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Article:

Collective Threat Framing and Mobilization in Civil War[*]

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Abstract

Research on civil war mobilization emphasizes armed group recruitment tactics and individual motivations to fight, but does not explore how individuals come to perceive the threat involved in civil war. Drawing on eight months of fieldwork with participants and nonparticipants in the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992–93, this article argues that social structures, within which individuals are embedded, provide access to information critical for mobilization decisions by collectively framing threat. Threat framing filters from national through local leadership, to be consolidated and acted on within quotidian networks. Depending on how the threat is perceived—whether toward the self or the collectivity at its different levels—individuals adopt self- to other-regarding roles, from fleeing to fighting on behalf of the collectivity, even if it is a weaker actor in the war. This analysis sheds light on how the social framing of threat shapes mobilization trajectories and how normative and instrumental motivations interact in civil war.

INTRODUCTION

Why do some individuals engage in high-risk mobilization, while others escape the fighting in the conditions of imminent threat against their group? The question of mobilization has occupied a prominent place in the civil war literature. Scholars have analyzed individual motivations for participation and recruitment strategies employed by armed groups[1] to motivate participation—the dual dynamics of mobilization.[2] Studies have demonstrated the roles of collective grievances (Gurr 1970; Horowitz 1985), selective incentives and social sanctions (Weinstein 2007; Humphreys and Weinstein 2008), social networks and norms (Petersen 2001; Staniland 2012; Parkinson 2013), emotions, identities, and ideological commitments (Wood 2003; Viterna 2013; Gutiérrez and Wood 2014), and security-seeking drives (Kalyvas 2006; Kalyvas and Kocher 2007). These determinants have been shown to variously affect individual paths to participation (Viterna 2013), or roles (Petersen 2001; Parkinson 2013) adopted by individuals at different stages of conflict (Gates 2002) and across different types of armed groups (Gutiérrez and Giustozzi 2010).

Yet mobilization decisions depend not only on individual motivations for participation and armed group recruitment tactics, but also on the ways in which individuals come to perceive threat involved in civil war. Without an understanding of who is threatened, by whom, and to what extent, individuals have no basis to make difficult choices about whether to risk their lives fighting for the group or pursue alternative options, such as defection or flight. How threat perceptions emerge and influence individual mobilization decisions, however, has not been explored in current research on civil war. This leaves unanswered critical questions about mobilization: Where do individuals seek information on threat? Who provides such information? How does it affect mobilization decisions?

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[1] This applies to both insurgent and incumbent forces.

[2] On the dual structure of mobilization, see Eck (2010). See Humphreys and Weinstein (2008) for a review of the literature on individual motivations and Blattman and Miguel (2010) on recruitment.

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Drawing on the case of Abkhaz mobilization at the beginning of the Georgian-Abkhaz war (August 14-18, 1992), this article argues that actors across social structures, within which potential participants[3] are embedded, collectively frame threat posed by civil war and shape individual threat perceptions and mobilization decisions. In the context of mass confusion surrounding the first days of the war in Abkhazia, collective threat framing was central to Abkhaz mobilization. Abkhaz men and women relied on the familiar social structures of family, friendship, local relation, and national authority for essential information on how to understand threat presented by the war and how to act in response across a range of combatant, support, and non-fighter roles that existed at the war onset.

The information filtered from Abkhazia's national leaders through respected members of local communities, to be reinforced and acted upon within the quotidian networks of relatives and friends. Invoking shared understandings of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, these actors produced a joint view of the Georgian armed forces as threatening Abkhazia's autonomy and the Abkhaz as a group. The emergence of collective threat framing affected how Abkhaz men and women perceived threat—as directed toward the self or the group—and their mobilization decisions, from individual attempts to flee or defect to collective mobilization to fight on the weaker, Abkhaz side in the war.

By tracing the process of collective threat framing at the onset of Abkhaz war mobilization, this article highlights the variable and socially constructed nature of threat perceptions in civil war. It demonstrates how shared conceptions of threat emerge and what role social structures play in this process. The argument centers on a simple but overlooked function of social structures in the midst of uncertainty inherent in civil war, to provide access to and consolidate information based on pre-existing notions of conflict. Individual instrumental and normative motives for mobilization and self- to other-regarding mobilization decisions are situated in this embedded social context.

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[3] I focus on fighters and define potential participants as all individuals in the mobilization pool who are able to fight.

The following sections, first, present the puzzle of Abkhaz mobilization and the contributions of this study. I then turn to my research design and develop the argument on collective threat framing by looking closely at the Abkhaz case. The article concludes with the implications of this analysis for research on social mobilization.

THE PUZZLE OF ABKHAZ MOBILIZATION

Mobilization by ordinary people in the face of severe state repression and physical harm in fighting, often against superior state and non-state forces, has been widely recorded in the civil war studies.[4] The puzzle of high-risk mobilization is reflected in the Abkhaz case—a case of immediate mass mobilization for war against a stronger opponent. Today a breakaway territory of Georgia, the conflict in Abkhazia evolved over the Soviet period.[5] While Abkhazia enjoyed the Soviet Socialist Republic status in the opening decade of the Union, it was formally incorporated into Georgia as an Autonomous Republic in 1931. Repression of the Abkhaz in the political, economic, and cultural realms and mass Georgian resettlement followed the 1931 status change. The process dramatically altered the demographic composition of Abkhazia and the Georgian-Abkhaz tensions in Abkhazia intensified as a result. The Abkhaz elite appealed to the Soviet center in Moscow in an attempt to restore the region's rights. Public protests were periodic (1931, 1957, 1965, 1967, 1978, 1988, and 1989), culminating in violent clashes in the late 1980s—the last to be dispersed by disintegrating Soviet troops—and the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-1993.

Existing models poorly predict mobilization in this case: "one would have predicted a .13 probability that a group with the structural characteristics… of the Abkhaz would have engaged in

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[4] These risks exist in defensive and offensive mobilization (Petersen 2001; Wood 2003; Humphreys and Weinstein 2008; Parkinson 2013).

[5] Scholars have identified historical (Anchabadze 1998; Lakoba 2004; Papaskiri 2010), political (Coppieters 1996; Cornell 2000; Nodia and Scholtbach 2006), economic (Zürcher et al. 2005), social (Hewitt 1996; Derluguian 2005), and external (Baev 1997; Lynch 2000) roots of the conflict.

separatist mobilization" (Beissinger 2002, 222). The Abkhaz side was at a significant disadvantage in manpower and arms at the war onset. Demographically, 93,000 Abkhaz had little chance against 240,000 Georgians from Abkhazia and five-million-strong Georgia.[6] Militarily, Georgia inherited most Soviet weapons in the Caucasus (15 May, 1992, Tashkent Agreement), while the Abkhaz did not have a comparable access to arms (Zverev 1996).[7] With this capacity, Georgia's forces entered Abkhazia through the administrative border in the east on August 14, 1992, and advanced from the Black Sea in the west the following night, effectively encircling the territory in the span of a day.

The capacity of the Georgian forces was evident earlier in July, 1989, when Georgians from Abkhazia and Georgia clashed with the Abkhaz in the capital Sukhum/i.[8] Only Soviet troops were able to stop the violence and many Abkhaz participants were repressed (Hewitt 1996). Despite this precedent, the Abkhaz did not expect a war and met Georgia's advance unprepared. In December, 1991, Abkhaz leaders formed the Special Regiment of Internal Forces (SRIF) of Abkhazia on the basis of the so-called 8th Regiment of the Soviet Army that dispersed violence prior to the Union's collapse. Within a year, the SRIF had 1,000 fighters, including 100 regulars equipped with arms and uniforms and stationed across Abkhazia. However, most reservists were dismissed before the war.[9] Moreover, mandatory registration and collection of weapons from the population preceded it.[10]

Greatly outnumbered, poorly armed, and surprised by the Georgian advance into Abkhazia, at least 13%[11] of the Abkhaz population mobilized to fight on the Abkhaz side—a substantial share

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[6] According to the 1989 census, the Georgian population comprised 45.7% of Abkhazia in contrast to 17.8% Abkhaz. On the demographic situation in Abkhazia more broadly, see Trier et al. (2010).

[7] On the Georgian forces, see also Darchiashvili (1997), Zürcher et al. (2005), Driscoll (2009).

[8] I use the combined Georgian and Abkhaz spelling of proper nouns as written in English.

[9] For example, only six reservists guarded the Okhurej post by the administrative border with Georgia on August 14 (Pachulija 2010, 29).

[10] See Resolution of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia of 20 January, 1992 (Diasamidze 2002, 14).

[11] The figure is based on the number of casualties on the Abkhaz side in the war. For the population of 93,000 Abkhaz, HRW (1995, 5) records over 4,000 deaths and 8,000 injuries. For a discussion, see Yamskov (2009). At the war onset, Baev (2003, 138) estimates 1,000 Abkhaz fighters, but this figure focuses on city defense and does not include mobilization in eastern and western villages.

compared to other civil wars of the time (Lacina 2006, 279). Two fighter trajectories emerged at the war onset. Regular soldiers and reservists formally recruited into the SRIF prior to the war adopted what I call an organized fighter trajectory. Most mobilization was not through formal recruitment. Ordinary Abkhaz mobilized voluntarily in a spontaneous trajectory.[12] Beyond this male dominated fighter body, men and women with medical, engineering, and logistical skills engaged in support. As an Abkhaz commander describes the Abkhaz force, "Fighters f[ou]ght, everyone else help[ed]," following a commonly gendered pattern of civil war participation (Interview 127, Sukhum/i, Winter 2011; Parkinson 2013). Yet others who were able to fight took a non-fighter trajectory and escaped the fighting by hiding, fleeing, or, in rare cases, defecting to the Georgian side. The analysis of the processes leading to these divergent mobilization trajectories can help understand why some—but not all—individuals assume incredible risks mobilizing to fight for their group when alternative options are available.

SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MOBILIZATION

The significance of social structures for civil war mobilization has been widely recognized. Social structures help recruit participants (Aspinall 2009; Fujii 2009), generate pressure to mobilize by sanctioning non-participants and rewarding participants (Petersen 2001; Weinstein 2007), shape the nature of war-time organizations as they form and adapt to new circumstances (Staniland 2012; Parkinson 2013), and transform in the course of war so as to produce new forms of organization in society (Wood 2008). By placing the complex processes of individual decision-making in civil war in their socio-structural context through an in-depth, local-level analysis of mobilization in the case of Abkhazia, this article makes three contributions to the study of social mobilization.

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[12] Fighters in the two trajectories were merged in the Abkhaz army formed in the course of the war.

Theoretically, this article broadens the scope of analysis from a recent organizational focus to include micro- and macro-level social structures of quotidian family and friendship and national authority respectively (Staniland 2012; Parkinson 2013). This theoretical move is motivated by the observation that individuals whose social networks do not overlap with the formal organizations of rebellion mobilize for violence (Aspinall 2009; Fujii 2009). The extended focus on quotidian, local, and national structures allows me to gauge how information is transmitted across society to impact socially embedded actors. The filtering of information through society is an innovative addition to social mechanisms that drive individuals into participation (Petersen 2001; Weinstein 2007).

In assessing the impact of social structures on mobilization, this article shifts attention from the nature of ties that bind individuals to their content. The strength of ties is central to the diffusion and consolidation of information in society, but it is shared understandings of history and identity underlying social structures that shape mobilization decisions (Granovetter 1973). Informed by constructivist theories of identity, this article shows that social structures enable mobilization when information that they transmit relates individual actions as part of the group to shared experiences of conflict, that is, to a relevant collective identity (Gould 1995; Polletta and Jasper 2001; Wood 2003; Viterna 2013). Attention to shared notions of conflict helps me link distinct collective identities to self- to other-regarding individual actions. The coexistence of instrumental and normative bases for these actions is an important insight for theories of individual motivations in civil war (Kalyvas 2006; Kalyvas and Kocher 2007; Humphreys and Weinstein 2008; Gutiérrez and Wood 2014).

Methodologically, this article adds to the growing scholarship based on immersive study of mobilization (Wood 2003; Aspinall 2009; Fujii 2009; Parkinson 2013; Viterna 2013). The detailed individual-level data contextualized with archival and secondary materials, which resulted from my field-intensive research on mobilization in Abkhazia, allows me to identify individual mobilization trajectories and situate them in their broader social and historical environment. This data advances

approaches to mobilization from the view of actors as isolated from the social context and driven to civil war participation by stable preferences and cost-benefit calculations to insight on how socially embedded actors come to perceive and act upon the dilemmas of civil war. The approach to complex individual choices as informed by their socio-structural position contributes to the difficult field of individual decision-making in civil war (Blattman and Miguel 2010; Wood 2015).

Empirically, this article brings an understudied case of Abkhaz mobilization to the tradition of scholarship on high-risk, violent mobilization in contexts of deep social conflict. Mobilization in these conditions spans, for example, Lithuania in the Soviet period (Petersen 2001), El Salvador in the 1970s-1980s (Wood 2003), Lebanon in the 1980s (Parkinson 2013), Sierra Leone in the 1990s (Humphreys and Weinstein 2008), and most recently Ukraine (Beissinger 2013). The Abkhaz case is an important addition to this scholarship. A case of deeply integrated pre-war society, reflected in high levels of inter-group interaction in family, neighborhoods, education, and employment, this case has implications for the study of violence in diverse societies (Straus 2006; Fujii 2009; Varshney 2002; Habyarimana et al. 2009). It illuminates the processes of formation of conflict identities, escalation of inter-group violence, and effect of different social relations on war-time mobilization.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Capturing the underlying processes of civil war mobilization—"what kinds of noncivil war contention they come from and how they evolve internally"—requires a grounded research design, based on sustained, face-to-face interaction with the actors involved in mobilization (Tarrow 2007, 592). Immersion in the field allows researchers to develop the trust and knowledge needed to access and evaluate sensitive mobilization data in politicized civil war environments, inaccessible through formal interview or survey methods. In-depth interviews and participant observation shift attention from macro-structural factors to individual paths as they are situated in broader social and organizational contexts (Schatz 2009, 11; Parkinson 2013, 420; Viterna 2013). Combined with archival and

secondary sources, this data collection strategy provides access to beliefs and meanings individuals

attribute to their present conditions and past experiences and helps researchers understand how the

present influences responses about the past (Wood 2007, 127; Fujii 2010, 231; Wedeen 2010).

To explore the internal processes of mobilization, this article draws on eight months of field

research carried out primarily in Abkhazia, but also in Georgia and Russia between 2010 and 2013.

Focusing on the single, understudied Abkhaz case[13] allows me to leverage the variation in localized

context and individual trajectories of mobilization, while holding constant macro-structural factors

identified in the cross-national literature on civil war (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Collier and Hoeffler

2004). These factors include a shared geography characterized by mountainous terrain and absence

of lootable resources, similar levels of political, economic, and social development—a legacy of the

Soviet past,—and comparable urbanization and ethnic composition[14] across Abkhazia. Controlling

for these factors eliminates a number of competing macro-structural explanations and permits unit

disaggregation and comparison within the case (Chenoweth and Lawrence 2010; Snyder 2013, 35).

I select two sites of Abkhaz mobilization marked by local-level differences at the war onset

that could have produced distinct processes of mobilization. Since the Georgian advance proceeded

to surround Abkhazia from the east and west of the territory, I compare Abkhaz mobilization along

the main road taken by the Georgian forces from Abkhazia's eastern border to the capital Sukhum/i

and the route of the Georgian advance from the sea to the major western city, Gagra. Initial Abkhaz

mobilization concentrated in these two areas, with individuals located in central Abkhazia joining

one or the other site of mobilization. These sites were marked by spatial differences at the war onset

(see Figure 1 below). Proximity to the Russian border, where individuals could escape with relative

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[13] While the case has drawn substantial scholarly attention (see fn. 5 above), analysis has often been based on elite interviews or data gathered outside of Abkhazia.

[14] The Abkhaz comprised a smaller share of the population relative to Georgians in five of the seven regions of Abkhazia, with the eastern region of Gal/i almost entirely Georgian (Trier et al. 2010).

Figure 1. Spatial and Temporal Variation at the Georgian-Abkhaz War Onset
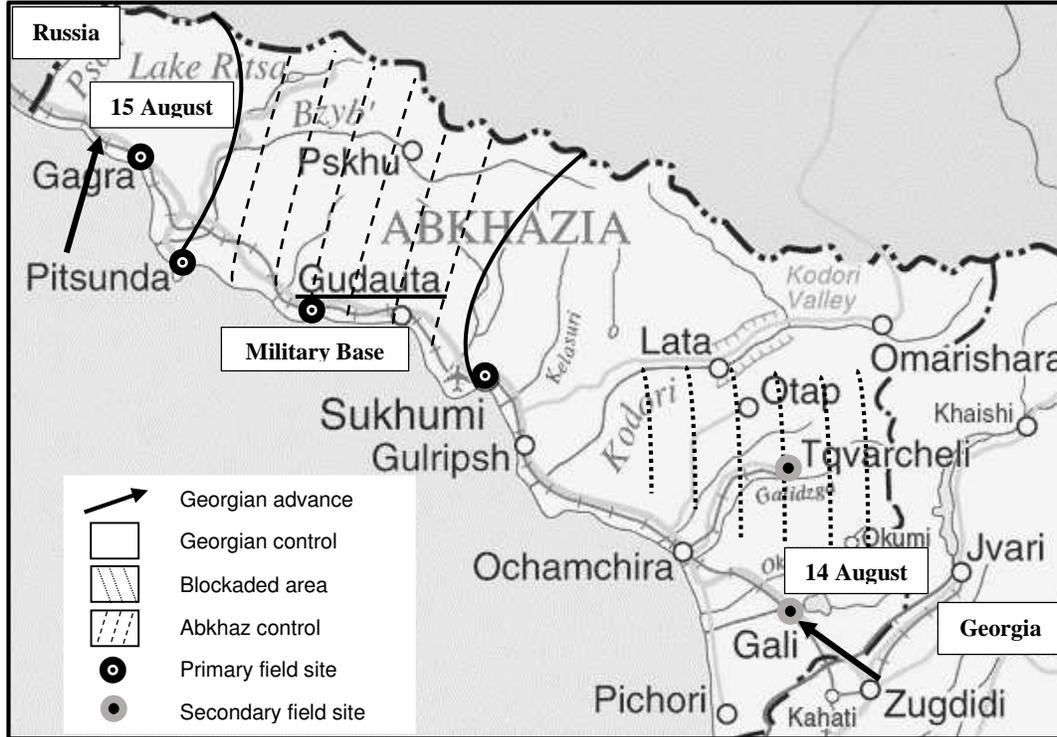
Source: Based on UN map of Georgia, August 2004

ease and outside help could come from, and Gudauta military base, where weapons could be sought

in western Abkhazia, contrasted with the east, where the border with Georgia facilitated immediate

establishment of Georgian control and blockade of the area. The sites varied not only spatially, but

also temporally, as the Georgian advance in the west took place a day later than that in the east. The

sources of spatial and temporal within-case variation allow me to probe how differently positioned

individuals learned about the Georgian advance, what shaped their understanding of the situation

across space and time, and how different social structures, with which individuals interacted on a

regular basis before the war, affected their fighter and non-fighter trajectories when the war began.

