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**THE ROLE OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY IN THE GEORGIAN-ABKHAZ
RECONCILIATION PROCESS: OBSTACLE OR OPPORTUNITY?**

MA thesis

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I have written this Master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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ABSTRACT

The present research seeks to uncover the dynamics between forms of collective memory and current reconciliation processes between Georgia and the *de facto* state of Abkhazia. Based on assumptions derived from theoretical perspectives on dynamics of memory in relation to reconciliation after violent conflict, this thesis argues that reconciliation can be both negatively and positively affected by collective memory. The data utilized to address the topic was collected through interviews with civil society activists who are working on initiatives that deal with the legacy of painful memories in Georgia and Abkhazia. Through thematic analysis, it was confirmed that collective memory poses obstacles to reconciliation, in terms of mutually-exclusive narratives that discourage dialogue and the change of perceptions of conflicting parts. At the same time, various formats of dialogue and reconciliation taking place in Abkhazia and Georgia were described and assessed in terms of their potential in encouraging reconciliation.

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Introduction

The present thesis aimed at exploring the connection between collective memory and reconciliation after violent conflict. Collective memory refers to the way a group of individuals relates to a common past. The memory of a collective is maintained and transmitted from generation to generation through means such as oral communication, media sources, memorial sites and commemoration. In societies recovering from violent conflict, perceptions of fear and mistrust based on historical enmity between conflicting sides might take a long time before transforming into constructive relationships. Reconciliation is a strategy for coping with the legacy of violent conflict that has been developed for situations where instruments such as diplomatic means for resolving conflicts fail to promote peace. It aims at favouring a process of rebuilding relationships and transforming mutual perceptions based on negative feelings.

The main argument of this thesis is that the collective memory of historical animosity and conflict can negatively affect relationships after conflict and hamper reconciliation processes. The research problem was to determine to what extent memory actually affects reconciliation and how. Another problem was to establish, on the other hand, whether memory could be a potential starting point from which to work in order to change such perceptions. To address such issues, the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict of 1992-1993 was selected as the case study for researching the topic. It represents an example of conflict which is still unsolved. The institutional channels for the Georgian-Abkhaz peace process have recently become narrower due to the gradual isolation of the Abkhaz de facto state and the its growing dependency from the Russian Federation's support. In this context, mutually acceptable solutions are seen as very distant and much work is devoted to reconciliation activities. In particular, recent initiatives conducted by NGOs at the local level both in Georgia and Abkhazia, have as a central focus memory. Hence, the choice of this research to interview civil society experts as the methodology for uncovering the dynamics of memory from the perspective of those who are involved in the same activities. The following research questions were formulated in this regard:

To what extent is collective memory, in its various forms, an obstacle to reconciliation practices in Georgia and Abkhazia? (RQ1).

How can collective memory be harnessed to promote reconciliation? (RQ2).

The research questions were answered through semi-structured interviewing with five experts from Georgia and three from Abkhazia. Thematic analysis was then applied to their

responses and the results were compared to the theoretical background, in order to explain the relationship between collective memory and reconciliation.

The first Chapter includes conceptual specifications and the theoretical basis for this research. Chapter 2 describes the methodology used. Chapter 3 delineates the main historical events characterizing the memory of Georgian-Abkhaz relationships and the recent peace process. Chapter 4 analyses the data collected from interviews and analyses the results.

Chapter 1. Theoretical Background and Conceptual Definitions

This chapter introduces the main concepts and theoretical underpinnings of this thesis. Collective memory will be discussed in its main features and aspects. Following, the relation between collective memory and conflict will be explored. The concept of Reconciliation will then be introduced. Perspectives on both the positive and negative effects that collective memory can have on reconciliation processes will be considered. These contributions will be assessed and utilized to formulate the theoretical assumptions of this thesis.

1.1 Individual and Collective Memory

The exploration of what memory is and how it works has a long history, and it has attracted the minds of intellectuals since ancient times. In modern times, memory has been investigated within a variety of disciplines, primarily as the biological ability of the human mind to retain and retrieve information. Since the late 19th century, a socio-anthropological perspective has developed the idea that memory is not merely a biological and individual process. Contextual elements such as group belonging and the social dimension within which individuals interact were used as new analytical lenses to observe how individual memory takes form and meaning. The French sociologist and philosopher Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945) is considered the founding father of what will be later named by Olick and Robbins 'social memory studies' (1998: 106). Previous philosophers, anthropologists and sociologists had elaborated on similar ideas. However, Halbwachs gave weight and theoretical foundation to the study of what he named 'the social frameworks of individual memory' and 'collective memory' (Coser 1992). These expressions were further elaborated, redefined and challenged particularly during the 'memory boom' at the end of the 1970s and during the 1980s, when memory studies flourished.

A first distinction that Halbwachs focused on is the one between individual memory, social frameworks for individual memory and collective memory. Individual memory, or ‘autobiographical memory’, consists in the biological and personal recollection of events experienced in the past that takes place in human minds. According to Halbwachs, however, individual memory has an inherent collective aspect. In his view, memories are often easier to recall when they relate to a wider social context and to the groups that individuals belong to. Groups can be the family, the local community, and the state, to give a few examples. Groups provide a ‘social framework’ to individual remembering, as well as ‘the stimulus or opportunity to recall; they also shape the ways in which we do so, and often provide the materials’ (Olick et al, 2011: 19).

Simultaneously, individuals can identify with or be related to, as members of a group or a community, a memory of which they have no experience firsthand. The shared historical experience of a group is the content of its collective memory. For Halbwachs, individual and collective memory are strictly interconnected. The memory of a group cannot exist independently of its members, their individual experiences and their interactions. At the same time, every individual’s memory is inherently part of a collective memory according to which group(s) a person belongs to. Following a metaphor provided by Astrid Erll, an individual like Kaspar Hauser, from this perspective, would have no collective memory because of its alleged isolation from the outside world. Robinson Crusoe, instead, despite the solitude in which he lived, placed his thoughts on a social framework that he derived from his past and the society he was part of (2011: 16).

Individuals usually belong to small and large groups like the family and the nation state. Whether they are aware of it or not, or whether they agree or not, they will find themselves as part of the collective memory of the groups they belong to. As an example, an event like the American Civil War can be considered an important part of the collective memory of the American people. There are currently no eyewitnesses of the American Civil War alive, and not necessarily everyone in the United States can relate to it individually because of personal connections to it or can recall every fact and figure about it. However, this memory is ‘collective’ in the sense that it is connected to how the whole American population as a group perceives and defines itself in the present through past experience (Olick et al 2011:19). Similarly, the celebration of a wedding anniversary in family memory can be meaningful for all its members. Children might not have been present at the wedding itself, but they are affected by the importance of it as members of the family.

These two examples show how collective memory can manifest itself through different means, other than people's brains or people's oral histories, for example through commemorations of events, rituals and symbols such as the national flag and the anthem. These represent the 'the symbolic order, the media, institutions, and practices by which social groups construct a certain past' (Erl 2008:5). They also show that the transmission of memory follows dynamics of reconstruction of the past. Halbwachs maintained that, since societies cannot 'remember' in a literal sense, collective memory, rather than being an 'entity', functions as a process that consists in the 'creation of shared versions of the past, which results through interaction, communication, media, and institutions within small social groups as well as large cultural communities.' The meaning of the term 'creation' has to be associated with Halbwachs' assumption that collective memory cannot be preserved in its entirety, but that it is continuously constructed and re-constructed according to present societal needs. (Erl 2011: 15). It is through the elaboration, interpretation and representation of shared memories that a collective memory can be transmitted through generations. This process is an inherently socio-cultural process that, according to Halbwachs, happens naturally within collectives and often affects individuals without their conscious decision or participation in it. Commemorations, rituals and symbols are clear indicators of what he referred to as, borrowing Durkheim's terminology, 'collective representations' of shared memory (Olick et al 2011: 19). To summarize, we can affirm that Halbwachs is implicitly combining two understandings of collective memory. On the one side, collective memory is made of the memories of individuals which are socially framed, and which participate in the shared experience of a group. On the other, it is the process of constructing a narrative on the past and remembering it through different media and practices.

The concept of collective memory provided by Halbwachs, along with its articulations, has been regarded by many as problematic, both because of being too broadly defined, and because it is considered not too different from 'older formulations like myth, tradition, custom, and historical consciousness'. Other scholars, rather than using the term 'collective', prefer to distinguish between different types of memory, such as 'official memory, vernacular memory, public memory, popular memory, local memory, historical memory, cultural memory, etc.' (Olick and Robbins 1998: 112). Accordingly, Aleida Assmann maintains that collective memory functions as an 'umbrella term' for different types of memory that can be studied separately. Her, together with Jan Assmann, formulated a theory on 'Cultural Memory' that refines the concept of collective memory. The researchers established clear boundaries for the

definition of collective memory and made the theory a useful tool for research on several fields. Their notions of communicative and cultural memory will be used as reference concepts throughout the present research (Erll 2011: 27).

1.2 Communicative and Cultural Memory

An important premise to the theory of Cultural Memory by Aleida and Jan Assmann is the idea of memory as a dialectic between remembering and forgetting. Aleida A. argued that memory is a process whereby individuals select and reconstruct their past. Memory will tend to, either intentionally or non-intentionally, select what is to be remembered and what is to be forgotten, due to its intrinsically limited nature and impossibility to remember everything. This process not only pertains autobiographical memories but shared collective memories as well (Olick et al 2011: 334). On the contrary, ‘Institutions and larger social groups, such as nations, governments, the church or a firm do not “have” a memory – they “make” one for themselves with the aid of memorial signs such as symbols, texts, images, rites, ceremonies, places, and monuments’ (A. Assmann 2008: 55). This juxtaposition summarizes one of the key distinctions between the concepts of communicative and cultural memory, the former being an informal way of remembering common historical experiences at the level of individuals, and the latter being based on media and institutionalized practices.

Aleida and Jan Assmann describe collective memory as constituted by two distinct processes that produce respectively a ‘communicative’ and a ‘cultural’ memory. Communicative memory originates from the informal and daily interaction of people within communities. It is based on the sharing of personal stories, whose meaning and interpretation are flexible, so that ‘whoever relates a joke, a memory, a bit of gossip, or an experience becomes the listener in the next moment’. Similarly to Halbwachs’ view, this type of memory, though individual, is described as being socially defined and related to a social group. Communicative memory’s peculiarity lies in its limited lifespan, which does not exceed a timeframe of a hundred years, as oral history studies have found. Cultural memory is, instead, based on a past which is distant from the everyday and is preserved through ‘cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance).’ (J. Assmann 1995: 129). These forms of remembering are more fixed, in the sense that they convey an established set of contents and meanings, and that only certain individuals can be their carriers, for example priests or historians (Erll 2011: 28). The following table helps making sense of these definitions:

	Communicative memory	Cultural Memory
Content	historical experiences within the framework of individual biographies	mythical past/ancient history, events from an absolute past
Forms	informal, loosely shaped, natural, created through interaction and everyday experience	consciously established, highly formalized, ceremonial communication, festival
Media	living memory in individual minds, experience, hearsay	established objectivations, traditional symbolic encoding/ staging in word, image, dance, etc.
Temporal structure	80-100 years, a temporal horizon of three or four generations that shifts with the passage of time	absolute past of a mythical ancient time
Carriers	non-specific, eyewitnesses within a memory community	specialized carriers of tradition

Table I: Comparison of communicative memory and Cultural Memory (J. Assmann 1992, 56) in Erll 2011, 29.

As Erll pointed out, however, the two notions are not impervious to change. The distinction between forms, timeframe, media, etc. might become blurred, for example in terms of which type of memory is supported by which media or carrier. Currently, personal memory is not exchanged solely through direct interaction of individuals between a collective, but it can be spread through different new media, such as the Internet. At the same time, written history, in the era of Wikipedia, is a form of cultural memory that is not necessarily transmitted by specialized carriers. Against this backdrop, the same content can be remembered through the means of either communicative or cultural memory. What ultimately distinguishes the two is the choice of individuals or groups, which might be conscious or not, of how it will be remembered.

1.3 Role of Collective Memory in Group Identity

Collective memory has been acknowledged as a constitutive element of identities of large social groups, such as ethnic, national or religious ones. Group identity, also known as social identity in social psychology, is defined as a process whereby individuals acquire a sense

of belonging to a social group (or groups) through cognitive, evaluative and emotive processes¹ (Tajfel 1982:2). Self-identification with a group usually takes place when the individual shares specific traits that characterize the group, such as ethnicity, religion, language, or a value system. However, a common history, a foundational myth or other representations of the past are often necessary elements in the forming of such identities (Olick and Robbins 1998; Volkan 2001; Devine-Right 1999). Aleida Assmann stated that, within social frameworks, ‘each “we” is constructed through the shared practices and discourses that mark certain boundaries and define the principles of inclusion and exclusion’. These ‘practices and discourses’ include visions of the past on which groups base the construction of its collective identity (2008:55).

