁴⁵ Jackson, ‘Ukraine Crisis: Frozen Conflicts and the Kremlin’.

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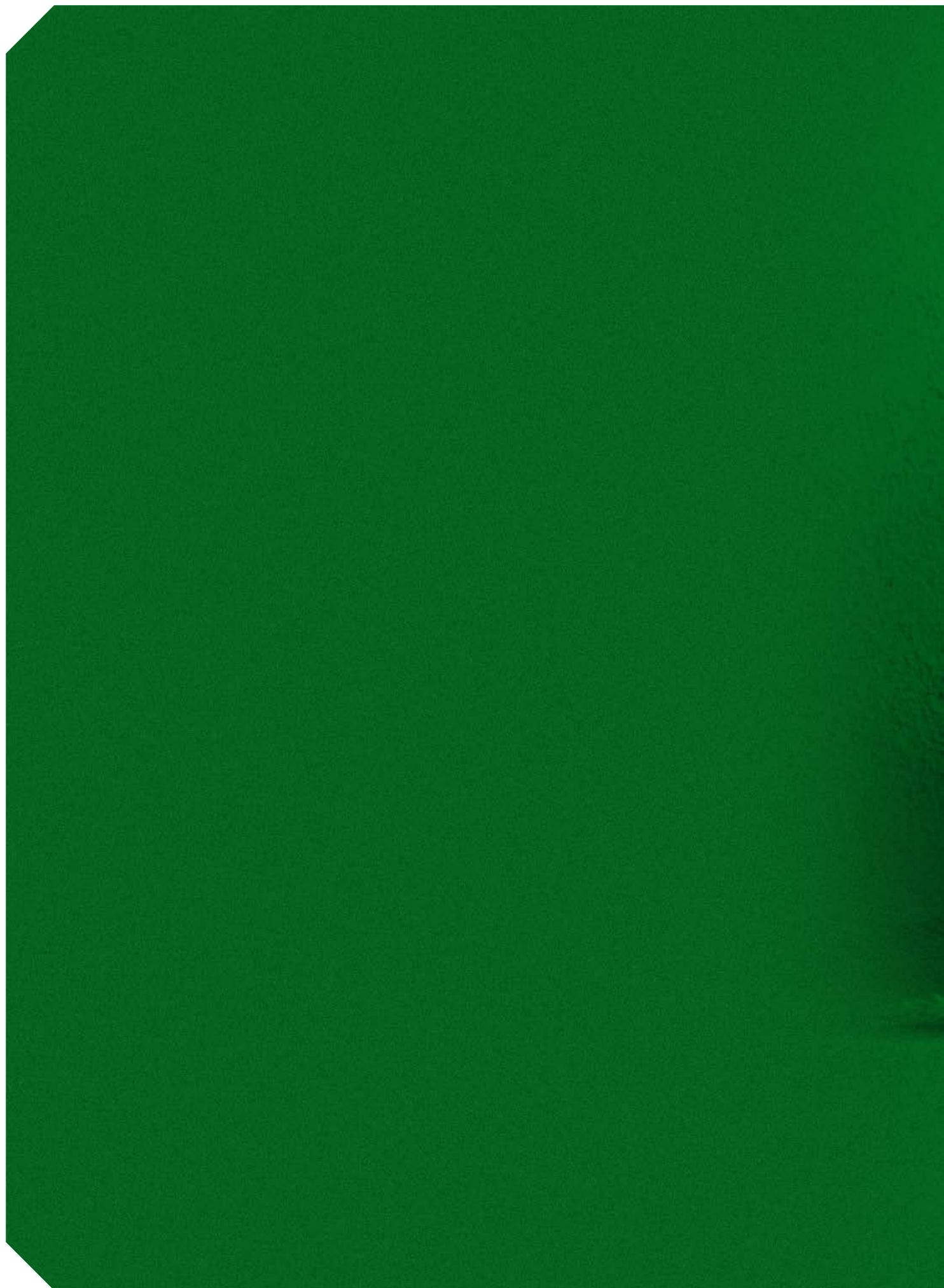
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5.