The analysis of the processes underlying the mobilization trajectories in eastern and western

Abkhazia is based on 150 semi-structured interviews with 142 participants and non-participants in

mobilization and additional primary and secondary materials.[15] To capture local-level differences in the selected mobilization sites and ensure representation across the mobilization trajectories, the interviews were conducted in four locales across three of the seven regions of Abkhazia (see Figure 1 above).[16] The interviews in Sukhum/i examined mobilization from Abkhazia's eastern border to the capital. Secondary materials on eastern mobilization were collected on Tqvarchel/i and Gal/i—the former immediately blockaded by Georgia, the latter predominantly populated by Georgians. I explored mobilization in the west in Gagra, Pitsunda, and Gudauta. The Abkhaz from these locales mobilized in response to the Georgian advance from the sea, with Gagra soon captured by Georgia, while the tourist town of Pitsunda and the military base in Gudauta remained under Abkhaz control.

In each of these locales, I sought individuals recruited prior to the war, those who mobilized spontaneously, and those who did not fight. My decision to stay unaffiliated during field research[17] and long-term, engaged presence in the locales facilitated interviews, as I gained trust and access to respondents from multiple networks of local residents, authorities, and non-governmental staff and was able to avoid institutional and personal referral biases (Fujii 2008, 576). Specifically, I devised a private snowball sampling strategy, whereby I selected those contacts from my multiple network referrals who fit my research purposes (Cohen and Arieli 2011). When referrals did not provide the needed respondent categories, I made appointments or approached respondents in these categories, depending on whether it was acceptable, at their location of employment. This strategy was critical to increasing the representativeness of respondents (see Table 1 below).

My interviews followed a semi-structured format, starting with a detailed informed consent procedure and moving through the pre-war, civil war, and post-war life histories. The major part of

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[15] See Online Appendix for the detailed discussion of my fieldwork procedures and data analysis.
[16] The regions include Gagra, Gudauta, Sukhum/i, Gulripsh/i, Ochamchira, Tqvarchel/i, and Gal/i.
[17] Government or non-governmental affiliation raises suspicion in the politicized Abkhaz context.

Table 1. Summary of Interview Data

			Total	Percentage (rounded)
General information	Gender	Male	99	70%
		Female	43	30%
	Self-identified	Abkhaz	127	90%
		Other	15	10%
	Age	<50	72	51%
		>50	70	49%
	Location	Eastern mobilization	45	32%
		Sukhum/i	45	32%
		Western mobilization	97	68%
		Gagra	42	28%
		Pitsunda	36	26%
		Gudauta	19	14%
Pre-war	Occupation	State	29	20%
		Non-state	113	80%
	Mobilization	Organized	45	32%
		Spontaneous	43	30%
		None	54	38%
War-time mobilization	Fighters	Organized	14	10%
		Combat	13	9%
		Male	13	9%
		Female	-	-
		Support	1	1%
		Male	1	1%
		Female	-	-
		Spontaneous	69	48%
		Combat	50	35%
		Male	50	35%
		Female	-	-
		Support	19	13%
		Male	12	8%
		Female	7	5%
	Non-fighters		59	42%
		Male	23	16%
		Female	36	25%
Post-war	Occupation	State	42	30%
		Non-state	100	70%
	Mobilization	Organized	59	42%
		None	83	58%

the interview focused on the events of August 14-18, 1992, including the ways in which respondents learned about and reacted to the Georgian advance. The discursive mode of the interviews allowed me to explore sensitive questions of conflict participation with great flexibility and my respondents to reveal their nuanced positions on the conflict. The combination of event and narrative accounts I used in the interviews and my attention to "meta-data" (Fujii 2010), or stories, silences, and physical gestures, helped address the issues of memory and reconstruct step by step individual mobilization trajectories and understandings of conflict as they evolved over the pre- to post-war period.[18]

The resulting interviews are similarly distributed across the four locales, with the nearly 1:1 ratio between Sukhum/i and Gagra—the key sites of eastern and western mobilization respectively. The percentage of fighters (58%) and non-fighters (42%) is balanced, with respondents in support roles (14%) allocated between the organized and spontaneous fighter categories based on their pre-war recruitment. Organized and spontaneous fighters constitute 17% and 83% respectively, which reflects actual mobilization patterns. The male (70%) to female (30%) ratio captures the gendered nature of mobilization, with combat dominated by men and women represented in support and non-fighter roles. To account for age and status in mobilization, young adults under the age of 30 (49%) at the war onset are distinguished from individuals over 30 years old (51%) with families and jobs.

This war-time data is situated in the context of respondents' pre- and post-war occupations and mobilization. I interviewed respondents with a broad range of backgrounds to control for pre-war factors that could shape war-time decisions and post-war allegiances that could influence how people viewed the conflict. To ensure that the interviews capture perspectives other than the master narrative of the war, respondents in state and non-state positions are represented in the pre- (20% to

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[18] See Online Appendix (pp. 9-15) on the strategies I used to address potential bias in the interviews.

80%) and post-war (30% to 70%) periods. Varied pre- and post-war mobilization experiences help check that the interviews are not homogeneous across respondents due to organizational affiliation.

The interviews are combined with field notes on informal interactions and textual materials, each focused on distinct aspects of the conflict (Davenport and Ball 2002). The primary data relates fighter and non-fighter pre- to post-war life events, choices, and actions to their social environment. Official documents—national and local government resolutions—shift attention from life histories to the ways in which the conflict was framed across the state hierarchy. Media transcripts are used to capture how official narratives were transmitted across the society. Secondary interview archives substantiate these sources and confirm conclusions based on my interviews (Khodzhaa 2003, 2006, 2009). This multi-level data allows me to trace individual mobilization trajectories in detail within their broader socio-structural context.

COLLECTIVE THREAT FRAMING AND MOBILIZATION IN ABKHAZIA

Why did individuals mobilize to fight on the Abkhaz side at the beginning of the Georgian-Abkhaz war? The Abkhaz were at a significant disadvantage in manpower and arms and could not offer material rewards for participation, often associated with joining the fighting (Weinstein 2007; Humphreys and Weinstein 2008). With Georgia establishing control over most of Abkhazia at the war onset, looting was reported on the Georgian side.[19] The Abkhaz in general were unprepared for the Georgian advance and could not provide fighters with access to skills and resources that would promote survival relative to non-participation (Kalyvas 2006; Kalyvas and Kocher 2007). Fighters across the four locales selected for this research consistently report having to mobilize unarmed and witnessing immediate casualties in the fighting on the Abkhaz side.[20] Their high-risk mobilization,

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[19] Interview 52, Gagra, Fall 2011; Interview 124, Sukhum/i, Fall 2011. See also HRW (1995, 6).
[20] Interview 9, Gudauta, Fall 2011; Interview 40, Pitsunda, Fall 2011; Interview 72, Gagra, Fall 2011; Interview 127, Sukhum/i, Winter 2011.

especially striking given the availability of alternative options of hiding, fleeing, or defecting to the Georgian side, was rooted in the processes beyond material rewards and security maximization. As Gutiérrez and Wood (2014, 221) write, "mobilization in high-risk circumstances despite the opportunity to free ride… [is] difficult to explain with self-regarding, material preferences."

Petersen (2001) argues that high-risk mobilization is affected by the social context in which it takes place. "Strong communities produce mechanisms that are able to drive individuals into these dangerous roles" (15). Sanctions over future status and norms underlying strong communities, such as the Abkhaz, are among these mechanisms and reflect instrumental and normative social motives for mobilization. Those who do not fight for the community can be punished by it later, or vice versa rewarded for participation (Taylor 1988; Weinstein 2007; Humphreys and Weinstein 2008). "[T]he norm that one should forgo self-interest and act in the interests of the collectivity," or reciprocate actions of its other members taken for its sake, is the basic prescriptive norm (Coleman 1988, 104). Given these considerations, Petersen argues, "community members are faced with a question: how much risk should I accept?" (53). The knowledge of risk by potential participants, even if limited, is assumed in this question—a common assumption in the literature on civil war (Kalyvas 2006, 207; Kalyvas and Kocher 2007, 184). Yet reports across Abkhazia suggest that risk was not well understood at the war onset and that this understanding had to be shaped to generate mobilization.[21]

I argue that the effect of social mechanisms on mobilization depends on the ways in which individuals perceive anticipated risk, or threat.[22] "When threat is not perceived, even in the face of objective evidence, there can be no mobilization of defensive resources" (Cohen 1978, 93). Threat

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[21] Interview 38, Pitsunda, Fall 2011; Interview 74, Gagra, Fall 2011; Interview 101, Gudauta, Fall 2011; Interview 117, Sukhum/i, Fall 2011.
[22] Threat is often defined broadly as actual or perceived attempts to "reduce [a group's] realization of its interests" (Tilly 1978, 133). I focus on "threat to a group's existence" and that of "engaging in a particular type of activity," i.e. mobilization to fight (McDoom 2012, 131; McAdam 1986, 67).

can be perceived without being shaped as such, for example, through prior knowledge on imminent violence or being in the midst of an attack. However, in the context of uncertainty characteristic of civil war, when "everyday routines and expectancies" are disrupted and violence can have different meanings, individuals rely on familiar social structures for information on threat—whether factual or not—and appropriate response (Snow et al. 1998, 2). Confused by the Georgian advance, nearly all fighters and non-fighters in Abkhazia report calling upon their families and friends and local and national authorities to make sense of threat and mobilization alternatives.[23] As Granovetter (1985, 487) argues, "[a]ctors do not behave or decide as atoms outside a social context… Their attempts at purposive action are instead embedded in concrete, ongoing systems of social relations."