One function of cultural memory in relation to identity is to serve as a form of preservation of large group identity. Halbwachs sustained that the continuous reproduction of memories contributes to the perpetuation of a collective identity through time (Halbwachs 1975 in Coser 1992:47). Similarly, Jan Assmann underlined that our sense of distinctiveness is transmitted through cultural memory, which ‘preserves the store of knowledge from which a group derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity’ (1995:130). Simultaneously, identifying with a collective’s historical experience provides meaning to reality and social challenges. It can help overcome feelings of individual fragility, by giving a sense of direction and continuity between the past, the present and the future. This process is typical in the formation of a national identity. Anderson described the nation as an ‘imagined community’, where the past is crucial to define the position of a society in the present and its future direction. The lifespan of a nation goes beyond the individual’s lifetime and it facilitates the cohesion of a group around the idea of shared experience in a continuous temporal dimension (Anderson 1983 in Cairns and Roe, 2003:18). Smith emphasizes the importance of the past for the same existence of group identities: ‘memory, almost by definition, is integral to cultural identity, and the cultivation of shared memories is essential to the survival and destiny of such collective identities.’ (1999:10).

Crucial for identity is also the specific meaning that is attributed to certain events of the past. The same content of collective memory can not only be represented differently in the form and media – books, images, symbols, etc. – but it can also acquire a different meaning

¹ According to social psychologist Henri Tajfel, social identity, or group identity, is the result of a process of self-identification with one or more social groups, which is understood as the result of the awareness of being a member. The membership awareness has to be accompanied with an evaluation, positive or negative, of the membership itself and a sense of being emotionally attached to it (Tajfel 1982: 2).

according to which frame is used to interpret it. 'A war, for example, can be remembered as a mythic event ("the war as apocalypse"), as part of political history (the First World War as "the great seminal catastrophe of the twentieth century"), as a traumatic experience ("the horror of the trenches, the shells, the barrage of gunfire," etc.) [..]' (Erl1 2008:7). In relation to the last one, Volkan developed a theory which affirms that group identity revolves around a 'chosen trauma' or a 'chosen glory', which are mental constructions through which collectives interpret their past. In particular, a traumatic memory of, for instance, genocide or forceful deportation, can be transmitted through generations and become part of a shared identity of perceived victimhood, which helps making sense of reality. Despite each individual has a personal experience of the trauma, or none at all, 'all members share the mental representations of the tragedies that have befallen the group' (Volkan 2001:87).

Regarding commemorations such as anniversaries of historic events and other ritual practices, which involve the active participation or the physical presence of the community, Zerubavel underlined how they are instrumental in affirming and validating group identities. By selecting meaningful events that mark the evolution and the development of a group, they provide a 'master commemorative narrative', a sort of *fil rouge* of a collective past, which highlights the 'group's distinctive social identity and highlights its historical development' (Zerubavel 1995 in Olick and Robbins 2011:237-238). Devine-Right suggested that they specifically contribute to strengthening a sense of group cohesion and temporal continuity. In addition, Devine-Right underlined how commemoration can solidify identity boundaries between groups and thicken their permeability by outsiders (1999:29).

1.4 Collective memory and Conflict

Collective memory has been studied in the context of intercommunal or interstate conflicts², which involve 'ethnic, religious, linguistic, and regional identities or groups' (Kriesberg, 1993:417). The interest on memory emerges from the fact that very often, as it has been underlined in the previous paragraph, group affiliations and identities are articulated around a distinctive shared past. The role of collective memories, or the (mis)use of them, might be useful to explain animosities, along with other perspectives from other disciplines, and the legacy they have in post-conflict societies. (Cairns and Roe, 2003: 4). There are two main dynamics that have emerged concerning the connection between collective memory and interstate conflict. The first one regards the effect of collective memory on the perceived

² Examples include Bosnia, Northern Ireland, Rwanda, to name a few.

legitimacy of collective actions. The second consists in the instrumental use of collective memory by political actors to legitimize collective actions and mobilize sentiments. The following insights suggest that, rather than being direct causes of conflict, collective memories can contribute to the formation or re-ignition of animosities.

Devine-Right suggested that 'myths and memories may play a role in motivating and legitimizing socially competitive collective actions'. The concept he used to explain the relation between collective memory and the perceived legitimization of collective actions is the concept of 'affect'. It refers to the affective meaning that individuals attribute to memories and experiences, such as 'feelings of insecurity, anxiety, fear and dread' (Devine-Right 1999: 51). On the basis of Tajfel and Turner's definition of social identity, which is defined as having a strong emotional component, individuals can identify in a certain vision of the past which legitimizes collective action only when there's a strong emotive connection with the past (Tajfel and Turner 1979, 1986 in Devine-Right, 1999:41). Terrorism is one instance of collective action where the individual motives, or the personality of individuals involved in terrorist activities, fail to provide a full explanation of the phenomenon.

Smith suggested that myths of heroic warriors of the past play a role in providing social identification of individuals in a group and legitimation of collective action, in the latter case terrorism (Smith 1984 in Devine-Right 1999: 55). A similar process occurs when individuals identify broadly with the collective history of the community, which is perceived to deserve justice because of its past. In the case of Northern Ireland, research on Irish individuals who joined the IRA highlighted how their choice to embrace violence in many cases was not due to their direct experience of the struggle, but rather because they empathized with a general past of collective injustices suffered by Irish people. These processes of identification are characterized by a strong affective component (Devine-Right 1999:55).

Literature on symbolic, identity or memory politics, focuses instead on the instrumental use of collective memory for mobilizing towards collective action. Political elites are the main actors in this process, who utilize public speech and rhetoric to legitimize certain views. However, both unofficial mediators such as the family and other media such as the school and intellectual elites can be instrumental in spreading a master narrative that promotes violence. The affective component is also mentioned by many scholars as a crucial factor for mobilizing for collective action (Smith 1999; Kaufman 2001; Volkan 2001).

Bernhard and Kubik studied memory and politics in post-communist countries. The authors started from the premise that historical memory, especially in dictatorial regimes, has generally been used as a tool for legitimizing power and promoting cohesion among the masses. They described categories of 'mnemonic actors', whose intent is to construct a certain interpretation of the past that serves socio-political purposes. It can be politicians, but also family members, teachers, intellectuals, artists, religious figures, who might have an interest in promoting a certain vision. According to the actors' behavior, a certain 'mnemonic regime' will be created and it will become 'official' when political actors are involved in affirming it. A 'fractured' type of mnemonic regime will be characterized by 'mnemonic warriors', who will be active in promoting a certain interpretation of the past and in preventing opponents to challenge it. Other regimes, the 'pillarized' and 'unified' ones, will have respectively some competitive but tolerated visions within society, or no active dispute over the past at all. As noted by the authors, in the fractured regime it is more likely to witness problems not only at the political level, where there can be issues of governability and trust between actors due to different mnemonic visions, but also within civil society. Where disputes over memory are not resolved and produce dissatisfaction, civil society might tend to express its unease through violence (Bernhard and Kubik 2014)

According to Smith, 'The memories, myths, symbols and values [...] furnish a distinctive and varied repertoire from which different elites can select those elements which can mobilize and motivate large numbers of their designated population' (1999:271). Interestingly, one of the instruments that is used by elites to stimulate a sense of emotional attachment is the land that a community inhabits, which might gain a crucial importance when it is perceived to be threatened. The spatial dimension where a community has experienced its past and developed his identity can be used to create feelings of affection and promptness to act in protection of it (Smith 1999). Kaufman also attaches great importance to the emotional factor, by underlining how ethnic allegiances are reinforced by the use of 'emotionally laden symbols' by political leaders, which are instrumental in stimulating participation to collective actions. The role of affection here is to downgrade the importance of compromise and to prioritize struggle. (2001:30). Volkan reaffirms the centrality of trauma, whereby in certain conditions, such as conflict, political elites can 'reactivate' the feelings connected to victimhood for purposes of mobilization. Emotional wounds can stimulate feelings of fear and motivate vengeful actions. (Volkan 2001:88).

1.5 Collective Memory and Reconciliation

Collective memory has been the object, among others, of peace studies. Especially in those conflicts where diplomatic means and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms fail, it can be useful to adopt new perspectives that consider the socio-psychological conditions where animosities take shape (Lederach 1997). Very often, these cases present situations where animosities perpetuate even when a formal settlement or an agreement between conflicting parts has been reached, making it more likely for new violence take place. They are defined as protracted, or intractable conflicts³ (Kriesberg 1993). Memory, in its various forms discussed above, can be, among other factors, at the heart of existing animosities. Therefore, collective memory is a prism through which not only understand conflict from a new angle, such as the one proposed in section 1.4, but also to understand whether reconciliatory processes work or not. The ‘role’ of collective memory in affecting reconciliation here is intended as whether collective memory has a detrimental or beneficial effect on reconciliation. The majority of authors mentioned here suggest that where disputes over the past are not solved, animosities might persist and reinforce. However, some suggest that collective memory can be harnessed to assist reconciliation. After giving a definition of the concept of reconciliation, this section will illustrate the main contributions concerning the role of memory in favouring or hampering reconciliation.

The concept of reconciliation has been developed in response to the need of dealing with those conflicts where attempts to negotiation between the interests of conflicting parts, along with other measures of conflict resolution, have proved inefficient. It belongs to of a sub-field of peace studies, conflict transformation, whose leading scholars are John Paul Lederach and Johan Galtung. This tradition of peace studies posits that peace is a long-term process, which involves shifting the focus from conflicting claims to conflicting relations, whose main challenge is often represented by ‘the long-term nature of the conflicting group’s animosity, perception of enmity, and deep-rooted fear’ (Lederach 1997: 14). Because of the emotional toll that they carry, mutual perceptions of conflicting parts can make pragmatic solutions to conflict ineffective and contribute to protract conflict. In these contexts, Lederach suggests that it is imperative for peace studies to devise innovative strategies to cope with the legacies of violent conflict. In his words, ‘Reconciliation is an important meeting point between realism and innovation’, whereby ‘realism’ refers to the context of material needs, geopolitical and security

³ Or those conflicts where, even in presence of formal agreements after war, animosities continue to manifest and prevent resolution (Kriesberg 1993) Examples include the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the conflict in Northern Ireland.

factors to be considered in conflict resolution practice (Lederach 1997: 25). The concept In Lederach's view, the aim of reconciliation is to restore and rebuild relationships that were disrupted by conflict. This must be done through a thorough understanding of the specific realities where perceptions take form and the evaluation of the emotional and psychological situation that the conflict created (1997: 24). In Lederach's view, reconciliation intends to 'seek innovative ways to create a time and a place, within various levels of the affected population, to address, integrate, and embrace the painful past and the necessary shared future as a means of dealing with the present' (1997:35). Among the practices of reconciliation we can find the following: investigating the truth behind events, acknowledging the pain suffered by both parts, apologizing to victims, forgiving, applying judicial measures, preventing new outbreaks of violence, reconstructing relationships and trust between conflicting parts (Santa Barbara 2007: 176). We will intend reconciliation here as a process where both institutional actors and individuals at the societal level engage in any form of dialogue, including those mentioned above, which entail the assessment and evaluation, and ideally reconsideration, of mutual perceptions and feelings towards each one's opponent. Obstacles to this process are intended here as all the elements which make individuals less prone to engage. Anything favouring this process is considered as a potential tool for harnessing reconciliation.

Transitional justice studies focus on mechanisms of transition from violent conflicts. Scholars highlight that collective memory poses serious obstacles to reconciliation in the following ways. On the one hand, conflicting memories make reconciliatory efforts more difficult, by thickening boundaries between groups identifying in one or the other narrative. Moreover, memory can take the form of an official narrative on the past which excludes certain sections of the population and suppresses other memory narratives.

Starting from the 1990s, the relevance of historical memory for the recovery from violent conflict has acquired momentum within the international agenda, in conjunction with the development of Transitional Justice. This concept interprets justice in terms of ensuring accountability of perpetrators and taking care of victims within states in transition from oppressive regimes. The founding principle is that there is a need to address violent pasts, whose legacies often affect both the present and the future of societies. 'Truth commissions' and investigative bodies have been set up in a variety of countries where mass violence and injustices have taken place (See Hayner, Appendix 2:256). They have mostly been created by national institutions or international organizations. Among the most well-known, we find South Africa, Sierra Leone, Rwanda and former Yugoslavia. The process consists in conducting

investigations on past violations. A truth commission is also designed to, according to Hayner: ‘address the past in order to change policies, practices, and even relationships in the future, and to do so in a manner that respects and honors those who were affected by the abuses’ (2001:11). According to theory, commissions are meant not only to provide truth, justice, reparatory measures and similar for victims, but also to promote broader reconciliation within society. However, studies on the effectiveness of transitional justice have produced mixed results in terms of the actual impact and limitations of commissions (Hayner 2011).