Appendices

Appendix A – Interview Questions

For GFP Delegates and Pioneers

1a) *Your involvement with GFP*

- How long have you been involved with the organisation
- What have you been involved with
- What do they consider to have been the most successful or to have had the greatest impact

For IDPs

1b) *When did you leave Abkhazia/South Ossetia? How long have you been in Tbilisi?*

For everyone

2) *In your opinion, what conflicts exist in Tbilisi?*

- How does the rest of Georgia compare to Tbilisi (are there conflicts that exist in Tbilisi that do not exist in the rest of the country)

3) *In your opinion, what are the origins/causes/consequences of the conflicts in Abkhazia and/or South Ossetia?*

- Origins
- Causes
- Consequences
- Reasons for longevity (why have these conflicts lasted for as long as they have?)

4) *What issues do you regard as being the most important for the people involved these conflicts?*

- What is at stake for them (alternatively ask why does it matter to people)
- What is the most important issue for you personally?

5) *How do the attitudes and behaviour of the different sides shape these conflicts?*

- Georgian, Abkhazian, and South Ossetian

6) *How do the attitudes and behaviour of the Georgian government (both the current and previous governments) shape the conflict?*

7) *What role do you consider Russia to have in these conflicts?*

- Without Russian involvement, what would the conflicts be like?

8) *What do you think is most likely to happen in the future?*

- If you were able to choose, what would be the ideal way for these conflicts to be resolved?
- How could this be done?

9) *Is there anything else you would like to add regarding these questions?*

GFP related questions

10) What do you consider the strengths and weaknesses of GFP's capabilities in Georgia?

- What do you think has been the most successful thing so far?
- What do you consider to be the main areas for improvement?

11) Do you think that GFP volunteers would be able to organise a programme aimed at addressing the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts?

- What would be needed in order to achieve this?
- Could this be done from Tbilisi?
- How could this be done (Sport For Peace, Advocacy For Peace, Art For Peace, Empowerment For Peace)?

12) Is there anything else you would like to add?

- Everyone

13) Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix B – Interview List

Interviews with GFP Delegates and Pioneers, Tbilisi, Georgia. 25 July-11 August 2014.

Interviews with Georgians from Tbilisi, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July-11 August 2014.

Interviews with IDPs, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July-12 August 2014.

Interviews with Abkhazians and Ossetians, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July-6 August 2014.

Interview 1 (GFP Delegate), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 25 July 2014.

Gender: Female / Age: 23 / Occupation: Student / Ethnicity: Georgian

Interview 2 (GFP Delegate), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 25 July 2014.

Gender: Female / Age: 23 / Occupation: Psychology / Ethnicity: Georgian

Interview 3 (GFP Delegate), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 26 July 2014.

Gender: Female / Age: 23 / Occupation: Student / Ethnicity: Georgian

Interview 4 (GFP Delegate, Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia. 26 July 2014.

Gender: Female / Age: 22 / Occupation: Student/Screenwriter / Ethnicity: Georgian

Interview 5 (GFP Pioneer), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 26 July 2014.

Gender: Male / Age: 23 / Occupation: Student / Ethnicity: Georgian

Interview 6 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014.

Gender: Female / Age: 23 / Occupation: Student / Ethnicity: Georgian

Interview 7 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014.

Gender: Male / Age: 57 / Occupation: Photographer / Ethnicity: Georgian

Interview 8 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 27 July 2014.

Gender: Male / Age: 19 / Occupation: Student / Ethnicity: Georgian

Interview 9 (Academic), Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July 2014.

Gender: Male / Age: 30 / Occupation: Assistant Professor / Ethnicity: Georgian

Interview 10 (South Ossetia), Hotel Central (Skype call), Tbilisi, Georgia. Started on 29 July 2014; completed on 31 July 2014.