One implication of this argument is that in the context of uncertainty presented by civil war social structures provide access to information critical for making difficult choices about whether to fight for the group, escape the fighting, or defect to the other side. This information centers on three basic questions: what the nature of threat is, who threatens, and who is threatened.[24] By responding to these questions in formal and informal interactions with potential participants, actors in relevant social structures frame, or construct, particular narratives of threat.[25] "Depending on how threats are constructed," Jasper (2008, 101) finds on protest, "individuals [can become] more open and willing to [mobilize]." To mobilize support in civil wars, "recruiters frame conflicts as threats that require defensive mobilizations" (Malet 2013, 55). The Georgian advance could have been interpreted as an act of securing Abkhazia's railroad from rampant illegal activity—a dominant narrative among the Georgian elite,—which would lead to a different mobilization outcome and potentially avert a

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[23] Interview 4, Gudauta, Fall 2011; Interview 27, Pitsunda, Fall 2011; Interview 84, Gagra, Fall 2011; Interview 113, Sukhum/i, Winter 2011.
[24] This is akin to identification of the issue and who is to blame, or the "attributional component of diagnostic framing" in social movements (Benford and Snow 2000, 616).
[25] Framing involves giving meaning to "what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of a scene" (Goffman 1974: 21). See also Benford and Snow (2000).

war. Yet it was widely framed and perceived as a threat to Abkhazia's political status and the existence of the Abkhaz as a group, which required defensive mobilization in response.[26]

Threat framing involves a range of actors, whose narratives compete and interact with one another. Social structures filter threat narratives based on shared understandings of conflict. While norms provide a general prescription for action, shared understandings of history and identity that emerge in the course of conflict fill the content of what the interests of a collectivity are and how to act in support of these interests (Wood 2003; Viterna 2013). To resonate with potential participants, threat framing actors appeal to this common history and the relationships that it affects. As Gould (1995, 18) says, mobilizing appeals "succeed to the degree that the collective identity [they] invoke classifies people in a way that… corresponds to their concrete experience of social ties to others."[27] The Georgian elite's narrative on the advance did not resonate with most Abkhaz precisely because of their collective view of the history of the Georgian-Abkhaz relations as one of the suppression of Abkhazia's autonomy and the Abkhaz as a group, substantiated by their own and their families' and friends' lived experiences.[28] Yet neither was the Abkhaz elite's interpretation accepted as given.

Threat narratives do not succeed in shaping people's threat perceptions by merely invoking common notions of conflict; they are negotiated across social structures and can shift in translation. Because potential participants are embedded in multiple social structures with varying salience for mobilization, elite threat framing—a focus in the conflict literature—can be insufficient for them to act upon or even accept the idea of threat.[29] "The creators of th[e] script are usually threatened elites

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[26] Interview 8, Gudauta, Fall 2011; Interview 29, Pitsunda, Fall 2011; Interview 53, Gagra, Fall 2011; Interview 107, Sukhum/i, Fall 2011. Another Georgian narrative focused on the rescue of Georgian hostages ostensibly kept in Abkhazia (Fuller 1992). On the reasons provided by Georgia, see Cornell (2000, 159), Nodia and Scoltbach (2006, 12), Zverev (1996).

[27] These ties can be "imagined rather than experienced directly" (Polletta and Jasper 2001, 285).

[28] Interview 80, Gagra, Fall 2011; Interview 114, Sukhum/i, Fall 2011.

[29] See Posen (1993), Kaufmann (1996), and Roe (2004) on elite threat framing in Yugoslavia and Valentino (2004) and Straus (2006) in Rwanda. See Petersen (2002) for a review.

in the capital," Fujii (2009, 12-3) demonstrates, but their narratives are adapted by local leaders "to fit local needs and requirements." The filtering of national threat narratives through local structures is evident in Abkhazia, where respondents report initially receiving the televised messages of threat from the Abkhaz government, but then corroborating these messages with local administration and organization leaders, which frequently shifted the emphasis from the defense of Abkhazia to that of villages, towns, and cities.[30] In this way, "[p]rewar political parties, students' and veterans' groups, and religious organizations, among others, are repurposed for rebellion" at the threat framing stage of mobilization (Staniland 2012, 17).

Political and social leaders are not the only actors framing threat, however. Individuals can be linked to local leaders and organizational recruiters through indirect ties of acquaintance. These "weak ties," in Granovetter's (1973, 1361) terms, are critical for the diffusion of information in the national-to-local filtering of threat narratives, but lack "the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciproc[ity]" that individuals draw on in the context of uncertainty. Reputation of and respect for national and local leaders are important to the credibility of their messages (Benford and Snow 2000). Yet it is "strong, quotidian ties" of family and friends, which "allow for trust," that consolidate their messages into collective notions of threat (Parkinson 2013, 422-3, emphasis in original). Most participants and non-participants in Abkhaz mobilization report reinforcing the view of the Georgian advance as threatening and deciding how to respond to this threat with their family members and friends in neighborhoods, universities, and workplaces. Both those who mobilized to fight and escaped the fighting often did so with their family members and friends as a result.[31] As Aspinall (2009, 16) finds, "kinship networks, ties of locality and friend-ship" serve as major social settings for high-risk mobilization.

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[30] Interview 97, Gagra, Fall 2011; Interview 118, Sukhum/i, Fall 2011.
[31] Interview 72, Gagra, Fall 2011; Interview 117, Sukhum/i, Fall 2011.

The emergence of collective notions of threat influences how individuals come to perceive threat and what mobilization decisions they make. Collective threat framing "guides perception… allowing [individuals] to build defined expectations about what is to happen" (Donati 1992, 141-2). Many participants report interpreting the Georgian advance as a clash, such as the one in 1989, but coming to view it as a war once threat framing messages spread across the society.[32] While collective notions of threat urge potential participants to perceive threat in general, it is individuals' ties to the collectivity and shared understandings of conflict invoked in threat framing that differentiate how individuals perceive threat and decide to act upon threat narratives. Individuals, whose lived experiences as part of the group resonate with collective notions of threat, perceive the collectivity to be threatened and join the fighting on its behalf, even if it is a significantly weaker actor in the war. In contrast, those, whose ties to the collectivity are severed by alternative group obligations, perceive personal security to be at greatest threat and attempt to hold neutrality, hide, flee, or join the fighting on the side that can provide greater security (Kalyvas 2006). The Abkhaz consistently report mobilizing on the Abkhaz side because they were convinced that Abkhazia and the Abkhaz as a group were threatened by the Georgian advance, while those who feared for their own security or that of close family and friends escaped the fighting, alone or together.[33]

In this way, threat framing interacts with instrumental and normative motivations that drive individuals in the context of mobilization against superior state and non-state forces when the exit option exists. Individuals who perceive threat as directed primarily toward the self or close family and friends act in attainment of personal or kin security. Their non-fighting trajectories reflect their security maximizing motivation. If they do mobilize to fight on the weaker side, it is to protect their

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[32] Interview 49, Pitsunda, Fall 2011; Interview 97, Gagra, Fall 2011.
[33] Interview 9, Gudauta, Fall 2011; Interview 47, Pitsunda, Fall 2011; Interview 84, Gagra, Fall 2011; Interview 104, Sukhum/i, Fall 2011.

Figure 2. Self- to Other-Regarding Mobilization Continuum

Self-regarding - ➔ **Other-regarding**

| Hide, flee or join stronger side alone | Hide, flee or join stronger side with family/friends | Fight on weaker side to defend family/friends | Fight on weaker side to defend village/town/city | Fight on weaker side to defend collectivity |
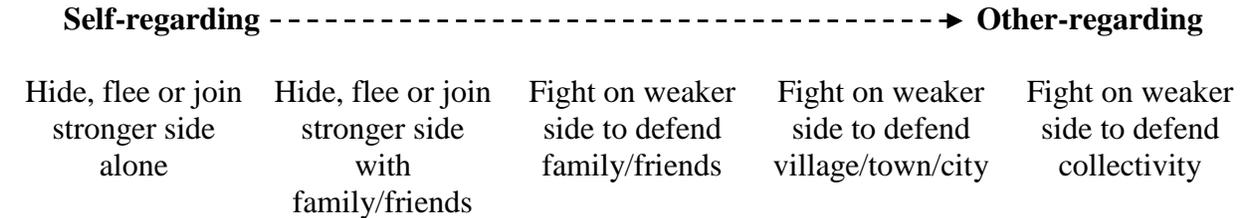
families and friends, rather than the broader collectivity. I place these actions on the self-regarding

end of the mobilization continuum (see Figure 2 above). In contrast, individuals who perceive threat

as directed toward their collectivity act to defend the collectivity at the local and national levels of

aggregation. Some fighters stay to defend their villages, towns, or cities, while others go to the sites

of fierce fighting. A weaker side, their collectivity offers little prospect of security or success. Their

fighter trajectories reflect normative commitments and are placed toward the other-regarding end.

This distinction between self- and collectivity-oriented threat perceptions I introduce is one

way in which instrumental and normative motives coexist in mobilization. As Gutiérrez and Wood

(2014, 200, 222) argue, "[n]ot all combatants fight for instrumental reasons: some join for normati-

ve reasons… [and] act on sincere beliefs and other-regarding preferences." The further one moves

away from the self-regarding end of the continuum, the more possibility exists for non-instrumental

motivations. However, even this other-regarding behavior may be driven by instrumental concerns,

including community rewards for participating and punishment for not doing so. My argument thus

is not about whether norms matter. For example, individuals concerned with personal security can

be said to be following the norm of self-protection. Neither is it about whether individuals follow

norms for purely instrumental or normative reasons. For example, individuals who flee with family

or friends may do so for both self- and (kin) other-regarding reasons. As Fearon and Wendt (2002,

62, emphasis in original) suggest, "there is little reason to think that human behavior toward norms

is either always self-interested or always a function of perceived legitimacy." Rather, what matters is to what extent individual threat perceptions and associated actions concern the broader group.