Similarly to Hayner, Alexander Boraine suggested that “Societies in transition need other instruments and other models in order to supplement one form of justice” (Boraine 2006: 19). A “holistic interpretation” of transitional justice, for the author, means to embrace a wider understanding of the concept of justice, which goes beyond criminal investigations and the courtroom. There are limits to what judicial mechanisms can achieve, due to the intrinsic limitations of international criminal law and sometimes political constraints. The importance of dealing with the past is associated with the need to look at future directions. In this sense, transitional justice marks the passage from an old to a new order. In other words: “ [...] rather than detracting from criminal justice, transitional justice offers a deeper, richer and broader vision of justice which seeks to confront perpetrators, address the needs of victims and assist in the start of a process of reconciliation and transformation.” Reconciliation, intended as the reconstruction of relationships and the mediation between conflicting memories, have to be pursued in order to ensure democracy and economic development. (Ibid.: 18).

In connection to the Northern Irish peacebuilding process, Barkan underlined the role of ‘sectarian identities and memories’ and the lack of institutional effort towards this direction. He sustained that ‘the tenacity of actively competing memories contributes to perpetuating animosity, and at times leads to a violent conflict’ (Barkan 2016:11). This author focused on the connection between memory and identity and the hurdles of dealing with ‘conflicting truths’. Group identity can contribute to the forming of these truths, which are specific to the group they refer to. Where exclusive narratives on memory are left to thrive, hostility between groups is meant to persist (Barkan 2016). In the case of reconciliation in Rwanda, King observed how the Rwandan government, in order to legitimize its rule, is promoting a unifying national narrative of peace that presents it as the force that stopped the genocide (2010:300). The violence perpetrated by forces that are now in power, which is testified by ethnic groups of Rwanda, including Hutus and Tutsis, as well as mixed-ethnicity individuals, is currently unrecognized. The result is a divided society, social exclusion and difficult integration between

ethnic groups. Moreover, repressed memories might intensify over time and represent a source of future violence (King 2010). In this context, the famous Kigali Memorial Centre has been widely criticized as the concretization of a dominant ‘genocide ideology’ (King 2010:295). In connection to memorials and commemorative practices for reconciliation, Selimovic warns about how commemorative practices bear the risk of becoming a political tool, imposing a dominant narrative and becoming ‘encounters between such packaged pasts and present power struggles.’ (Selimovic 2013:348). In Srebrenica, the international responsibility for the massacre is not represented in the memorial.

The types of official interventions suggested by transitional justice literature vary from material compensation to war victims, trials to perpetrators, investigative commissions. Additional ‘non-judicial instruments such as apologies, healing circles or forms of collective remembrance and commemoration’ are also mentioned (Schwelling, 2012:8). Other suggestions are specifically about remembering and forgetting the past. They include the reconstruction of memory narratives and the inclusion of minoritarian perspectives in order to promote social cohesion. Barkan insisted on the importance of working towards the creation of an inclusive perspective on history, rather than a ‘unified history’ that risks being self-serving and exclusive. In the Northern Irish case, despite the enormous variety of initiatives that have been implemented for reconciliation, the author noticed that an extensive focus on individual memory and experiences, which he called ‘micro-perspective’, has prevented the formation of a ‘macro-perspective’ on history. Initiatives failed in contextualizing all reconciliation efforts, from personal memories recollections to criminal trials, and integrating them into a pluralistic narrative of the past. On the Colombian experience, despite the extremely long-lived and complex nature of the conflict and despite violence continues to take place, Barkan talked about the extensive number of commissions and investigative bodies, both official or non-governmental, which have worked on the past. Their peculiarity lies in that they have acknowledged the dangers of creating a unified narrative, which would hardly be accepted by both parts. Instead, they directed their efforts in providing a multitude of perspectives and histories, without imposing a more ‘truthful’ version of history for all sides to be acknowledged. This process has sparked debate but has also allowed for major successes in peace negotiations (Barkan 2016:22).

Other perspectives from other traditions of peace studies, focusing on grassroots processes of reconciliation, also highlight the importance of challenging master narratives. Jabri argues that new discourses of peace and tolerance can overcome narratives that foster

hate and violence (Jabri in Wang 2018). According to him, approaches that focus on political and institutional aspects of reconciliation fail to account for the social dynamics that produce exclusivist perceptions of groups. If narratives are the source of conflict, a space should be created for the revision and provision of multiple narratives, where the parts are not in competition with each other about whose truth is right, about whom has to be forgiven (Jabri in Wang 2018: 50). Wang, however, warns about the difficulty of challenging memory narratives that have been consolidating for a long time and that it is not realistic to expect that new discourses can emerge. One of the possible steps to facilitate a process of re-framing of narratives is, in his view, to revise history textbooks of conflicting sides where their representation of history is selective and self-serving (2018:). Tint, basing on her work on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, suggests that acknowledging and challenging memory narratives is an essential part of reconciliation. She underlines how conflicting parties often are not aware of the other side's perspective. Hearing alternative versions can break into the narratives they have been absorbing through their families, schools, media and politics. This process can only be done on a grassroots level, and by keeping in mind the strong connection between memories and identity: 'Asking people to reconsider their stories is not an approach that will likely succeed because they are so entwined with their identity. But to ask them to consider the other's stories more fully can help shift rigid perceptions of past, present, and future' (2010:392). These contributions reflect ideas that are more akin to Lederach's concept of reconciliation enunciated above, which entails addressing socio-psychological perceptions of conflicting parts from the bottom of society. In his view, the engagement of civil society in processes of reconciliation is crucial (1997).

1.6 Assessment of the Literature

From a broad perspective, the studies presented above have shown that memory can represent both an obstacle for reconciliation and a potential tool to encourage reconciliation. However, there are some shortcomings in how these perspectives address the issue of collective memory and reconciliation. First of all, transitional justice studies focus on the negative effect of imposing dominant narratives on memory, which tend not to represent the whole spectrum of memory narratives within society, causing the resentment of minoritarian segments of society and their social exclusion. However, it is not clear whether, in the case these were represented in the dominant narrative, they would not constitute an obstacle to reconciliation anymore. The doubt raised here is connected to the fact that memory is studied from the perspective of institutionally-driven processes for promoting reconciliation, which tends to

overlook local contexts and people-to-people relations. If the national narrative changes, perceptions at the individual and group level might not change automatically. This implies that other dimensions of memory, not only its manipulation from the top, have to be considered. Moreover, transitional justice processes are based on a top-down and often externally-promoted agenda. Every procedure needs either the initiative or the authorization of the national government under scrutiny. These aspects bear the risk of sacrificing the understanding of individual and societal needs and apply pre-packed societal projects of reconciliation. Transitional justice mechanisms are also not always possible to apply, especially in cases where conflicting parties include non-state or de facto state actors. It is therefore imperative to consider also other perspectives that are based on the study of bottom-up reconciliation processes to understand the connection between memory and reconciliation. Other studies mentioned above, which focus on memory from a socio-psychological level, explain the connection between memory and reconciliation with the presence of conflicting memory narratives, providing limited explanation as for what exactly makes them an obstacle for reconciliation. Identity is the only explanatory factor that has been identified as making these conflicting memories a problem for reconciliation. All of these contributions, nevertheless, provide useful insights on how to harness the past for reconciliation.

Against this background, a perspective on how collective memory affects reconciliation at the civil society level is still an understudied topic. This thesis aims therefore at providing insights from the perspective of grassroots initiatives. The Georgian-Abkhaz reconciliation process, in this framework, presents an instance where official ways of addressing the issue of memory are lacking, and are currently difficult to establish, since they would require the collaboration between the de facto government of Abkhazia and the Georgian government. As it will be discussed in Chapter 3, this conflict is also characterized by a strong importance of collective memory. Civil society in both Abkhazia and Georgia has been active in promoting reconciliation through bottom-up processes in recent years. Exploring them will be instrumental to understand what role collective memory is playing in that context and what kind of consequences it has for reconciliation.

1.7 Theoretical Assumptions and Research Questions

Despite the limitations noted above, the literature analysed in this chapter can be instrumental to delineate a set of propositions which will form the basis of the present inquiry. By looking simultaneously at the main arguments in the previous sections, we can elaborate

assumptions that take into consideration the various factors characterizing the connection between memory and conflict and memory and reconciliation.

Animosities that find their roots in a history of past enmity – among other important factors such as unequal relations, competition over resources, power struggles, etc. – and that are represented as such through social commemoration and other forms of collective memory, have been said to influence the perceived legitimacy of violent collective actions against a conflicting group. As it has been mentioned, the role of identity and emotion in sustaining actions that protect groups from a real or perceived threat is crucial. (Devine-Right 1999). If representations of the past, following this pattern, encourage groups to participate in violent conflict, one could expect that, once the war is over, enmity might remain. In fact, cultural memory can transmit meanings and representations of the past according to what aspect of the past has to be remembered (A. Assmann 2008). Victimhood, or trauma, along with enmity, are examples of meanings that are transmitted from one generation to another and that give meaning to the present as well (Volkan 2001).

The strong emotional component and the connection of the past with individual and social identity, transmitted through various forms of collective memory, might pose itself an obstacle to reconciliation, in terms of the reluctance to engage in dialogue with someone who is associated with fear, mistrust and painful feelings. As a consequence of conflict, identities might have become stronger and non-negotiable, as well as the past connected to it. If reconciliation means to reconstruct relationships and reconsider the past, these can be considered significant obstacles for its effectiveness. The latter argument has a socio-psychological character, because it concerns individuals and intergroup perceptions, however there might be a parallel instrumentalist perspective that looks at the same dynamics.

It has been found that the same perceptions which might occur naturally within collectives, because of previous historical experience, can be channeled by political actors in a narration, a template that is used to legitimize the establishment, their choices and the direction of the whole nation (King 2010). One can assume that, if present political needs require the continuation of a narrative that uses historical enmity or trauma, based on which, for example, political elites can sustain certain claims against the other side, there will be no incentive to promote conciliatory narratives. If such narratives also ensure political consensus, then there are even less reasons to engage in dialogue and reconsider mutual perceptions. They would create two entrenched and non-negotiable narratives that reinforce negative perceptions of each

other, which are supported at the institutional level and, through institutionalized forms of remembering, can influence directly individuals and their propensity to engage in informal dialogue.

According to this view, therefore, memory is both an obstacle to rebuilding relationships and changing perceptions, and a potential tool for promoting them. To summarize, the role of memory in reconciliation, according to this analysis, can be seen in two ways. First, collective memory is part of an intimate sphere of the individual, connected to identity and the way he or she interprets the present. When it is linked to conflict and a past of animosity, it can perpetuate ideas of fear and mistrust in the present which discourage dialogue. At the same time, collective memory functions as a tool for political elites, who might consolidate a dominant narrative that focalizes on trauma and enmity. In this case, mutual perceptions and relationships between conflicting groups are off the negotiating table. On how to deal with these obstacles, the analysed literature proposes what follows. First, direct dialogue and reassessment of the past in order to transform perceptions of the other and promote reconciliation. Second, the deconstruction of sectarian narratives and the promotion of inclusive ones, aimed at representing all actors of the same stories and acknowledging everyone's suffering. This is understood here as the potential of memory in fostering dialogue.

The case of Georgian-Abkhaz conflict has been chosen because it presents an instance where the connection between memory and reconciliation can be studied closely. As it will be discussed in Chapter 3, the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict is an instance of intractable conflict where conflict resolution mechanisms have proved inefficient to provide durable solutions. The fact that many recent reconciliation activities in Abkhazia and Georgia have focused on a dialogue on memory and history, provides a unique opportunity for investigating the link between memory and reconciliation. Whether collective memory constitutes an obstacle, as suggested by the theory, or a potential tool to be used by peacebuilders, it will be explored by this study. (RQ1) To what extent is collective memory, in its various forms, an obstacle to reconciliation practices in Georgia and Abkhazia? (RQ2) How can collective memory in this context be harnessed to promote reconciliation?

Chapter 2. Methodology

This thesis aimed at understanding what kind of connection there is between collective memory and reconciliation in Georgian-Abkhaz relations. It has been noted that the way groups perceive themselves in the present might be influenced by the way they relate to their past. In

conflict situations, this can assume a dimension of animosity between groups, which can complicate post-conflict reconciliation. The interaction between present and past in Georgian and Abkhaz societies and the implications for reconciliation are therefore the main subjects of inquiry of this thesis. This Chapter will describe the choice of expert interviewing and thematic analysis as methods to approach the topic, as well as the sample selection and interview process.