Gender: Male / Age: 56 / Occupation: Publisher / Ethnicity: Ossetian

Interview 11 (IDP), Ori Beli Hostel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 29 July 2014.

Gender: Male / Age: 22 / Occupation: Psychologist (Hostel worker) / Ethnicity: Georgian

Interview 12 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Ori Beli Hostel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 30 July 2014.

Gender: Female / Age: 23 / Occupation: Unemployed / Ethnicity: Georgian

Interview 13 (Focus Group) (IDP), respondent's residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 30 July 2014.

Gender: Female / Age: 22 / Occupation: Student / Ethnicity: Georgian

Gender: Female / Age: 57 / Occupation: Housewife / Ethnicity: Georgian

Gender: Female / Age: 57 / Occupation: Retired / Ethnicity: Georgian

Interview 14 (Abkhazian), Hotel Central (Skype Call), Tbilisi, Georgia. 30 July 2014.

Gender: Male / Age: 38 / Occupation: Media Assistant / Ethnicity: Abkhaz

Interview 15 (Academic), Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, Georgia. 31 July 2014.



Gender: Male / Age: 61 / Occupation: Professor / Ethnicity: Georgian

Interview 16 unused (Georgian from Tbilisi), Georgian Partnership for Road Safety Offices, Tbilisi, Georgia. 1 August 2014.

Gender: Female / Age: 24 / Occupation: Project Coordinator / Ethnicity: Georgian

Interview 17 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Georgian Partnership for Road Safety Offices, Tbilisi, Georgia. 1 August 2014.

Gender: Male / Age: 41 / Occupation: Chairman / Ethnicity: Georgian

Interview 18 (GFP Delegate), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 1 August 2014.

Gender: Female / Age: 25 / Occupation: Witness/Victim coordinator in the Prosecutors' Office / Ethnicity: Georgian

Interview 19 unused (Abkhazian), Hotel Central (Skype), Tbilisi, Georgia. 1 August 2014.

Gender: Male / Age: 37 / Occupation: Not given / Ethnicity: Georgian

Interview 20 (Georgian from Tbilisi), respondent's residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 2 August 2014.

Gender: Male / Age: 58 / Occupation: Retired / Ethnicity: Georgian

Interview 21 (IDP), respondent's friends residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 4 August 2014.

Gender: Female / Age: 49 / Occupation: Lawyer / Ethnicity: Abkhazian

Interview 22 unused (uncategorised due to filled quota), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 4 August 2014.

Gender: Female / Age: 22 / Occupation: Student / Ethnicity: Georgian

Interview 23 (Georgian who grew up in Abkhazia, categorised as IDP), Hotel Central (Skype), Tbilisi, Georgia. 5 August 2014.

Gender: Female / Age: 21 / Occupation: Student / Ethnicity: Kartveli (Georgian)

Interview 24 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 6 August 2014.

Gender: Male / Age: 26 / Occupation: Hotel Manager / Ethnicity: Georgian

Interview 25 (Abkhazian), Hotel Central (Skype), Tbilisi, Georgia. 6 August 2014.

Gender: Female / Age: 25 / Occupation: Political Party employee / Ethnicity: Abkhazia

Interview 26 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Tbilisi Hospital, Tbilisi, Georgia. 7 August 2014.

Gender: Male / Age: 48 / Occupation: Professor of Medicine / Ethnicity: Georgian

Interview 27 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Tbilisi Hospital, Tbilisi, Georgia. 7 August 2014.

Gender: Female / Age: 42 / Occupation: Psychiatric Doctor / Ethnicity: Georgian

Interview 28 (Georgian from Tbilisi), Hotel Central, Tbilisi, Georgia. 7 August 2014.

Gender: Female / Age: 40 / Occupation: Doctor / Ethnicity: Georgian

Interview 29 (IDP), Café near the Bridge of Peace, Tbilisi, Georgia. 7 August 2014.