THREAT FRAMING AT THE GEORGIAN-ABKHAZ WAR ONSET: AUGUST 14-18, 1992

On the morning of August 14, 1992, troops of the Georgian National Guard—the Georgian nascent army—crossed the Ingur/i Bridge from Georgia to the east of Abkhazia.[34] According to the Abkhaz de facto Defense Ministry, the troops were equipped with tanks and artillery and supported from air (Pachulija 2010, 27). They "advanced on Sukhumi and shelled the parliament, forcing the Abkhaz leadership to retreat to Gudauta in the northwest of the republic" (Cornell 2000, 159). The following morning, Georgian marines landed in Gantiadi (Tsandrypsh) in Abkhazia's west.[35] They "block[ed] Abkhazia's border with Russia" and advanced on Gagra with support of the Mkhedrioni (Horsemen)—the Georgian paramilitary group that became active in Abkhazia after the clashes of July, 1989 (Baev 2003, 138; Darchiashvili 1997). Within three days, the Georgian forces controlled Sukhum/i and Gagra, with the adjacent territory to the east and west respectively, part of which was blockaded, leaving the area surrounding Gudauta under the Abkhaz control (see Figure 1 above).

Today the events of August 14-18 have a clear meaning in Abkhazia. They are remembered as the first days of what became known as the Patriotic War of Abkhazia—a culmination of the long struggle for Abkhaz political, economic, and cultural self-determination.[36] Political tensions around the status of Abkhazia, which preceded the war, were part of this struggle.[37] Achugba (2010, 256-7) summarizes the issues that the Abkhaz raised in public letters and gatherings in the Soviet period:

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[34] Troop estimates vary between 2,000 and 5,000 (Pachulija 2010, 27; Baev 2003, 138), but may be inflated as the Abkhaz Press Service reported 1,000 on the day of the advance (Lezhava 1999, 102).
[35] Estimates of Georgian marines range from 250 to 1,000 (Pachulija 2010, 77; Baev 2003, 138).
[36] Lakoba (1993) refers to this struggle as the hundred-year war between Georgia and Abkhazia.
[37] For example, on July 23, 1992, Abkhazia's non-Georgian leadership, in the absence of Georgian officials, reinstated the 1925 Soviet Socialist Republic Constitution, which declared Abkhazia "as independent but 'united with the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia on the basis of a special union treaty'" (Cornell 2000, 158; see also Hewitt 1996; Nodia and Scholtbach 2006).

The ending of the demographic expansion of Georgians in Abkhazia, protection of the ethnic

Abkhaz history, restoration of the native Abkhaz toponymy, preparation of Abkhaz national

cadres…, liberation of Abkhazia from Georgia's dictatorship—this is an incomplete list of

issues raised by the Abkhaz… before the central authorities of the Soviet Union.

Most Abkhaz view the war of 1992-1993 against this background. "This war went down in history

as Patriotic," a speech at the 10-year anniversary of the war illustrates, "Everyone understood well:

the fate of Abkhazia was being decided in a fierce struggle—should our people be free or dependent,

should we have national statehood, language and culture, or lose everything" (Enik 2002, 58-9).

In 1992, however, these events were not as well understood. There was intense uncertainty

and confusion over the meaning of the Georgian advance. Witnesses report: "Tanks entered all of a

sudden on August 14" (Interview 42, Pitsunda, Fall 2011); "No one understood what was going on:

how serious it was, how long it would last, whether it was a war" (Interview 72, Gagra, Fall 2011).

Most Abkhaz did not expect a war and interpreted the events as a clash similar to that of July, 1989,

anticipating protection from the falling Soviet structures. "We did not believe that a war could start,

felt that we were protected by the powerful Soviet Union" (Interview 49, Pitsunda, Fall 2011); "We

thought it would be over right away, that it was another clash" (Interview 38, Pitsunda, Fall 2011).

In other words, ordinary men and women in Abkhazia, many of whom shortly mobilized to fight on

the Abkhaz side, were shocked by the Georgian advance, but did not perceive it as a threat.

Neither was the Georgian explanation convincing. The advance took place amid the internal

conflict that ousted President Zviad Gamsakhurdia from Tbilisi and persisted as the new leadership

struggled to control his supporters, Zviadists (Driscoll 2009). Georgia's elite in this context asserted

that the Georgian forces were "securing road and rail links [in Abkhazia]… in the hunt for the secu-

rity officials taken hostage" by Zviadists (Fuller, 1992).[38] This message did not find support among potential participants in Abkhazia. "They said that they came to guard the railroad, but how can you guard the railroad with tanks?" was the common question (Interview 29, Pitsunda, Fall 2011; Interview 8, Gudauta, Fall 2011; Interview 78, Gagra, Fall 2011; Interview 107, Sukhum/i, Fall 2011).

In the confusion over the Georgian advance, in order for Abkhaz mobilization to take place, threat posed by the advance had to be perceived. Individuals who did not view the advance as threatening did not mobilize in response. The SRIF reservists in the east of Abkhazia who were the first to face the Georgian forces and were immediately imprisoned as a result corroborate this argument:

> Six reservists were on duty at the Okhurej post [near the Ingur/i Bridge]. A car with soldiers came by… The Abkhaz fighters did not have time to understand the situation, as they were captured and… placed in custody of the Gali police department… As the surviving fighters said, they did not expect a battle, thinking that Zviadists wanted to sneak through the post or that some car did not comply (Pachulija 2010, 29-30, emphasis added).

Mobilization of SRIF fighters at the nearby Okhurej garrison began after they heard the fired shots. Similarly, whole villages did not mobilize until threat of the Georgian advance was perceived. "On the first day of the war," a fighter who later mobilized in the eastern village of Merkula illustrates,

> Georgian soldiers came in and out of our village… It was quite and calm for a month [and] no one organized village defense… Georgians began burning homes of local Abkhaz and Russians, and after that killing them… But [mobilization] began after the arrival of [a local villager informed in] the west (Interview in Khodzhaa 2003, 123, emphasis added).

The timing of mobilization suggests that threat perception was in part situational: organized fighters at the Okhurej garrison came to view the Georgian forces as threatening by virtue of being

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[38] Whether Georgia's leader Shevardnadze was in control of the forces is debated (Baev 2003, 138).

positioned on the route of the Georgian advance. This pattern characterizes initial resistance to the Georgian forces by organized fighters in the east of Abkhazia. In further organized and spontaneous mobilization, however, threat was framed, as the Merkula villager's arrival and subsequent mobilization indicate. The following sections address in detail the questions of how potential participants in Abkhaz mobilization came to perceive threat and how threat framing shaped their mobilization decisions by focusing on the organized fighter, spontaneous fighter, and non-fighter trajectories in the east and west of Abkhazia. Despite the spatial and temporal variation, mobilization in these sites followed a typical pattern. Threat framing appeals were filtered and consolidated across the society to produce a collective notion of threat and influence threat perceptions and mobilization decisions.

Organized Mobilization: Situational Threat Perception and the Chain of Command

How did the Abkhaz come to perceive the Georgian advance as threatening? Some drew on prior knowledge about potential violence. The sister of an Abkhaz activist reports: "My brother felt that there would be a war. He was even called an extremist for it" (Interview 59, Gagra, Fall 2011). Yet even informed individuals, such as military commanders and leaders of the Abkhaz movement, did not immediately perceive threat when the Georgian advance began. The SRIF commander who inspected the Ingur/i Bridge on its eve was startled by the advance. A witness describes his reaction:

> August 14, 1992, was a regular day on duty… Suddenly, [the commander] looked out of the *window… [and] gave a command*, "Alarm." Not understanding what was happening, I said that everything was in order. But he repeated, "[A]larm." Realizing that [he meant] combat alert, I told him to turn on the siren, the button was in his office. As he came to his senses, he gave the signal [to mobilize] (Interview in Khodzhaa 2003, 17, emphasis added).

The commander's threat perception was situational, just as it was for the SRIF regulars and reservists who were not demobilized before the war and were located in the midst of the advance— along the single road connecting the territory of Abkhazia from east to west. Organized fighters in

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the east offered initial resistance once they heard or saw "a column of Georgian… tanks and troops [e]ngaged in gunfire" (Interview in Khodzhaa 2003, 57, emphasis added). As they were approached by the Georgian forces, a few fighters at the Okhurej garrison and nearby Gudava post opened fire with the limited weapons that they were assigned, but had to retreat to the west and clashed with the Georgian forces midway to Sukhum/i (Pachulija 2010, 30, 34; Interview in Khodzhaa 2006, 158).

The chain of command played a major role in organized mobilization thereafter. Organized fighters of the Agudzera unit further along the road were ordered to block the bridge on the outskirts of the capital. A SRIF regular reports: "the deputy commander called… and gave the order… to set out to close the Kelasuri Bridge" (Interview in Khodzhaa 2003, 56, emphasis added). This task was impeded by the first battle that broke out with the unit. A participant reports: "[one fighter blocked] the road with an armored vehicle and took the fight. [He w]as shot, but caused [the Georgian forces] losses" (Interview in Khodzhaa 2003, 56). Up to 40 regulars and reservists joined in the fighting, but were overwhelmed and received the order to retreat. These and other fighters were instructed to take defense of the Red Bridge at the entry into the capital, where they were assisted by spontaneous fighters, many of whom unarmed, and held the Georgian forces until the stand-off and negotiations.