2.1 Semi-structured Expert Interviews

Semi-structured expert interviews have been selected as the appropriate method to better illuminate the research topic. Experts have professional experience and systematized knowledge on specific issues, which makes them desirable to address delimited research topics. The semi-structured format of interviews allows flexibility both for the interviewer in designing open-ended questions and for the interviewee to elaborate on their thoughts (Flick 2009). This enhances the chances to gather a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon through a detailed account of the experts' perspectives and experiences. This method was intended to generate data to answer the following research questions: To what extent is memory, in its various forms, an obstacle to reconciliation practices in Georgia and Abkhazia? (RQ1); How can collective memory in this context be harnessed to promote reconciliation? (RQ2).

Experts have been chosen among civil society actors in Georgia and Abkhazia, as individuals whose experience stretches from the interaction with top levels of society to the grassroots, granting access to different levels of knowledge (Lederach 1997, Mikelidze& Pirozzi 2008). Moreover, published sources on recent reconciliation activities in Abkhazia and Georgia are extremely limited, due to the sensitivity of the topic. Therefore, gathering contributions of important figures involved in such processes is necessary to collect information that otherwise would not be available. The researcher also noticed that civil society has been overlooked in terms of its practical involvement in dealing with historical legacies of conflict and in transitions from oppressive regimes, despite its growing importance as a constitutive element or desired outcome of any democratization process. The role of civil society in reconciliation is recognized in conflict transformation theory as being essential for providing assistance to victims and act as mediators between the bottom and the top levels of society. (Mikelidze&Pirozzi, 2008). This thesis will harness the role of 'mediators' in society

that Lederach (1995) theorized, in order to understand their perspective on dynamics of memory on the top and grassroots levels of society.

2.2 Sample and Interviewing Process

A total of eight interviews were conducted between June and July 2019. Respondents were contacted by email or phone call. The selection criteria for participants was to have current or past experience with reconciliation activities within Georgian and/or Abkhaz civil society, as well as speaking English. There was no requirement for age, gender or nationality. However, there was an attempt to arrange as many interviews with individuals who are currently living and working in Abkhazia, as those living in Georgia. This was meant to ensure a balance of perspectives in responses. Five people from Georgia and three from Abkhazia accepted to participate. This result was due to the difficulty in finding Abkhaz individuals who would be available within the timeframe proposed, and who would speak English. The impossibility for the researcher to travel to Abkhazia made online interviews necessary, for which a possible translation process with the help of a third part was considered impractical. Despite the imbalance in numbers, the researcher ensured that the amount of data collected from the Abkhaz side satisfied the needs of the research. Participants showed a variety of experiences and perspectives. The numerosity of Georgian interviewees allowed for the balancing and complementing of each other's perspective. In this case, the researcher purposely contacted individuals with the most varied backgrounds possible.

Meetings with Georgian interviewees were arranged in their current offices in Tbilisi, Georgia. Skype interviews were conducted with Abkhaz participants. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Each interview lasted approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes. Participants were asked to sign a Consent Form and an Information Sheet in English. They were also given the option to receive the same documents in Georgian or Russian language if they required so, in order to ensure the full understanding of the interviewing process. All Abkhaz participants preferred their surnames and organization names not to be cited for privacy reasons. Therefore, the researcher agreed with them to use only their first name, in order to ensure that they cannot be identified. All participants were notified of the possibility to withdraw at any time during and after the interview. A complete list of interviews is available in Annex 3.

Due to the sensitivity of the topic, interview questions were designed in order not to fall in the personal experience of the conflict. The personal sphere emerged spontaneously in some

of the responses. However, the researcher remained attentive to the reaction of interviewees to questions. In a few instances, an emotional tone was detected and interviewees were reminded of their possibility to refuse to provide an answer. In none of the cases the emotional status of the participants resulted disturbed or escalated in negative reactions. The researcher noticed that there was a general enthusiasm in answering questions and elaborating detailed responses, as well as in sharing practical experience. Much of the data collected about practical experience in reconciliation activities was new to the researcher. This is due to the fact that much of the work that is done at the present moment is carefully publicized and a few information are found on available sources.

The researcher first identified potential candidates by searching on contact sections of websites of relevant organizations. These included: International Non-Governmental Organisations such as Conciliation Resources, Berghof Foundation, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, Swisspeace and International Alert, which are active both in Abkhazia and Georgia. Name of local NGOs have been found through suggestion of professors at Ilia State University and Glasgow University, as well as online resources where their name was cited. They included, for Abkhazia: Center “World Without Violence”, Centre for Humanitarian Programmes, Women Fund for Development. For Georgia: Caucasus Institute For Peace, Democracy and Development, Studio Re, SovLab, Go Group and Caucasian House. Given the relatively small size of both societies, it was not surprising that many interviewees worked for one or more local organizations, and all of them worked in partnership with the international NGOs that were mentioned. Snowballing was used for the recruitment of four participants, whereby two contacts were given by the official contact of organizations and, in the other two cases, by a contact suggested by the Glasgow supervisor. Others were identified through the purposive method mentioned above.

A brief description of participants is in order. Angela, Elena and Lana are currently working on peacebuilding and reconciliation for local organizations in Abkhazia, which are mostly funded by the international NGOs mentioned above. Angela and Lana are ethnic Abkhaz, living respectively in Sukhum(i)⁴ and Ochamchira. Elena is a non-ethnic Abkhaz who was born in Abkhazia and currently lives in Sukhum(i). The following participants are Georgians. Marina and Ghia have contributed to a variety of peacebuilding activities, as well as academic research on the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. Ghia has a long-standing academic

⁴ Georgians write Sukhumi and Abkhaz Sukhum. We write Sukhum(i) Coppieters 2004, p.2

career, as well as political experience and engagement with the peace process. He is also the founder and director of the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development. Marina is part of the same organization and now coordinating the “Memory Project”, in collaboration with Conciliation Resources. Irakli works at SovLab, a non-profit organization that conducts academic research and civic initiatives on Georgia’s Soviet Past. Ketii was working as ombudsman of Georgia before joining Berghof Foundation, where she has participated in and worked as a mediator and coordinator at workshops on history and memory. Mamuka is the founder and director of Studio Re, a non-profit media organization that regularly hosts TV shows and programmes for the Georgian-Abkhaz dialogue. He also directed a series of innovative documentaries on the conflict. All participants worked on the memory of the conflict in different ways and from the position of civil society workers, as well as experiencing the peace process as individuals belonging to one or the other society in the conflict. The variety of backgrounds and experiences of participants allowed for richness in data collection.

2.3 Interview Questions

Interview questions were designed as a template where it would be possible to cover broad as well as sub-themes. Initial questions were formulated in general terms, allowing interviewees to take the direction they preferred. The researcher’s role during the answering process was limited to asking for elaboration of certain themes or to connecting the discussion to a related issue. To those interviewees who provided more concise answers, questions were sometimes reframed or more details were asked about a certain aspect.

Interview questions were divided in two sections according to the research questions. The first aimed at understanding the general context where interviewees work, in terms how much the history of Georgian-Abkhaz relationships matters now in Georgian and Abkhaz social and political spheres. The attention was focused on both the institutional level, in terms of what are the official attitudes in relation to the past, whether and how it emerges as a topic at the moment, etc. and the broader society, intended as the general perception around the value of the past for the present and how it can be observed in practice. The focus shifted then to what are the most diffused mutual perceptions of Georgians and Abkhaz, and to what extent these are informed by constructions of the past. The following questions were about an evaluation on what kind of impact collective memory has on reconciliatory efforts. The second was about the description of processes, interactions and perceptions of precise projects that experts have been working on or initiatives they have participated in. Both sections aimed at

answering the first research question, because both general perspectives and practice-based perspectives provided insight on the role of collective memory for reconciliation. The second section was instead instrumental for a descriptive account of practices.

2.4 Thematic Analysis

The chosen method of data analysis was Thematic Analysis (TA). This method consists in ‘systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set’ (Braun and Clarke 2012: 57). The purpose is to gather similarities of perspectives and experiences concerning a specific research question. The approach is not tied to a specific epistemological position about the nature of the inquiry and allows the researcher to approach the data flexibly. This thesis used a combination of inductive and deductive analysis. Themes were not defined a priori, however theoretical assumptions were used as a supportive structure to systemize the data during the final discussion.

The first stage of the analysis consisted in the repeated listening of audio records and in the transcription of them. Transcripts were read multiple times and notes were written about the structure of thoughts and the reference to key issues, in order to anticipate the systematizing part of the analysis. Secondly, codes were generated in order to help the following identification of themes. Coding involved addressing mostly the descriptive, or “semantic” level of meaning of responses, as for example “social reaction to X situation”. In some cases, “latent” codes were detected beneath the objective content of the response, such as “historical grievance”. Codes were ordered and grouped around common meanings. The next phase involved identifying themes. A theme is constructed around codes that relate to one another. According to Braun and Clarke, a theme ‘captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set’ (Clarke 2006: 82). The final phase consisted in the drafting of a report. At this stage, theoretical assumptions stated in Chapter 1 were used to discuss the results and assess whether these were confirmed or whether different or additional elements emerged.

2.5 Limitations

One of the limitations of this approach was the unbalanced sample. Due to limited accessibility to Abkhaz contacts, both because of the impossibility to travel personally to Abkhazia, and the lack of proper networks, only three Abkhaz participants were recruited. Another contributing factor to this limitation was the requirement for participants to be English-speakers. This was asked because of the limited competences of the researcher in both Russian

and Georgian. Abkhaz participants could have been a bigger number if the researcher could interview in Russian. Instead, English speakers in Georgia were easy to recruit. Translators were initially considered as an option, however due to logistical problems (internet connection for Skype calls, general organization of the process) this option was discarded. The sample is therefore representing a limited perspective of civil society in Abkhazia, however the contributions were detailed enough to complement Georgian perspectives.

Chapter 3. Georgian-Abkhaz relations: background information

Memory dynamics within Georgian and Abkhaz societies cannot be understood unless some key historical facts that led to the conflict are highlighted. A recount of the main events prior and after the 1992-1993 war will be followed by an overview of the 2008 conflict between Russia and Georgia, after which Moscow recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Both conflicts will be important to understand the nature of current memory narratives on both sides, as well as the status of relations between Georgia and Abkhazia. The recent reconciliation process will also be taken into account.

3.1 Historical grievances: the 1992-1993 Georgian-Abkhaz war and the 2008 Russo-Georgian war



Map of Georgia with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Source: International Crisis Group, , ‘Abkhazia: The Long Road to Reconciliation’, Europe Report 224, 10 April 2013, p. 27.

Abkhazia is a strip of land situated on the North-West of Georgia, between the Eastern coast of the Black Sea and the Caucasus Mountains. During Soviet times, Abkhazia was an autonomous republic within Georgia. In the Soviet federal system, Georgia was a Union Republic with de jure sovereignty and the right of secession from the Soviet Union. Abkhazia



Map of Abkhazia. Source: International Crisis Group, 'Georgia and Russia: Clashing over Abkhazia', Europe Report 193, 5 June 2008, p. 25

was initially given the status of associated Soviet Socialist Republic, but in 1931 it became an Autonomous Republic with a certain degree of self-government, but ultimately subordinate to the administrative centre in Tbilisi. Within the Soviet centralized system, however, power was, in fact, in the hands of the all-union Communist Party. Despite the constitutional rights of sovereignty and secession,

along with the constitutional equality of all nationalities within the Soviet Union, the reality was instead a hierarchical system based on ethnic affiliation. The main nationality of each ethno-territorial division was given the status of 'titular nation'. This entailed a series of social and political privileges. Georgians were the titular nation of Georgia and the Abkhaz were the titular nation of Abkhazia, despite being in minority compared to the size of local Georgian population of Abkhazia. (Coppieters in Accord 1999:14).

Despite some existing reciprocal mistrust, interethnic relations between ethnic Abkhaz and Georgians at the societal level were relatively peaceful, episodes of violence were uncommon and mixed marriages were diffused (Souleimanov 2013: 130). However, on the Abkhaz side, latent resentment towards Georgians developed over the years. Under Stalin and Beria's rule, like in other parts in the Soviet Union, Abkhazia experienced purges of public officials, which were perceived as ethnic purges against the Abkhaz. Restrictions in the cultural sphere, including the closing of Abkhaz schools, were also widely resented. Moreover, the industrialization process required the settling of migrant workers in Abkhazia, causing a rapid

increase in numbers of Georgians, Russians and Armenians, particularly between 1939 and 1959. Within Abkhaz intellectual and political circles, reminiscent of Russian deportations of the previous century, a fear of deprivation of their identity, status and territorial belonging strengthened and emerged during destalinization years. All of this contributing to the strengthening of anti-Georgian sentiments. (Coppieters 2002:92).