Gender: Female / Age: 23 / Occupation: Receptionist / Ethnicity: Georgian

Interview 30 (IDP), Subway restaurant, Tbilisi, Georgia. 8 August 2014.

Gender: Female / Age: 35 / Occupation: Translator / Ethnicity: Georgian

Interview 31 (Georgian from Tbilisi), respondent's residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 11 August 2014.

Gender: Female / Age: 58 / Occupation: Administrator / Ethnicity: Georgian

Interview 32 (GFP Delegate), Solo Hotel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 11 August 2014.

Gender: Female / Age: 24 / Occupation: Student / Ethnicity: Georgian

Interview 33 (Georgian from Tbilisi), respondent's residence, Tbilisi, Georgia. 11 August 2014.

Gender: Female / Age: 63 / Occupation: Teacher / Ethnicity: Georgian

Interview 34 (Academic), Marriot Hotel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 12 August 2014.

Gender: Female / Age: 56 / Occupation: Journalist/Academic / Ethnicity: Georgian

Interview 35 (IDP), respondent's hostel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 12 August 2014.

Gender: Female / Age: 73 / Occupation: Teacher (retired) / Ethnicity: Georgian

Workshop with GFP Delegates and Pioneers, Solo Hotel, Tbilisi, Georgia. 9 August 2014.

Appendix C – Selected Recurring Themes and Metaphors

Theme or Metaphor	Number of Mentions in the Georgian from Tbilisi Sample (n=12)	Number of Mentions in the IDP sample (n=7)
Conflict is not native to Georgia	3	n/a
Paradise lost (the idea that Abkhazia was a happy, harmonious and prosperous place prior to the war)	0	5
Autonomies are 'mines' or 'bombs' planted by Russia on Georgia territory to divide the country	4	1
Russia wants to 'cut' or 'split' Georgia into different parts	0	5
Abkhazians and Ossetians are manipulated and taught to hate and fear Georgians	7	5
The Russians are harming the Abkhaz and Ossetians and trying to assimilate them and take their territory	4	6
Future: the unity of Georgia would be beneficial for everyone	6	5
Future: It would be best if everyone was friends and lived together again	8	6
Future: Returning home	n/a	6

About the Summer Field Research Intern

Edward Beswick

Edward Beswick grew up near Leeds, in the North of England. Between 2009 and 2012 he attended the University of Manchester where he completed a BA in History, focusing specifically on the 20th century history. In 2013-2014 Edward attended the University of Oxford to study for a MSc in Russian and East European Studies. For the course, his research focused on Russia, minority rights, and globalisation. Throughout his studies, Edward has developed interests and gained knowledge of current affairs, international politics, the history of war, development and human rights. Edward's specific interests include inter-group perspectives in conflict, the sociocultural dynamics of conflict, and conflict mapping. The main geographical focuses of his research interests are in Europe, Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia. When not working, Edward enjoys music, reading, hiking, cooking, travelling and photography.

About the Summer Field Research

Generations For Peace awards two research grants annually to selected postgraduate students pursuing Masters or Doctorate studies at the University of Oxford. The awardees conduct a field research which takes place during the University's summer vacations. The multi-disciplinary field research is focused on an activity or programme implemented in one or more countries in which Generations For Peace volunteers operate. In terms of outputs, each awardee is expected to provide a full research report focused on the local activity/programme, including a detailed write-up of the research conducted and any practical recommendations for the activity/programme organisers; and a supplementary report with further meta analysis and recommendations for Generations For Peace regarding activity/programme adjustment and opportunities for further research. A key objective of Generations For Peace in supporting research grants is to support knowledge transfer and capacity development therefore, it is also expected that the awardees will use their best endeavours to demonstrate (within the limits of practical context of their particular research situation) some knowledge transfer to and capacity development of the local actors.



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