The role of command in organized mobilization was evident in the west of Abkhazia, where the Georgian marines landed on August 15. A local SRIF commander reports the order he received: "head of the Gagra administration called and passed the order of the [SRIF] command to take guard of the Psou-Gagra road… I [took] regulars and a large number of unarmed reservists" (Interview in Khodzhaa 2009, 437-8, emphasis added). These men were similarly joined by spontaneous fighters and "stood along the main road…, blocked it with a truck [and] sand bags" (Interview 27, Pitsunda, Fall 2011); "mined a rock slope and left a roadblock on the way to Gagra" (Interview in Khodzhaa 2009, 440). However, only a minority of fighters had access to the organized structure of command.

Spontaneous Mobilization: Collective Threat Framing

Most men and women in the east and west of Abkhazia, including discharged reservists and spontaneous fighters who mobilized outside of the SRIF structure, did not have prior knowledge or situational awareness but sought information from social structures that they interacted with in daily life and trusted as a result. A school teacher who mobilized spontaneously in the west summarizes the sense of uncertainty, mistrust of the Georgian narrative, and collective threat framing involved:

> Train raids were common… Georgia used this as a pretense… It all happened unexpectedly in August. We suspected something, but even that day when we saw ships we could not tell: a ship is a ship… An hour later, my friend found me and said that [Georgian] marines were landing… By then there was the [state] message on TV about the beginning of aggression… We moved toward Gagra. Here [the head of] administration gathered the people… He said, "There are battles, shootings, the aviation…" We decided, given our small numbers [and] lack of weapons…, to retreat and organize city defense (Interview 78, Gagra, Fall 2011).

Threat framing proceeded from the national elite messages to the local level, often shifting to focus on city, town, and village defense, but was indorsed with quotidian networks of family and friends.

"Attack and Aggression": From Elites to Family

Threatened by the Georgian advance and displaced from Sukhum/i by the Georgian forces, the national Abkhaz elite served as the primary source of threat framing in Abkhazia. Soon after the Georgian advance began on August 14, Chairman of the Supreme Council of Abkhazia Ardzinba appealed to the population in the emergency address:

> I appeal to you at this difficult time. Our land was invaded by the armed formations of the State Council of Georgia… that spread death and destruction… The Abkhaz and the entire population of our long-suffering Motherland are being added to… the blood spilled by the

[Georgian] leadership… I think that we have to resist… [and] defeat those who bring hosti-

lity (Ardzinba 2004, 5, emphasis added).

This formal address responded to the questions of who is threatened, by whom, and to what extent. It presented the advance as an attack (the nature of threat) by the Georgian aggressor (the agent of threat), threatening not only the Abkhaz, but also the entire population of Abkhazia (the subject of threat), and advocated defensive mobilization in response. Other statements of the Abkhaz national leadership reaffirmed Ardzinba's threat narrative. For example, Resolution of the Supreme Council of August 14 "On mobilization of the adult population and arms transfer" urged all citizens 18-40 years old to mobilize in defense due to "real threat that appeared to… Abkhazia [and] the life of the population" (Ardzinba 2004, 6, emphasis added).[39] These threat framing messages were broadcast on television and widely publicized in print press across Abkhazia.

Elite messages resonated with many Abkhaz. In their appeals, the national elite drew on the shared history of Abkhazia as a "long-suffering Motherland" and a state—"every citizen, according to all constitutions, must defend their state," Ardzinba explained (Ardzinba 2004, 5; Zantaria 2010, 43).[40] They, furthermore, invoked the intimate and familiar ties that were disrupted by the Georgian advance. "It is not easy to speak," Ardzinba stressed in his address, "when perhaps right now… our homes are robbed, people are beaten, and life itself is not guaranteed" (Ardzinba 2004, 5, emphasis added). Ardzinba's reputation as a fervent defender of Abkhaz rights, long respected in the society, added the credibility to elite messages.[41] Respondents in the east and west of Abkhazia consistently

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[39] The Council's address to the population of August 19 corroborated threat: "Death to all… who came to us with arms [(the nature of threat)]…, enemies [(the agent of threat)] of the entire multinational people of Abkhazia [(the subject of threat)]" (Ardzinba 2004, 24-6, emphasis added).

[40] Acting as a state, on September 15, the Supreme Council formally recognized Georgia's advance as an act of aggression and formed the State Defense Committee (see text in Ardzinba 2004, 160).

[41] Abkhaz support for Ardzinba formed in the pre-war period. His speech at the I People's Deputies Congress of the Soviet Union in 1989 (see text in Maryhuba 1994, 463-7) is recounted as a defining moment in his emergence as a "leader… who could bravely get up and say what the true condition of the Abkhaz was" (Interview 60, Gagra, Fall

report that they learned about Georgia's advance and understood it as an attack requiring defensive mobilization from these messages: "I came back from work and learned that the war began on TV" (Interview in Khodzhaa 2003, 63, emphasis added); "Ardzinba [told] us that an armed attack was carried out against Abkhazia and that we will resist" (Interview 84, Gagra, Fall 2011).

Yet elite threat framing was insufficient for most to decide how to act upon the information about the Georgian advance. Political and social actors at the local level, including highly regarded administration and Abkhaz movement leaders, further advanced elite threat framing.[42] After seeing Ardzinba's televised address, crowds poured to local administrations across Abkhazia. These city, town, and village centers have historically served as places of assembly for the Abkhaz population. Men and women knew that they would get more information from actors in this social setting. My interviews confirm their role at the war onset: "When the war began, I… went to the administration. Everyone gathered there and expected a message from the leaders" (Interview 117, Sukhum/i, Fall 2011); "People stood by the village council…, debat[ing] what happened… When [a local activist] approached, they exclaimed, 'He will tell us something serious!'" (Interview 64, Gagra, Fall 2011).

Local actors corroborated the national narrative, but adapted it to the purposes of city, town, and village defense. The address of the administration of Tqvarchel/i—an eastern blockaded city—is exemplary. It began by framing threat posed by Georgia to the whole of Abkhazia. "The republic [(the subject of threat)] is in danger! Today… troops of the State Council of Georgia, accompanied by tanks [(the agent of threat)]…, invaded the territory of Abkhazia in order to occupy it [(the nature of threat)]" (Cherkezija 2003, 84, emphasis added). The address went on to suit the particular needs of city defense. "Due to the state of emergency in Tqvarcheli, general mobilization of men 18 to 45

2011). This support continues. At current memorial and celebratory events, the Abkhaz refer to Ardzinba as the spiritual core of Abkhazia—"a saint, a dome where you pray" (Field notes, October 31, 2011).
[42] Other key actors include the elders, leaders in employment and education units, and military men.

years of age is declared… Get ready for city defense" (Cherkezija 2003, 84, emphasis added). This message was immediately aired on local television. Similar filtering of the national narrative took place in the west of Abkhazia. As a participating fighter illustrates, "'Gagra is a pearl,' [the head of administration] told us, 'We may not have battles in the city…' So we had to retreat back to the old [part of the] city and take defense positions [there]" (Interview 20, Pitsunda, Fall 2011).

Threat framing was often substantiated by Georgian statements and actions at the local level. On August 15, for example, Sukhum/i channels aired the Georgian leader Shevardnadze's warning that "in the struggle for preservation of the territorial integrity of [Georgia]… we are willing to die, but also eliminate anyone" (Brojdo 2008, 53, emphasis added).[43] The images of looting showed the Georgian forces' brutality. "We went to the homes where people were tortured, robbed; aired this in Gagra," a local reporter says (Interview 85, Gagra, Fall 2011). The images and local threat framing in general reassured the Abkhaz that a war began: "Now we understood what we faced—weaponry, tanks, marauding" (Interview 75, Gagra, Fall 2011); "I was assured that a war really began, that the Georgian forces occupied a part of Abkhazia" (Interview in Khodzhaa 2003, 216, emphasis added).

However, it is within the quotidian networks of family and friends that this information was typically consolidated into collective notions of threat and transformed into mobilization decisions. A spontaneous fighter in the east captures this process of consolidation across the social structures:

> On August 14…, I was at work… At 10 am we went outside due to noise… Not understand-
> ing anything, all family gathered by the TV… [We saw] *Ardzinba's address* [(national)] on
> the start of aggression… [and] formation of battalions to defend the motherland. Right after,
> the Abkhaz population of Tamysh gathered [(local)], where a village defense group was
> formed… [My relative]… took a couple of friends [(quotidian)], went to the [SRIF] unit…,

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[43] The Georgian commander Karkarashvili's promise to sacrifice "100,000 Georgians [to kill] all 97,000 [Abkhaz]" was broadcast on August 25 (Amkuab 1992, 128, emphasis added).

brought [back weapons]…, [and o]n his initiative we began shooting at [Georgia's] military convoy moving along the main road (Interview in Khodzhaa 2003, 85-6, emphasis added).

In the east and west of Abkhazia, relatives and friends in neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces alerted one another of threat based on the information that they received from the national and local actors: "My son was studying in Russia… I told him about the war [and] he left it all to come here… I sent him to [fight]" (Interview 11, Pitsunda, Fall 2011); "I was home picking tea… [My] neighbor called urgently and said that the war began" (Interview in Khodzhaa 2009, 690, emphasis added).

Informal interactions with family members and friends offered the level of validation to the idea of threat and the need to mobilize in response that is only possible in this private social setting. Threat framing in this setting often took form of a blessing. As organized and spontaneous fighters confirm, "My father [told me] what happened… He gave me his rifles, cheese, [and] a loaf of bread and said, 'Go where your friends are!' [and] I went" (Interview 27, Pitsunda, Fall 2011); "You only try to return!" a mother blessed her daughter to fight in the war (Interview 39, Pitsunda, Fall 2011).