One of the first interethnic tensions that animated public debate occurred in correspondence of the publication of a book by a Georgian writer. The historian advanced a theory which sustained that Abkhaz tribes inhabiting the land in ancient times were in fact Georgian, which implied that Abkhaz people currently living in Abkhazia are not their descendants. The publication sparked fierce protests from the Abkhaz side in 1957. In the same years, Abkhaz historiographers also engaged in ethnogenetic research that would prove the historical ownership of their territory. On that occasion, a letter was sent to Moscow demanding secession from Georgia and accession to the Russian Federation, which was dismissed. However, Moscow pressurized Tbilisi to ensure that the administrative and cultural policies would not create turmoil within the Abkhaz community (Francis 2011: 68). Similar movements happened in 1967 and 1977, each time characterized by secessionist demands to Moscow and protests over some academic dispute. In 1977, a new Soviet-sponsored language policy that required constitutional equality between Georgian language and the other languages used in Georgia, sparked protests all over Georgia. It was interpreted as a political act aimed at russification and the provision was eventually cancelled. On the Abkhaz side, since in Abkhazia Georgian language was not as widely used as Russian by non-ethnic Georgians, this development was described in a letter to Moscow by some intellectuals as an attempt of 'Georgianization' against them. Another request for secession was advanced, but it was again dismissed by Moscow. New political, economic and cultural concessions were made to ease the tensions (Coppieters 2002 :95).

Against this backdrop, it can be noticed that perceptions of both sides were developing in two main directions. On the Georgian side, the public recognized the right to the status of autochthonous people, but judged the privileges derived from the titularity as excessive. Political disputes with Abkhazia were framed within the broader quest for emancipation of Georgia from Soviet control. From this perspective, Abkhaz demands and their punctual accommodation by Soviet authorities were orchestrated by Moscow, in the attempt to destabilize Georgia and promote russification (Coppieters 2004: 4). The increasing privileges of Abkhaz elite and the predominant role of Russian language in Abkhazia heightened this fear.

At the same time, Georgians living in Abkhazia started voicing complaints about interethnic anxiety through dissident literature. (Coppieters 2002: 97). From the Abkhaz side, instead, Moscow symbolized the guarantor of security from the threat of 'Georgianization'. Despite the increase in privileges, the fear of Georgia remained and strengthened the idea that secession was the only way to survive (Coppieters 2004:4).

More intense episodes happened at the end of the 1980s, when the Soviet system was collapsing. Another letter was sent in March 1988, asking for the upgrading of the status of Abkhazia to union republic. According to the authors, until 1931 Abkhazia had enjoyed the status of union republic, though associated with Georgia, before becoming an autonomy within the latter. Demonstrations supporting these demands were organized the following year, when around 30 000 people including national minorities rallied in the village of Lykhny. The growing national movement in Abkhazia was key for mobilizing people around the cause. The Georgian national movement was also increasing in popularity among Georgians, but the same year it was confronted with the conflict in the South Ossetian autonomy, another ethnic administrative unit created in Georgia after Sovietization. On the academic level, conflicting theories on ethnogenesis became popular again and each side competed with the other to confute their studies (Coppieters 2002: 98). Violence erupted in July in Sukhum(i) and Ochamchira, following the creation of a separate branch of Tbilisi State University in Sukhum(i). During the riots, sixteen people died and around a hundred were injured. The following year, a new language policy that required the knowledge of Georgian for accessing educational opportunities was passed, heightening tensions in Abkhazia. After the demise of Soviet Rule, following general democratization processes at the end of the Cold War, Georgia held the first multi-party elections in 1991, ending the communist party rule. In 1991, Tbilisi declared independence and Abkhazia declared sovereignty from Georgia (Souleimanov 2013: 133).

After tensions over the legal framework of the status of Abkhazia, also known as the "war of laws", military confrontation erupted in 1992 in Sukhum(i), followed by the advance of the Georgian National Guard in the territory of Abkhazia. Abkhaz forces, aided by divisions from the North Caucasian republics, eventually defeated Georgian troops. The war lasted thirteen months and a ceasefire agreement was signed in 1994. It caused the displacement of around 200 000 to 230 000 people, primarily ethnic Georgians. (Francis 2011: 88). Violence broke out again after the ceasefire, namely in 1998 and 2001.

The first negotiations between 1994 and 1995 were aimed at introducing monitoring measures for preventing violence to erupt again. Involved in the process were Russia and representatives of Abkhaz authorities, Georgia, representatives of the UN Secretary general and OSCE. Peacekeeping forces of Russian personnel were established in Abkhazia and discussions on the legal status of Abkhazia were on the table, including the possibility of a federal union. At the same time, a regime of sanctions and blockade on Abkhazia was imposed by the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Negotiations and agreements failed to meet each of the parties' interests and to provide guarantees for each other's security concerns. In 1997, the United Nations and the EU major powers became more involved in the peace process, which started taking the form of a series of informal talks and negotiations aimed at building trust and confidence between conflicting parts. The proposals envisaged, among others, economic and legal cooperation, as well as political meetings. They were facilitated by international and local NGOs. Some of these processes are still active. (Akaba and Khintba, 2011: 24).

At the end of the 1990s, Russia eased sanctions and the embargo imposed by the CIS. In the meantime, Abkhaz authorities had created judicial, legislative and executive institutions, whose performance and services have been rather weak and dependent on international donors and Russian support. A couple of years later, Abkhaz people were able to obtain Russian passports and receive pensions issued from the Russian government. The options of a confederative or a federal arrangement that had previously been discussed during negotiations were dismissed in 1999 when the "Act of State Independence" was approved by the Abkhaz parliament. This coincided with a change of the political leadership in Russia and an increasing strategic interest of Abkhazia, whose dependence on Russian support increased. Under the presidency of Mikheil Saakashvili in Georgia after the Rose Revolution of 2003, the atmosphere for negotiation was positive and Georgian officials Giorgi Khaindrava and Irakli Alasania delineated measures for a peaceful cooperation that was intended to lead to an agreement. However, during the following years tensions between a militarily stronger and Western-leaning Georgia and Russia increased. The negotiation process about the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict considerably slowed down (Francis 2018).

Sanctions from the CIS were officially suspended in 2008 and Russia established official ties with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, along with the recognition of its legal and judicial bodies. The already precarious security situation in the de facto states deteriorated and an armed conflict with Georgia broke out in August 2008. The military confrontation took

place mostly on the South Ossetian front and was followed by the advance of Russian troops into the Georgian territory for purposes of ‘peacekeeping’ until the Gori district, close to the capital Tbilisi. The Kodor(i) Gorge, which was not an Abkhaz-controlled territory at the time, was occupied by Abkhaz and Russian forces, leading more than a thousand inhabitants to flee the region. Russia officially recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia at the end of August. A ceasefire agreement was reached with mediation of the French presidency of the European Council, establishing the withdrawal of troops to pre-conflict positions. In numbers, the 2008 war provoked the displacement of nearly 200 000 people, some fleeing from South Ossetia, adjacent Georgian territories and the Kodori Gorge to Georgia and some others to the Russian Federation. Of those who were unable to return to their homes, about 23 000 of them are still in Georgia (Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia 2009).

3.2 Peace Process After 2008

Before Russia eased CIS sanctions in 1999, which were eventually suspended in 2008, Abkhazia was completely isolated from the outside world. Today, Abkhazia’s independence is recognized by a few countries, but in practice it is overly dependent on Russia in terms of economy and security. Abkhazia belongs to a category of state-like entities that are referred to in literature as ‘de facto states’, which usually seceded from another state through conflict and whose legitimacy is internationally not recognized (Hoch *et al.* 2016). Dependency on Russia, the ‘patron’ state, especially in terms of security, produces a negative reputation in the international arena and diminishes the incentive to negotiate a conflict settlement (Florea 2017). Since 2008, the Georgian-Abkhaz peace process has witnessed ups and downs. Social policies implemented by the Abkhaz de facto government, particularly those regarding language and people mobility, have negatively impacted on the non-ethnic Abkhaz population. Georgians living in the Gal(i) region have been affected the most. Moreover, Georgian policies aimed at promoting cross-border contact and cooperation are not welcomed by Sukhum(i). The increasing isolation of Abkhazia and the uncompromising stance of Abkhaz authorities towards Tbilisi, has made unofficial, non-diplomatic peace initiatives central for maintaining contacts between the two divided societies.

On the Abkhaz side, The Administrative Boundary Line (ABL), a demarcation line between the Abkhaz-controlled territory and Georgia, has been subject to a “borderisation” process (Consolidated Report on the Conflict in Georgia: 9). This entailed the closing down of

some of the available crossing points and the securing of the remaining ones with military personnel, causing problems for the daily movement of inhabitants and affecting especially elderly people. Movement between the two sides includes the flow of goods and people, usually for needs of livelihood, health reasons and education. The Gal/i district, where the main crossing point is located on the Engur/i river, has witnessed some accidents that worsened the precarious security situation of the area, concerning mainly detentions and the general activity of the Abkhaz and Russian security personnel (Consolidated Report on the Conflict in Georgia). Among the accidents that happened in the region, one that generated huge stir within Georgian society was the killing of Georgian Giga Otkhзорia by an Abkhaz guard in 2016 (Jasutis 2018). In 2018, the Georgian government published the “Otkhзорia-Tatunashvili List”, which includes the names of individuals accused or convicted for the murder of Georgian citizens in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and called for restriction of action and movement of these individuals.⁵ Moreover, in 2015, Abkhaz authorities adopted a law complicating the situation of Gal/i inhabitants. A great number of de facto passports were withdrawn or made void. Ethnic Georgians residents in Gali who are moving between Abkhazia and Georgia can be classified as foreigners and be forced to apply for a “foreign residence permit” (Consolidated Report.:10). Abkhaz passports or resident permits can be released with a document signed by Georgian authorities that testifies the renouncing of Georgian citizenship by the applicant. As for the rest of Abkhazians, the majority of them hold Russian passports, however with restrictions on movement that are being resented in Abkhazia. Another issue of concern is language, where education in Georgian language is not available in many schools in the Gal/i district. Ties with Russia have deepened on a variety of areas, as stipulated mainly in the 2014 and 2018 agreements with the Russian Federation. Areas of cooperation include foreign affairs, trade and customs approximation, legislation, security, education and healthcare (Jasutis 2018). Moreover, the political arena has been dominated by ethnic Abkhaz, while other national minorities are still under-represented. In 2007, the Abkhaz language became the official language in the administrative sphere and on newspapers. As of today, ethnic Georgians do not have the right to vote (Francis 2018).

Tbilisi concentrated its efforts on initiatives concerning economic cooperation, education, healthcare and cross-border mobility. These are included in the ‘State Strategy on

⁵Resolution n. 339, 26th June 2018, Georgian Government. Available at: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4234552?publication=0> .

Occupied Territories: Engagement Through Cooperation’⁶ of January 2010 and the ‘‘A Step to a Better Future’ Peace Initiative, Facilitation of Trade Across Dividing Lines’⁷ of 2018. Some provisions included in the 2010 document were implemented and are still working in terms of facilitating border-crossing for reasons such as health issues or education. However, the plan from last year has been rejected by Abkhaz authorities, who refuse to collaborate with Tbilisi. They subordinate any kind of further cooperation with Georgia on the recognition of independence of Abkhazia and the signing of an agreement on the non-resumption of violence⁸. The increasing isolation of Abkhazia and the deepening relations with Russia reduce the incentives to negotiate with Georgia on such kind of initiatives. Moreover, public opinion shows that the conflict is not a priority for Abkhazians after Russian recognition, which provides security and economic support. (Akaba and Khintba 2011 in Bernardi 2019). Initiatives from international bodies such as the EU and the UN have attempted to promote the transformation of the conflict by de-isolating Abkhazia and promoting a wide variety of initiatives on the level of financial resources, economic and political support, humanitarian aid and civil society initiatives. Major tools employed include the Non-Recognition and Engagement Policy (NREP), initiated by the European Union’s Special Representative for the South Caucasus (EUSRSC) Peter Semneby in 2009 and the Confidence Building Early Response Mechanism (COBERM), in partnership with United Nations Development Program in Georgia. The only diplomatic channel still in place is the Geneva Discussions international forum, where discussions are in place but where no major results are emerging⁹.

3.3 Civil Society and Memory in Georgian-Abkhaz Relations

Despite the hurdles of peace talks and the lack of results of the official peace process, civil society organizations in both Georgia and Abkhazia have been engaging in a wide range of activities at the local level, spanning from addressing the needs of vulnerable groups such

⁶ ‘‘State Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement Through Cooperation,’’ Government of Georgia, January 2010,

http://gov.ge/files/225_31228_851158_15.07.20-

[StateStrategyonOccupiedTerritoriesEngagementThroughCooperation\(Final\).pdf](http://gov.ge/files/225_31228_851158_15.07.20-StateStrategyonOccupiedTerritoriesEngagementThroughCooperation(Final).pdf).

⁷ ‘‘A Step to a Better Future’ Peace Initiative, Facilitation of Trade Across Dividing Lines,’’ Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, 2018,

http://smr.gov.ge/Uploads/Concept_EN_0eaaac2e.pdf.

⁸ Statement of the de facto Minister of Foreign Affairs of Abkhazia,

13/03/2018 and 5/04/2018 http://mfaapsny.org/en/allnews/news/statements_speeches/kommentariy-daurakove-o-novoy-mirnoyiniitiative-pravitelstva-gruzii-shag-k-luchshemu-budushchemu-/?sphrase_id=1521 ;

<http://apsnypress.info/en/opinion/daur-kove-we-are-faced-with-the-categorical-refusal-of-the-georgian-sideto-adopt-a-joint-document-o/>

⁹ 47th Round of Geneva International Discussions, 04/04/2019, civil.ge, <https://civil.ge/archives/301070>

as IDPs and women, to initiatives concerning local realities and people-to-people relations. These are mainly sponsored by international governmental and non-governmental donors. While those unofficial initiatives that started to take form at the end of the 1990s targeted key societal groups which are important for negotiations at the official level, the latter ones have been directed to the bottom level of society. Interestingly, one of the main aspects of recent activities has been the focus on the past and on ways to address the past to reconstruct relationships between Georgians and Abkhazians. Examples include the following. The “Memory Project”, sponsored by the British NGO Conciliation Resources, consists the collection of historical records, oral histories, letters, videoclips articles from the press and any other item relevant to the workshops concerning the memory of the conflict, which are stored in the form of a digital archive to be published in the future. Both sides are involved in the process. Another major initiative concerns workshops organized by Berghof Foundation, a German NGO, both in Abkhazia and Georgia where participants engage in a dialogue on history, memory, and identity. Some formats are directed in particular to youngsters. The absence of an institutionally-driven process of dealing with the past and the growing isolation of Abkhaz society make it imperative to study why civic efforts are taking the format of a dialogue on memory in a context where the divide between the two communities appears to be extremely deep. The border between Abkhazia and Georgia, which is more and more difficult to cross, symbolizes such divide and makes it harder to imagine reconciliation between societies. The case of Georgian-Abkhaz relations presents a peculiar type of reconciliation. There are no major processes which utilize judicial measures, investigations, public acknowledgement or apology, therefore we cannot speak of transitional justice. Partly, these aspects are targeted by civil society actors, whose main goal is, rather, the reconstruction of relationships and trust. This is the aspect that this research will refer to when speaking of reconciliation in the Georgian-Abkhaz context. In this respect, the peculiarity of the case is the use of memory as a central topic of reconciliation.

This focus of the research can not only provide insight on the actual activities on the ground, but also add relevant knowledge to the theoretical approaches to reconciliation that have been proposed in the literature review.

3.4 Main Memory Narratives

Based on the historical background underlined above, it is possible to distinguish some general features of memory narratives in the Georgian and Abkhaz context. As highlighted in

the previous chapter, there is a strong connection between memory and identity, both on an individual and a collective level. Memory can justify and give meaning to the present, as well as promoting group cohesion and, in turn, national identification.

In the case of Georgia, collective memory is based on a series of narratives that recur in the political realm, in school textbooks and media, which have been studied by the Georgian scholar Nutsa Batiashvili. She identifies the following memory narratives that she connects to the concept of “Georgianness”. In her view, the Georgian nation is particularly proud of its long and heroic history. For Georgians, their distinct character enabled them to maintain their own language, culture, religion and tradition throughout centuries, in the face of continuous invasion and occupation by foreign powers. The ability to preserve this identity despite the threat of assimilation is a natural characteristic and it is rooted in a struggle for unification and consolidation of the Georgian nation that has been taking place since ancient times. As noted by Batiashvili, in Soviet times Georgia represented an example of resistance to the assimilationist policies of the regime. Within this framework, Russia is perceived as a foreign invader who attempts to suppress Georgian national identity and statehood. Georgia is more akin to the European culture, and the West has helped it preserving its integrity. Reintegration of lost territories represents therefore a natural process of consolidation of the Georgian nation. (Batiashvili 2018).

Russia is also considered responsible in exploiting the Abkhaz people for its imperialist plans. This is testified by IDPs recollections about the war, who describe the Abkhaz as a population that has always been akin and peacefully coexisting with Georgians. They stress the role of Russia in planning and provoking tensions and separatism in order to hinder Georgian independence (Torcia 2015). This narrative became dominant after the Rose Revolution of 2003, which marked a passage from the post-Soviet aftershock and corruption. The new era was embodied by the Georgian leader Saakashvili, at the head of the United National Movement, who characterized a break with the previous corrupted and criminal system that was suffering from the Soviet legacy. Intense reform and reconstruction of the political and legal system, as well as economic revival, were accompanied by a new flag, anthem and coat of arms, as well as new national days. The shadow of Soviet times, symbolized for instance by the Stalin statue in Gori, was removed with it. Streets were renamed and the memory of victims and heroes against Russian occupation were represented in new monuments, such as the Heroes Square in Tbilisi (Torcia 2014).

The memory framework provided above is amplified by the analysis of Georgian media in the years after the 2008 conflict (Khapava 2013). Researchers found a narrative that puts a repeated stress on the image of Russia as a common enemy. According to this, Russian policies are to blame for deceiving the Abkhaz population, who are starting to realize the oppressive nature of Russian occupation and who will eventually opt for the better option of peacefully reintegrating with Georgia. In this sense, Georgia will 'save' Abkhazia from occupation. Abkhaz authorities are rarely mentioned, confirming the fact that they are perceived as having no legitimacy. Along with Russia, separatist forces and leaders of both sides are blamed for the conflict, whereas combatants and the rest of the population are depicted as victims and heroes. The idea of common victimhood of occupation by Russia is expressed in a message of fraternity and unity, which is directed towards Georgian population as a whole, which includes Abkhaz people. The carriers of this message are especially the representatives of the mothers of fallen soldiers, war veterans and the key figures of the Abkhaz government in exile.

How the Abkhaz instead remember their past with Georgia is mainly through the lenses of the Soviet period, where they insist on the assimilationist character of the Georgian political elite during Soviet times, which the Abkhaz repeatedly opposed. This articulated in perceptions which consolidated the feeling of threat to survival of Abkhaz identity and the growing nationalist sentiments. Public protests and petitions directed to Moscow in 1957, 1964, 1967, 1978 and 1989 are remembered as attempts of emancipation from Georgia. However, Secessionist aspirations were repeatedly suppressed (Akaba 2011). At the same time, the fear coming from Georgian nationalism and Gamsakhurdia, who openly referred to Abkhaz and Ossetian minorities as puppets of the Kremlin, terrorists is also significant (Souleimanov: 90). Abkhazians also include, in their narrative focused on 'historical injustice', mass deportations carried out in Soviet times towards them, Circassians and other Caucasian ethnic groups, blaming this also on Georgia (Akaba 2011: 9). An interesting example of how collective memory is represented in Abkhazia is the commemoration of the victory of 1993, when Abkhaz forces raised the flag of Abkhazia on the Council of Minister's buildings in Sukhum(i). That day is remembered as the day of 'Liberation'. Last year, it started with a mourning for the soldiers who died in that war at the Park of Glory. Children participated at a drawing competition next to the Dramatic Theater, while secondary school students played a concert. War veterans also hold a concert the same day. All these were celebrations continued for the whole week including military parades and celebrations at memorial sites. Celebrations such as those taking place in Sukhum(i) on the day of victory over Georgian forces go beyond the

simple one-day commemoration. All the events are part of an entire holiday period in which every citizen has the chance to participate. Activities involve all layers of society, not only adults whose experience of the war is still vivid, but also children and youth in general. Events encompass military displays as well as artistic and entertainment ones, all part of a shared experience which is to bring a sense of proudness and glory to the collective.

Chapter 4. Analysis of Data and Discussion

The following thematic analysis aimed at answering the following questions: to what extent is collective memory, in its various forms, an obstacle to reconciliation practices in Georgia and Abkhazia? How can collective memory in the Georgian-Abkhaz context be harnessed to promote reconciliation? From the analysis of data collected through semi-structured expert interviews, three macro-themes emerged, two for the first question and one for the second. The final section is dedicated to the discussion of these results in the light of the theoretical considerations outlined in Chapter 1.

4.1. Memory and politics

A major theme that emerged from all interviews from both sides concerns one of the primary contexts where memory takes shape and is transmitted to the collective, namely politics. All participants, when asked about the importance of memory in their society, made explicit reference to the use of memory by politicians. Due to the unresolved status of the conflict, political figures from both sides have tended to promote a certain narrative of the past that justifies and legitimizes political choices. More importantly, the mainstream vision of the past is a simplified one that is tailored to the political situation and that ensures consensus.

This produces two main consequences: the lack of incentive towards dealing with history's contradictions and the incompatibility of the respective claims. The political narrative on memory in Georgia is focused on Russia, which is perceived as being and having been a major obstacle to Georgian independence and nation state. Abkhazia is referred to as an occupied territory by Russian forces, which has to be reintegrated in Georgia. For the Abkhaz perspective, Georgia has always threatened the Abkhaz nation, which has managed to survive and build its own state. Their suffering should be recognized with independence.

Irakli used an interesting metaphor to describe the phenomenon in the case of Georgian politics.

“In Georgia there is a standard memory that is like a fairy tale. There are heroes and traitors. There is us, the victims, and the others, the enemies. It has always been a struggle for freedom and independence.” (Irakli)

In this perspective, the focus is on Russia, the enemy who has repeatedly occupied Georgia and prevented it from flourishing. Those who act in the interest of Russia might be perceived as internal enemies. However, there are some elements which do not fit in this Manichean approach to historical memory. Primarily, the legacy of Stalin and other Georgian figures who have not acted in the interest of Georgian independence, in Irakli’s view, have been treated with rejection and denial. Irakli mentioned the museum of Soviet Occupation, created in 2006, where the role of Stalin and Beria, mass terror, deportations and related events are almost invisible. He also mentioned the considerable restrictions on the access to historical archives of former KGB and the communist party. The costs for copying material are extremely high and much data is not accessible because of regulations about personal data. The current law therefore imposes limitations in terms of financial resources and is responsible for a gap in historical research of the Soviet past. Memory policies, according to this view, seem to have hampered or avoided the problem of dealing with that part of the past that results contradictory in the face of the idea of a repressed Georgian nation.

This attitude is mirrored in society: Irakli talked about one project for the victims of Soviet repression and deportations. A metal plaque with the name of a former Georgian commander who was deported and shot in 1938 was put on the wall of the house where he lived in Tbilisi. The news sparked protests and demands of removing the plaque, since the commander participated in the Soviet occupation of Georgia in 1921. It was requested that the victims be filtered in terms of whom is worth to be remembered and whom is not.

“When the news appeared there was a very angry and strong reaction in the society because this commander was Soviet and in 1921 he was head of one of the armies that participated in the occupation of Georgia. This part of society perceived these acts as we are glorifying the society. They asked that we should filter the victims.” (Irakli)

The issue is still pending with the Tbilisi city council. In the collective perception, this person is a traitor, an internal enemy that tarnishes the memory of the Georgian collective.

As for Abkhazia, as Elena explained, the prevalent narrative describes Georgia as the aggressor, while Russia is perceived as the ‘friend’ and protector. Flows of migrations in and out of Abkhazia between the late 19th and the early 20th century caused a reduction of ethnic

Abkhaz and an increase in the number of Georgians. In their view, Abkhaz people have been forcedly replaced and discriminated by Georgians during Soviet times, in a way that marginalized them in society and tried to suppress their ethnic identity, tradition and language. Elena mentioned the time when Abkhaz language started not to be taught anymore in school and when Abkhaz intellectuals' requests for more equal rights between Georgians and Abkhazians were repeatedly dismissed by Moscow. Angela, Elena and Lana underlined how this memory has maintained alive the fear of a new military attack, which has been very vivid within Abkhaz society, even after 2008.

Angela explained that politicians in power have been benefitting for numerous cycles of elections from the general narrative that sees Georgia as the major threat and problem for the Abkhaz de facto state, which brought broad consensus.

“Memories are still strong. Whenever you face a problem, memories come back, you get angry again, and you have to blame it on something or someone. For many people in Abkhazia, Georgia is to blame for our situation. Until not long ago, this was also the political view. I can't get education, why? Because no one recognizes my passport. I cannot get the international support, why? Because no one recognizes my country” (Angela)

However, after the recognition of Abkhazia by Russia in 2008, people's concerns have been shifting from the status of the conflict to internal issues such as employment, development and corruption, which can only be blamed on the government itself, not Georgia. The previous memory framework is not working anymore and, despite the conflict is not solved, political elites are now directing the attention to internal problems because this is the demand in the public. However, and despite expressed criticism and frustration over Georgian attitude towards their side, Abkhaz participants denounced the dire situation of the current Abkhaz government, where corruption and incompetence are prevailing and are neither making the internal situation better, nor contributing to constructive dialogue with the Georgian side.