As the collective notion of threat of the Georgian advance consolidated, difficult mobilization decisions were made at the quotidian level: "First I was in shock, then we began gathering with friends, relatives, deciding what to do" (Interview 72, Gagra, Fall 2011); "We began calling all our [sports team] boys by phone…, gathered at the sports ground to discuss what to do…, [and] formed around close ones" (Interview 75, Gagra, Fall 2011). The resulting narodnoe opolchenie (people's force) "was formed on the basis of location and friendship ties" (Interview 47, Pitsunda, Fall 2011).

"Narodnoe Opolchenie": For Families, Villages, and the Nation

Why did threat framing resonate with the Abkhaz? The shared understandings of history and identity invoked by the national, local, and quotidian actors were related to individual experiences as part of the Abkhaz group. Fighters came to view the Georgian advance as an attempt to eliminate Abkhazia as a separate political entity and the Abkhaz as its core cultural unit. This notion drew on

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the political, economic, and cultural repression in the Soviet Georgian state that fighters shared in directly, through family history, or collective memory. This excerpt represents fighters' responses:

I participated in the war because since childhood, we lived in the society where the Abkhaz were humiliated, eradicated. Our language, last names were changed to Georgian… [so] that there would be no Abkhaz… [or] Abkhazia—the land that [Georgians] considered to be their own. But it is our, Abkhaz land… [Thus] we had to struggle (Interview 114, Sukhum/i, Fall 2011).

That their land and people, the constituent parts of the collective Abkhaz identity, were threatened, meant to potential participants that mobilization was required in defense: "We realized that we had to seriously resist, we had no other motherland" (Interview 118, Sukhum/i, Fall 2011). The duty to Abkhazia and the Abkhaz is reported as the key motivation to fight across the interviews: "Whether we remain alive or not, it is our duty to defend our native land" (Interview 12, Pitsunda, Fall 2011). All fighters who mobilized on the Abkhaz side characterize the war as Patriotic as a result.

However, some fighters mobilized to defend their homes and localities, while others left the native villages, towns, and cities to join mobilization in the sites of intense fighting, specifically by Sukhum/i and Gagra. The differences in the roles that individuals adopted suggest that they viewed threat as posed to their collectivity at its different levels of aggregation. Attacks on houses "created … a core of fighters determined to regain lost homes" (HRW 1995, 23). As fighters explain, "They cleared my house, killed my dog, offended my father—all this boiled up and I united people around me to fight" (Interview 53, Gagra, Fall 2011); "It was not only the Abkhaz who fought. Everyone was defending their families, elders, and children" (Interview 12, Pitsunda, Fall 2011).

The majority of fighters sought to defend their localities. Fighters explain: "How [could] I leave my city and people whom I worked with closely for many years, now that they are in danger?" (Interview in Cherkezija 2003, 105, emphasis added); "We knew that every village had to defend

itself" (Interview 64, Gagra, Fall 2011). In the east of Abkhazia, local-level mobilization took form of village defense, prompted by threat framing in the local social structures.[44] Spontaneous fighters confirm: "the Administration was notified that the [Georgian] forces were [near] in Okhurej… That evening the whole village gathered… and organized village defense" (Interview in Khodzhaa 2003, 100, emphasis added); "My nephew… urged me to go to the east… where it was very difficult due to the blockade. Soon I… was in my native Mokva" (Interview in Khodzhaa 2003, 64, emphasis added). Village defense groups formed similarly in the west, but were complemented by shoreline patrols due to proximity to the sea.[45] Fighters illustrate these forms of local mobilization: "When Georgians occupied Abkhazia, we immediately formed a Pitsunda group. We were 15 boys from the village… Others started to join… We only had 12 rifles and a grenade launcher…, but guarded [our] bridges [from intrusion]" (Interview 33, Pitsunda, Fall 2011); "people without weapons began organizing into groups in their villages to patrol the shoreline. Our [group] was in the school. We all knew each other and tried keeping close to one another" (Interview 36, Pitsunda, Fall 2011).

Finally, many Abkhaz left their localities to defend Sukhum/i and Gagra, the sites of utmost fighting at the war onset. "You are most dear to me," a spontaneous fighter in the west explained to his wife, "but my motherland is dearer" (Interview 104, Sukhum/i, Fall 2011). A Tqvarchel/i fighter demonstrates: "my younger brother ran away to [Sukhum/i] to fight for the Motherland together with his [SRIF] friends" (Interview in Khodzhaa 2009, 736, emphasis added). As this fighter, many joined organized mobilization by Sukhum/i and Gagra once threat was framed nationally. "When Ardzinba announced general mobilization," a Gudauta fighter reports, "I said, 'Everyone, go to [the

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[44] Groups of 15 to 215 fighters formed in at least 22 of around 35 villages (Pachulija 2010, 49-55).
[45] Defense groups formed in almost every village in the Abkhaz-dominated Gudauta region, while shoreline patrols were as well present in the Gagra region, where the Abkhaz were a minority.

military headquarters]!..' They separated us into groups" (Interview 97, Gagra, Fall 2011). The Gudauta group of 140 fighters formed there assisted SRIF fighters by Sukhum/i (Pachulija 2010, 39).

Yet most mobilized outside of the SRIF structure, gaining access to weapons at the Gudauta military base and among the locals or going unarmed. Fighters describe these typical mobilization scenarios: "we gathered the boys we knew…, took some weapons from the Russian barracks (with some they helped, other we just took)…, [and] right away went with one bullet to *[Sukhum/i's]* Red Bridge" (Interview 81, Gagra, Fall 2011); "Everything was arranged spontaneously… We collected weapons and those who managed to get these weapons *went toward [Georgia's marines by Gagra]* … Of course, tens [of us] who got the weapons were not enough" (Interview 72, Gagra, Fall 2011).

"[J]oining the armed struggle in spite of the apparent futility of resistance" implies that non-instrumental motives coexisted with instrumental concerns in Abkhaz mobilization (Brojdo 2008, 51). Certainly, status considerations played a role. A mother captures the importance of community sanctioning: "both sons were sick but both were not sent [to be treated in Moscow] not to be seen as traitors" (Interview 102, Sukhum/i, Fall 2011). However, the further individual threat perceptions and associated actions were directed toward the broader collectivity, the more possibility existed for normative motivations in mobilization decisions. Three indicators support these motivations.

First, poorly armed and unarmed mobilization suggests that security seeking or expectation of rewards were not the primary drivers. Local mobilization in the areas where Georgia established control is a critical observation in this regard. Exemplary is the record of continuing poorly armed mobilization after Georgia's forces blockaded villages, towns, and cities in the east: "on the second day [after Adzuzhba was blockaded], the youth of the village began gathering, arming themselves with whatever they could: made bottles with incendiary mixtures, got ammonal from Tqvarcheli, and put up a barricade… with watch duties" (Interview in Khodzaa 2009, 615, emphasis added).

Second, the record of human losses among the Abkhaz and continuing mobilization despite these losses, especially by Sukhum/i and Gagra, is a strong indicator of normative motivations. For example, spontaneous fighters "taken captive [in the first Sukhum/i battle] were all brutally killed" (Interview in Khodzhaa 2009, 888, emphasis added). Fighters learned about or observed casualties in the fighting, yet continued to fight. A participant illustrates this pattern by Sukhum/i: "when the Abkhaz went into counterattack the first day of the war, one had a gun, two were unarmed, running behind… to take the guns of [those]… injured or killed" (Interview 127, Sukhum/i, Winter 2011).

Third, mobilization despite the exit option reflects normative motives. As a fighter explains, "People died voluntarily for Abkhazia, no one forced them: they could leave for Russia" (Interview 127, Sukhum/i, Winter 2011). Not only escaping the fighting was generally feasible at the war onset (see section below), but also exit options existed for select groups. General mobilization exempted youths under 18 years old. Single sons and intellectuals were ordered not to fight. Many mobilized despite these alternatives and report duty-based motives: "[I] perform[ed] the duty to our people at a difficult time," a young fighter says (Interview in Bebia 2011, 345, emphasis added); "I could not do otherwise in the situation of aggression against my ethnos," a professor explains (Interview 117, Sukhum/i, Fall 2011).[46] Combat deaths and injuries in these groups are systematically reported.[47]

Non-Fighters: Fear and Self- and Kin-Protection

While collective threat framing made most potential participants aware of Georgia's threat, the extent to which threat toward the broader group was prioritized differentiated fighters from non-fighters. Fighters mobilized to defend their families, localities, and Abkhazia as a whole, moving toward the other-regarding end of the mobilization continuum in each scenario. Non-fighters, even

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[46] Righteous from this perspective, the war forced up to 240,000 Georgians to flee Abkhazia (Trier et al. 2010, 21).
[47] Interview 11, Pitsunda, Fall 2011; Interview 88, Gagra, Fall 2011; Interview 95, Gudauta, Fall 2011; Interview 144, Sukhum/i, Winter 2011.

if empathized with the cause, did not see their participation as meaningful in the unlikely conditions of Abkhaz success and hid, fled, or, in rare cases, defected to the Georgian side. Pursued for self- or kin-protection reasons, these actions were situated toward the self-regarding end of mobilization.

Hiding was the dominant non-fighting strategy. Depending on who controlled their locality, non-fighters hid in their villages, towns, or cities or fled to safer areas in Abkhazia. These included Tqvarchel/i in the east and Gudauta in the west—"the only areas that did not suffer [from fighting]" (Interview 10, Gudauta, Fall 2011). "Over the course of a few weeks, most Abkhaz fled Sukhumi" to these safer areas (HRW 1995, 23). In the east, holding neutrality was possible until the Georgian forces entered villages under their control. Thereafter, non-fighters who hid in these villages fled to Tqvarchel/i and surroundings that were blockaded but inaccessible to the Georgian side. "Tqvarchal was occupied, but Georgians could not take it because of the partisan fighting in its nearby villages" (Interview 110, Sukhum/i, Fall 2011). A non-fighter reports a usual pattern in the area: "On August 16, the [M]khedrioni entered our village Tamysh… Abkhaz residents were forced to save ourselves by fleeing… through villages… to Tqvarcheli" (Letter in Cherkezija 2003, 89, emphasis added). In the west, the Abkhaz-controlled Gudauta region served as the hiding area. The Georgian roadblocks were set up, but were lenient at the war onset. A non-fighter from Gagra reports: "There was a post in Kolkhida… They sifted… the Abkhaz…, but still looked through the fingers… My relative came to take his sister and children [and we fled] to the Gudauta region" (Interview 83, Gagra, Fall 2011).