The responses highlighted how both sides' attitudes towards the past, each one focusing on different parts of the same story, do not leave much room for dialogue on memory. Angela, Elena and Lana sustained that at the present moment there is no incentive on both sides to review and reconsider the past. Both political agendas are about the present: for Georgia, “reintegration” of Abkhazia, “occupied territories”, antagonism with Russia and getting closer to the EU; for Abkhazia, being recognized as an independent country and improve state-building. Lana, despite criticism towards the Abkhaz government, attributes a great deal of

responsibility to Georgian authorities, as they always refer to Russia and do not treat Abkhazia as “equal”. Elena also thinks that Georgia has used the framework of historical enmity with Russia for achieving international support, forgetting the times when Abkhazia was under sanctions and blockade from the whole Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). For her, this lack of acknowledgement of the hardship Abkhaz people had to go through is very frustrating and it only reinforces Abkhazia’s dependency on Russia. She added that Georgians often forget about their friendship with Russia at times in the past when it was convenient for them. Mamuka observed how, despite a general focus on the past with Russia, Georgian attitude towards the conflict has nevertheless been shifting from total closure to openness to dialogue. Many initiatives have been designed to improve relations, but they have been met with gradual closure of Abkhaz authorities. In his view, the problem lays in that Abkhaz aspirations regard a vision of the future that Georgia will never accept:

“Abkhaz have a bit frozen those grievances and now the conflict is mostly fed by a realpolitik vision on the future. They are preoccupied with the future. They stopped being interested in discussions about the past. This is not good for dialogue, because we don’t follow them in their visions of the future, which means recognition of the independence” (Mamuka)

At the time being, it would be too unlikely for them to step back and reconsider their past, since it is not convenient. They might risk losing their credibility and the results they have achieved so far. This is why the memory narrative focuses on what highlights the historical injustice and victimhood they have experienced.

The majority of participants agreed that challenging a view of the past that brings consensus is just not possible or very inconvenient in the political arena. The immediate effect of the use of these narratives on the political level has been that of focusing attention and resources on the threat of an evil enemy and a past of struggle against this enemy. Ghia believes that:

“It is the future and present that define the past. Based on that, we choose to remember certain things actively and forget others. In Georgia, we have internal problems, relations with Russia and the West, etc. This, of course, defines Georgian agenda. Only if issues with Russia are sorted out, which I think is very unlikely, we can start revisiting the past in a new light. But at this point there is not much social demand. If there is some solution acceptable for both sides, then past becomes safe because you will not blow yourself up on the past. But if there is an

issue, the past can be instrumentalized and used as a weapon against the other and you have no incentive to agree on it.” (Ghia)

In other words, as long as there is no political solution to the conflict, there will be no stimulus nor social demand to rethink the past in a new light. On the contrary, the past will be adapted according to present needs and instrumentalized against the other.

4.2 Memory and Identity

The importance of memory for identity is summarized in Angela’s words:

“Memory is a very powerful thing. It’s part of the society, especially in Abkhazia but in the whole Caucasus. It’s part of our identity. It influences who we are, who we think we are and who we want to be. Our memories shape our identity on a community level. It has been accumulated for centuries.” (Angela)

Participants associated memory with identity in multiple ways. Abkhaz participants focused both on individual and on collective experience of the war as a marker of identity. Angela highlighted the everyday aspect of memory:

“In Abkhazia you see the traits of war. It used to be worse, but still now even if you try to overcome it you see it everyday. You see women in black, the border closed, people trying to bring products in, people who used to have one job before they are in the market, it’s kind of humiliating. It is not finished, you carry it with you.” (Angela)

In Abkhazia, the traces of the war are still visible. Destructed buildings, non-functioning facilities, the closed border, along with socio-economic difficulties and lack of opportunities, represent the normality. It is easy to blame this on Georgia. They say that the fact that Abkhazia won the conflict back in the nineties made Abkhaz stronger about their views and the belief that they are on the right side. Georgia is the one to blame for the situation they live in. The society is very small, therefore nearly everyone suffered losses in their families and friends during the war. Women are still wearing black scarves to mourn their relatives and people are regularly crossing the border to sell products to Georgia. The situation has been changing extremely slowly, whereas Georgia has been improving as a country by the minute during the past decades. For Abkhaz interviewees, the conflict is still part of what they are. In this sense, we can see a direct connection between the past and the present individual experience, in terms of personal losses and hardship, as well as present socio-economic challenges. All Georgian participants mentioned how this is the case as well for IDPs in Georgia, the majority of whom

still dream to go back to their homes. Marina, however, observed how destruction and losses from the war affected a comparably smaller population in Georgia than in Abkhazia. In her opinion, this marks a difference in terms of the intensity of identification with the conflict. While in Abkhazia, as confirmed by Abkhaz participants as well, the memory of the conflict and its legacy is directly linked with being Abkhaz or an individual who lives in Abkhazia, in Georgia the emotional feeling could be less intense for those who did not have direct experience of the conflict or relatives involved in it. The 1992-1993 conflict with Abkhazia tends to be shadowed in the collective memory by the 2008 conflict with Russia. This is reflected as well by the experience of interviewees who participated in workshops with mixed groups, who noticed a general propension of Georgian participants to speak less emotionally and more easily about the conflict than Abkhaz.

Another theme that was given considerable attention was the importance of mediums of transmission of memory in forming a consolidated narrative and resulting in identification with the conflict. Despite the personal connection to the war and its memory could be considered the most immediate factor in the formation of an identity related to it, the majority of participants mentioned how the family, the school, media and politics contribute to the process. Politics, which has been discussed before, can also be seen as a mediator of memory and identity, whereby people identify with memory discourses proposed by the political establishment. Similarly, how memory is talked about in the family, in history taught in school and reproduced through media, contributes to consolidate certain memory narratives. Ketii said that she was born with hate towards Russia. It was shared by the whole family, especially the grandma, and it just became part of Ketii as well. She knew that Russia invaded Georgia several times and was mistreating Georgians living in Abkhazia. She studied it at school and heard it on the news or at home. She defined herself a “nationalist”. After 2008, the decision to take on a professional career of ombudsperson was inspired by the desire to help Georgian people on the border with Abkhazia. In her work, she realized that she had a simplistic view of the situation and that she knew very little about Abkhazians and the problems they were facing. When she was confronted with something she had not been told in school or at home, that was when she started questioning the situation and being critical towards what she had always been told. She also mentioned how difficult it was to talk in critical terms with her friends and family.

Lana shared something similar, saying that before starting working on interviewing people and participating at workshops she had difficulty in hearing the other side. She called herself “radical” and said she only believed in her and her nation’s truth and suffering. She

realized much of the knowledge she had of the war clashed with the new information she started to hear, uncovering what were instead rumors and stereotypes about Georgians and the conflict. Lana realized she had never had the chance or the need of checking whether those stories were verified, or if there were different versions. Similarly to Ketii, she considered it as the consequence of not having the choice to hear a single perspective that would not repeat the key ideas of the perpetual suffering of her nation and of the blame of Georgia for it. Lana remembered how she has always used to have ethnic Georgian friends from Gal/i and other origins as well, including Armenians, Russians, Ukrainians. While growing up, she did not perceive any difference towards them. However, she remembers how one of her lecturers in university used to treat her Georgian friend from Gal/i, being overly impolite with him and assigning him low marks on every assignment. Lana was shocked by how this influenced other people's perception of him. Regarding the role of media in transmitting memory discourses, participants did not elaborate on the topic significantly. However, there was a general stress of Georgian participants on the limitation of independent sources of information in Abkhazia and on the influence of Russian propaganda. One Abkhaz interviewee, instead, talked about how Georgian media generally portray Abkhazia in a very stereotyped way, and people active on social media are often attacking her personally and with aggressive tones.

Similarly to what was noticed in the political sphere, where the actors are categorized by memory narratives through concepts of amity and enmity, the same happens to individuals. The theme of social stigma emerged as what characterizes people who directly or indirectly challenge mainstream views or positions in the conflict, who come to be identified as "traitors" or "enemies". When memory narratives are conflicting and politicized, identity becomes a choice: either on this side, or the other. When Angela was commenting on the situation in Gal/i she explained it as the result of the politicization of ethnicity according to the conflict dynamics. The passportization policies and voting system are a clear example of policies demanding a choice from Georgians living in Abkhazia to be on the Abkhaz side, if they want to be treated equally to other Abkhazians. Otherwise, they will not benefit from the same rights and they might be perceived as internal enemies. Lana explained that the failure of plans and policies designed by the Georgian government to provide services for Georgians in Abkhazia or even for Abkhaz people as well, is partly because they indirectly ask people to make this kind of choice. Mamuka stated that the healthcare plan has been a great opportunity for many Abkhazians but that, to his knowledge, it is being used as a last resource. Abkhazians risk to be considered as "traitors" for choosing to go to the other side.

In connection to this, he remembered about one war veteran and head of the invalid society in Abkhazia, who went to Tbilisi for health reasons and accepted to participate in an interview with Mamuka. They had a relaxed conversation and talked about friendship between Abkhazia and Georgia. The interview was broadcasted and uploaded on youtube some months ago. According to Mamuka's version, the man was heavily attacked online by Abkhaz accounts and, apparently, he was forced to leave Abkhazia and had to publicly apologize for accepting to be interviewed. Irakli and Marina also mentioned this event, as an example that one of the obstacles for reconciliation is that in the Abkhaz society those who engage with the "enemy", in a way or the other, will be stigmatized. This aspect is mirrored as well in all the participant's work as civil society activists. Participants often used the terms "pro-Russian", "pro-Georgian", "pro-Western" as definitions attached to them because their work entails working with the "enemy". Marina said that initiatives by civil society, but also governmental plans directed towards reconciliation and improving of relations, no matter how innovative they might be, will generally be criticized as pro-Russian. Abkhazians are perceived as being brainwashed by Russian propaganda. Mamuka said he initially experienced pressure from IDPs in Georgia and the Abkhaz government in exile, since his work seemed to be anti-patriotic, pro-Russian and to undermine Georgian position. On the contrary, initiatives in Abkhazia and criticism of the Abkhaz government or Russia by the Abkhaz society can be targeted as pro-Western and pro-Georgian. Angela and Elena experienced a great deal of social pressure for their work and said that everything they do is usually done very carefully or is not publicized until they think it is the right moment. As a result of all these conditions, constructive criticism and analysis are discarded as a sort of betrayal of the respective side in the conflict.

4.3 Creating Space for Memory: description of reconciliation initiatives

All respondents but one talked extensively about providing space to people as the purpose of their work. What kind of space and for what purpose? The idea of space is very broad and it has been articulated in different ways by respondents: the physical dimension of meeting with people to talk about the conflict, sharing and hearing people's perceptions, and creating dialogue.

First of all, space is created in the physical sense of the term, whereby people meet to attend reconciliation activities. Initiatives taking place in Abkhazia and Georgia usually host local people from the respective side, however there were cases where one or two participants from the other side were hosted. Meetings and conferences are also organized abroad, where

Georgians and Abkhazians physically meet. It is the case of last year's event in Yerevan, which was mentioned enthusiastically by three respondents. It has also been underlined how important it is not only to provide space for people to meet and talk exclusively about the conflict within their own society, but also to give them the chance to meet with people from the other side. The vast majority of Abkhazians and Georgians have not crossed the border for decades or have never done it in their whole life, in the case of younger generations.

Secondly, space is given to share individual experiences and perceptions about the conflict. Initiatives are designed so that participants will be able to tell stories that otherwise only a few people in their circles would know. Ketii said that:

“The main idea is to give to the people who have not witnessed the war an idea of the different narratives and memories and views, which are most of the times not the mainstream views or those seen in the media, in school textbooks,” (Ketii)

This gives the chance not only for unheard or suppressed voices to be heard, but also to remember people who want to be remembered but who feel forgotten. Four respondents (two Abkhaz and two Georgians) underlined that initiatives focused on “oral history” turned out to be widely welcomed by elderly people, who generally feel misunderstood and neglected by younger generations. As Lana said:

“Elderly people in particular, they want to be valued, they want to be remembered. In the Eastern Part of Abkhazia one woman was like “how did you find me because no one remembers about me. She told that once she had young people at home and she had some videos of the war on the TV. The youngsters asked her to switch off and she started crying. She felt no one cares about her pain” (Lana)

The oral history format is performed by NGOs all over Abkhazia and Georgia and it consists in the collection of interviews. Marina, Lana and Angela noted how enthusiastic was the reaction of the majority of respondents to tell their story or to contribute by providing personal objects, pictures or videotapes. Others, however, preferred not to be named or asked to retain the information for a long time before disclosure, indicating that social stigma related to personal positions or choices before or during the conflict is still present. Lana recalled:

“A week ago we were in a village where they all were ex-combatants. It's very hard to work with them because they say “you are the first ones who remember about us”. It is very

popular in Abkhazia that people have memories but those who participate are always shy, they don't talk much. In the villages we see that there is so much work that is still undone.” (Lana)

Moreover, and more importantly, participants are given the chance to hear other stories in a context that aims to be open-minded and de-politicized. Participants expressed throughout the interviews how memories can vary, if compared to the dominant memory narratives. Contrary to other contexts such as the family, group of friends and other types of interactions within one's own society, where people tend to refrain to sharing opinions that do not conform to the mainstream, there is the attempt to provide an environment which is free of such constraints. Angela and Elena noticed that younger generations do not have memories of living together with the other side, apart from those who are transmitted by their families and friends. While elderly people might recall memories of friendship and solidarity with their Mingrelian or Abkhaz neighbour, youngsters do not share good memories with the other side. They are more exposed to narratives of suffering and struggle. Moreover, people in general know very little about the historical aspect of the conflict. Marina stressed that in general, both young and elderly people tend to not remember key historical facts or dates, and that this makes it easier for them to share mainstream or even radical views on the conflict that they acquire from the social context they live in. Personal stories that challenge the memory discourse that people have been exposed to can therefore make a considerable difference in providing new knowledge and awareness about the past.

Keti talked extensively about group dynamics at workshops organized by Berghof Foundation. As a mediator, she was both coordinating and actively participating during the events. One of the main activities of the workshops was to listen to interviews on personal recollections of the war and to give the word to each participant to comment on them. The interviews tended to be chosen on the basis of the novelty and originality of their perspective. She immediately recognized how numerous and rooted were certain stereotypes and preconceptions she had of the other side, and how narrow was the picture she had of the conflict. She explained that this resembled the participants' most recurrent feedback on the activities. Lana expressed similar feelings when referring to the interviews that she recorded and to the “Biographical Salon”, a storytelling event that has been taking place in Sukhum(i) since 2015, which is open to the public and usually broadcasted on TV. Keti, however, said that a similar initiative on Radio Liberty and broadcasted in Georgia was not as successful as expected, probably because it did not reach a wide public. In regard to this, she added:

“The idea is to reach many people. The group I had was an intensive one. You could listen to more difficult interviews. You can attend a workshop, but you can also skip the next, it’s voluntary. If we have a continuous process and one group develops it might bring more results. However, even listening to one interview can make change in perceptions.” (Keti)

Along with meeting, sharing and hearing stories, another effect of this type of reconciliation work is to provide space for dialogue. Dialogue can take place in different ways. It can be interpersonal, through the interaction between people participating at events and activities. Angela explained that the process of dialogue starts with everyone being very shy to talk. Meeting after meeting, everyone feels more and more confident to express their views even on delicate topics, which is very positive. However, sometimes there might be dramatic phases when sensitive issues make people less willing to hear the other’s opinions. She recalled an event with Georgian and Abkhaz people together, which she said was somehow exemplary of the dynamics of how dialogue works:

“Recently, I was in a meeting with the younger Georgians, who were not experienced and in the beginning, it was like the ideal situation, there was dialogue in a very constructive way. At some point, boom. People got tired to be tolerant, respective, open, and started insulting each other. People, at that point, show their true faces and dialogue is showing its true face. You lose hope and you feel demotivated” (Angela)

However, dialogue would be restored afterwards, and people would listen to each other again. For her, dialogue means to accept that the other side has different opinions, but that it is nevertheless possible to talk. Another type of dialogue happens, for example, within groups where younger and older participants, including war veterans, mothers of fallen soldiers, and other people who have no direct experience with the conflict. In this case, as Keti explained, it is interesting not only how multiple views within Georgian experience arise, but also how that the importance memory has for each individual is tied to how much it matters for its identity, having a considerable emotional impact on them according to their experience. She noticed that those who have no direct experience tend to have a one-sided view, whereas others show a more nuanced view, having a balancing effect. However, the most “radical” ones, are those who are more eager to participate again in workshops, according to both Keti’s and Lana’s experience. Keti said:

“But the difficult part is with the ones who have someone who died, or IDPs, for them memory is very important. The idea they have of the past is very much part of their identity,

that is why it is difficult to talk about it. The ones who witnessed have a complex view. The young have a very one-sided view. It's what they learned from school, from family, from the media.” (Keti)

Lastly, the dialogue takes place within individuals. This aspect was mentioned in the paragraph about mediums of memory transmission, where Keti and Lana explained how their view of the conflict changed from being radical to being open after doing this type of work. Angela also noticed that, despite each side's position on the conflict does not change, the sole acknowledgment of the other side's perspective and the origins of their claims, creates a different atmosphere. This atmosphere is characterized by the possibility to review one's own beliefs and understand that there is no “true” belief. Therefore, both calm dialogue and heated debate, despite the intense emotional weight, are a crucial element for societal reconciliation.

4.4 Discussion of Results

A common thread throughout the whole analysis has been the presence of two opposite ways of framing mutual relations, reflecting in two collective memories. On the Georgian side, relations with Abkhazia are connected to broader relations with the Russian Federation, considering a historical perception of Russia as a threat for Georgian independence and identity. On the Abkhaz side, Georgia represents instead the historical oppressor and a constant threat to the survival of Abkhazia.

The presence of a dominant memory representing these perspectives is visible. It is transmitted and shared within society. Rather than actively promoting or imposing it, Georgian institutions seem to be adhering to the Russian-centered narrative because of present needs that make it a priority over relations with Abkhazia. The latter, on the other hand, is responding to Tbilisi's peace initiatives with reluctance, which reinforces the perception of the Abkhaz as those who have fallen on the trap of Russia. At the same time, this narrative has an impact on people's perceptions as it has been said that the family, media and school are also adhering to it. Because of its rather simplistic and selective character and the lack of policies to address conflictual pasts, the dominant narrative appears to contribute to the general lack of knowledge on the historical background of Georgian-Abkhaz relations, and to the strengthening of stereotypical perceptions of Abkhaz people in Georgian society. On the Abkhaz side, the narrative about Georgia as a threat, despite political actors have refrained in recent times to resort to it because of the low consensus it ensures, is still very widespread. The focus is rather on the future right now. However, the threat of a military invasion by Georgia is still vivid

within society, which reinforces the perception of Russia as the protector. School, family and media have also been mentioned as carriers of this memory narrative.

From this perspective, the presence of a dominant memory poses obstacles to reconciliation because it affects the way people perceive their relations with the conflicting part. Dominant narratives from the Georgian and Abkhaz sides tend to categorize the other with definitions such as ‘enemy’ or ‘traitor’, emphasizing their respective victimhood and to not consider the other version. As it has been noted by participants, these mechanisms cause the entrenchment of each side in their own perspective. This is testified by numerous examples of participants who felt that they unconsciously shared these narratives before realizing they were too narrow and selective. Similarly to what had been stated in the theoretical part, dominant narratives can transmit perceptions based on past enmity and animosity, reducing the incentive to engage in dialogue. However, rather than interpreting the situation as one where political elites have an a priori interest in keeping alive past animosities and instrumentalizing trauma, it can be argued that it is the political agenda that defines what kind of narrative to promote. When it does not produce consensus anymore, like in Abkhazia, it can be discarded.

Collective memory is therefore not necessarily subject to malign instrumental use by political elites. However, when it is present and transmitted in the form of a dominant narrative through different channels, along with the political one, it can be considered as an obstacle to constructive dialogue, hence to reconciliation. In this regard, reconciliation work can harness diversity of perspectives constructively through dialogue and through the challenge of pre-existing narratives carried by individuals. However, regarding the activities that have been discussed above, impressions from participants suggest that such activities are extremely limited in scope to challenge dominant narratives.

Another common thread that emerged from the data concerns the importance of identity and emotions connected to collective memories associated with conflicting sides. Both Georgian and Abkhaz societies make large use of memory for defining their identity. They refer to a past of struggle to preserve this identity. They also use memory to give sense to the reality they live in. These identities are charged with feelings which are represented by those participants of reconciliation initiatives who have been described as ‘harder’ to deal with. The pain associated with these memories can be per se an obstacle to engage in dialogue. Another obstacle is posed by the fact that changing social representations of the past that are rooted in identity is challenging. An additional element suggested by the data, which was not detected

in the literature, is the concept of stigma and reputation. Interviewees highlighted the amount of pressure from society that they constantly receive for the work they do. They might be targeted as pro-Russian, in case of Georgians, and pro-Georgia, or pro-West, in the case of Abkhaz people. Even if for them it is normal and it does not prevent them to do their job, they underlined how this might be extended to all those who participate, disincentivizing others to participate. In a similar way, those who might have a divergent opinion from the dominant narrative, could be also targeted and discouraged to express their views. It can be argued, therefore, that stigma and reputation attached to those who engage with the 'enemy' or who does not agree with the dominant vision, function as an obstacle to reconciliation by discouraging minoritarian narratives to emerge.

Conclusions

This thesis explored the connection between collective memory and reconciliation in the case of Georgian-Abkhaz relations, through the eyes of civil society actors. The aim was to establish whether collective memory could function both as an obstacle to and as a potential tool for reconciliation. The theoretical discussion focused on the definition of individual and collective memory with their main characteristics. The link between collective memory and identity was explored. It provided the basis for the following assessment on the role of collective memory in conflict. It was found that social representations of the past can influence the way individuals perceive the legitimacy of violent actions. Where memories of enmity have a deep connection with the identity and the emotion of individuals, they might legitimize the need for violence. This process can be instrumentalized by elites, who might mobilize sentiments and engage individuals in collective violent action if this suits their power goals. Collective memory was also analyzed in relation to the concept of reconciliation. The assumptions derived from the analysis of the literature highlighted two functions of collective memory: an intimate one, connected with individual identity and emotions, which poses hurdles to reconciliation when it transmits feelings of enmity, pain and mistrust; an instrumental one, connected with the instrumental use by political elites of dominant memory narratives for power gains. The latter produces obstacles for reconciliation when these narratives are exclusive and self-serving. The analysis of data collected through semi-structured interviewing confirmed that dominant narratives in Georgia and Abkhazia have a detrimental impact on reconciliation, but this effect is not necessarily connected to the

instrumental use of dominant narratives, rather to their robustness, which is due to the fact that they are transmitted through different channels, such as media, school and family. The role of emotion and identity in affecting reconciliation was also confirmed. An additional factor that emerged was the role of stigma associated with those who do not conform with prevalent memory narratives, who might be perceived as traitors and who could be deterred from engaging in dialogue both with the conflicting side and within its own side.

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Annexes

Annex 1. Tables and figures

	Communicative memory	Cultural Memory
Content	historical experiences within the framework of individual biographies	mythical past/ancient history, events from an absolute past
Forms	informal, loosely shaped, natural, created through interaction and everyday experience	consciously established, highly formalized, ceremonial communication, festival

Media	living memory in individual minds, experience, hearsay	established objectivations, traditional symbolic encoding/ staging in word, image, dance, etc.
Temporal structure	80-100 years, a temporal horizon of three or four generations that shifts with the passage of time	absolute past of a mythical ancient time
Carriers	non-specific, eyewitnesses within a memory community	specialized carriers of tradition

Table I: Comparison of communicative memory and Cultural Memory (J. Assmann 1992, 56) in Erll 2011, 29.

Annex 2. Maps

Map of Georgia with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Source: International Crisis Group, 'Abkhazia: The Long Road to Reconciliation', Europe Report 224, 10 April 2013, p. 27.



Map of Abkhazia. Source: International Crisis Group, 'Georgia and Russia: Clashing over Abkhazia', Europe Report 193, 5 June 2008, p. 25.



Annex 3. List of interviews

This is a list of the interviews collected for this project. Some of them have not been directly quoted. However, they have given an enormous contribute to this research.

Name	Place of the interview	Date	Current position
Mamuka Kuparadze	Tbilisi	12 June 2019	Studio Re
Marina Elbakidze	Tbilisi	14 June 2019	CIPDD
Angela	Skype	17 June 2019	Non-disclosed
Irakli Khvadagiani	Tbilisi	19 June 2019	SovLab
Keti Akhobadze	Tbilisi	20 June 2019	Berghof Foundation
Elena	Skype	22 June 2019	Non-disclosed
Lana	Skype	2 July 2019	Berghof Foundation
Ghia Nodia	Tbilisi	3 July 2019	CIPDD, Ilia State Uni

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RECONCILIATION PROCESS: OBSTACLE OR OPPORTUNITY?,**

supervised by Dr David Darchiashvili, Dr Adrian Florea

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