The second widespread non-fighting strategy was fleeing outside of Abkhazia. In the east, a helicopter from Tqvarchel/i flew to Russian Teberda: "My husband [and son were in the east], went to… Tqvarchal through non-occupied area…, from there by helicopter to Teberda" (Interview 83, Gagra, Fall 2011). Access to this option was difficult, especially for men, most of whom hid instead. In the west, individuals fled to Russia by sea or main road. A non-fighter describes these scenarios:

"a boat carried all those who wanted to leave from Gudauta to Sochi…, many left by cars… [T]here had been tens [already in Russia] when we arrived [by boat]" (Interview 59, Gagra, Fall 2011).[48]

Finally, a small number of individuals defected to the Georgian side. Respondents critically say: "There were also others who went to fight on the other side" (Interview 5, Gudauta, Fall 2011). The defectors are known by name, as traitors, and often come from the organized pool of potential mobilizers (Pachulija 2010, 32-3). The Georgian leadership admitted after the war that the Abkhaz population rarely supported them (Kvarandzija, 1996). Thus, of under 100 SRIF regulars, only two fled and three defected (Khodzhaa 2006, 190-2). Organized fighters illustrate this decision: "when the Georgian tank approached, our battalion commander… ordered personnel to stand right before the tank… [and] disappeared" (Interview in Khodzhaa 2006, 58, emphasis added).

The actions of individuals in the non-fighter trajectory indicate that they perceived personal or kin security to be at greatest threat. The underlying theme of fear for own life or close family and friends supports their security-based motives. As non-fighters consistently explain, "I was afraid… [and so] went to Gudauta and hid. There was fear for your life and your close ones… We could be killed any time" (Interview 149, Sukhum/i, Winter 2011); "We were in fear, we could have died… I now regret. It would have been better if I had gone to fight" (Interview 42, Pitsunda, Fall 2011).[49] "The Abkhaz population thus lived in terror" and escaped to protect themselves (HRW 1995, 23).

Depending on whether they escaped the fighting on the Abkhaz side together with family and friends or alone, the non-fighter roles moved toward the self-regarding end of the mobilization continuum. The actions of those who hid, fled, or defected alone strongly align with self-regarding motives as they commonly compromised others. As organized fighters recount their commander's

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[48] Russia's fleet evacuated around 10,000 people from Abkhazia by August 20 (HRW 1995, 21).
[49] Regret is evident in my participant observation as rumors surround non-fighters (Field notes, November 4, 2011).

defection, "our deputy commander… betrayed us, giving in part of our personnel" (Interview in Khodzhaa 2003, 45, emphasis added). Parents driven by fear hid the sons for others to fight instead:

> my son was [in the Gudauta barracks]. He did not like it: "I am 20 years old, the war is ongoing but I am laying here…" I told him, "Stay…, like everyone." [Many] hid their sons there… If volunteers came, they were taken to fight. These ones were not volunteers, so they remained [in the reserve] and lived (Interview 11, Pitsunda, Fall 2011).

Those who escaped together prioritized security of close family and friends, even when this posed difficult dilemmas of mobilization. Non-fighters report: "We had no doubt that we could not stay in Abkhazia [due to] casualties… My husband [took me] with children to Majkop" (Interview 59, Gagra, Fall 2011); "my mother-in-law… told her son, 'Take your child, go to Tkuarchal!..' [My husband] was a 40-year-old man [able to fight, but]… had to take [our son] because otherwise they would be killed" (Interview 83, Gagra, Fall 2011); "I did not want to, but was persuaded… to take the children away from the village… to Moscow" (Interview 39, Pitsunda, Fall 2011).

Family and other alternative obligations formed through inter-marriage or employment and education outside of Abkhazia overwhelmed these individuals' duty to the broader collectivity. As respondents explain, "My brother's wife was Georgian… They went to Moscow as soon as the war began" (Interview 5, Gudauta, Fall 2011); "As a parent, it is not the state that punishes my son, but I … There is a notion of shame here, of which there is none in Moscow [where many went to study or work]" (Interview 122, Sukhum/i, Fall 2011). As a result, fighters mobilized driven by the duty to their collectivity at the quotidian, local, and national levels, which they perceived to be threatened. Non-fighters feared for their own or kin security. Self- or kin-protection was their primary concern, reflected in their decisions to hide, flee, or defect, alone or together with close family and friends.

CONCLUSION

Using local-level data on Abkhaz mobilization at the onset of the Georgian-Abkhaz war in mid-August, 1992, this article argued that social structures, within which individuals are embedded, provide access to essential information on threat that individuals draw on to make difficult mobilization decisions in the context of uncertainty characteristic of civil war. This information is filtered from the national through local levels of society and is consolidated into collective notions of threat with quotidian networks based on shared understandings of history and identity. The emergence of collective notions of threat shapes the ways in which individuals view threat. The difference in self- to other-regarding roles that individuals adopt is based on who the other is in their threat perception.

Framed as threatening across social structures in Abkhazia, the Georgian advance prompted mobilization by both armed and poorly armed or unarmed fighters, even in the areas where Georgia established control. Those whose understanding of conflict resonated with collective threat framing perceived threat to their collectivity and mobilized to defend families, localities, and the nation. The further their actions concerned the broader group, the more they reflected normative commitments beyond self-regarding concerns, as their group—outnumbered and militarily weak at the war onset —offered little prospect of security or success in the war. Others prioritized threat to themselves or close family and friends and hid, fled, or defected to the stronger, Georgian side. Whether they escaped the fighting alone or together reflected the self- or kin-protection motives behind their actions.

The implication of this analysis is that distinct mobilization trajectories cannot be viewed as a result of stable preferences or cost-benefit calculations based on pre-existing knowledge of threat. While these considerations play a role, they are situated in a complex social context, where threats are not given, but are rather constructed, or filtered through and consolidated by the social structures that individuals interact with in daily life, and the resultant perception, rather than the fact of threat, drives individual mobilization decisions. This article relates the differences in threat perception to

lived experiences as part of the group and suggests that alternative group obligations influence the ways in which individuals process the information on threat. Future research should focus greater attention on how social structures interact with instrumental and normative motives in shaping mobilization across a broader range of micro-level variation in combatant, support, and non-fighter roles as they relate to collectivities at their different levels of aggregation. This research can gain further insight into the coexistence of instrumental and normative motivations and specific mechanisms of other-regarding mobilization—a novel and promising area of research on individual decision-making in civil war.

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COLLECTIVE THREAT FRAMING AND MOBILIZATION IN CIVIL WAR

ONLINE APPENDIX

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APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

The primary data on which this article is based was collected in Abkhazia over 2010-2013.
The main source of data are 150 interviews conducted with 142 respondents selected according to
location and participation in the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-1993—the two sources of variation
in my micro-comparative research design. This methodological appendix provides a description of
the manner in which the interviews were conducted, including my fieldwork logistics and interview
strategies.

Fieldwork Logistics

My research in Abkhazia began with an exploratory field trip, when I probed the feasibility
of long-term engagement in the selected sub-national locales, the ability to locate respondents with
the varied record of participation in the Georgian-Abkhaz war, and people's openness to discussing
topics related to war participation, life events outside of the war period, and the conflict in general.
This preliminary trip focused on establishing contacts in the non-governmental sector, government
structures of the de facto Abkhaz state,[1] and local community groups. I identified key state and non-
state organizations and held informal meetings with the leaders. The trip was essential in testing my
initial assumptions about the case and refining my research design, developing trust among leading
actors in the Abkhaz society and visibility on which my future research depended, and assessing the
security issues I could encounter during long-term fieldwork in Abkhazia (Sluka 2012).

The insight I gained in the exploratory stage of my research guided my core field trip, when
I spent close to a month in each of the four field sites—Sukhum/i, Gagra, Pitsunda, and Gudauta. In
particular, it was important for me to remain unaffiliated during my field research: in the politicized

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[1] Abkhazia is a partially recognized, breakaway territory of Georgia.

Abkhaz environment, formal affiliation with any one organization can be perceived as acceding to that organization's position on the conflict.[2] Hence, I worked independently and relied on my local contacts, rather than official bodies, non-governmental organizations, or universities, for logistical support. This strategy helped "dispel the notion that [I was] affiliated with government agencies [or civil society opposition], a frequent fear of the residents of high-violence locales" (Arias 2009, 245).

In entering each field site, I followed two steps to attain confidence of potential respondents and personal security. First, I introduced myself to the local authorities, including the heads of local administrations and the police (milicija) office. Formal approval implied that my research purposes were known and that respondents would not bear reprisals for participation from the state. Second, I drew on networks I established in the preliminary trip to contact prominent community members who served as gatekeepers for me in each locale, identified my first respondents, and could "vouch for [my] legitimacy" (Peritore 1990, 366). Both strategies reassured respondents of my researcher role—the impression critical for increasing trust and addressing security concerns in violent social contexts (Sluka 1990).

My sustained presence, consistency of research activities, and engagement in respondents' daily lives and formal and informal social events allowed me to extend my initial networks in each locale to include a broad range of local contacts, on which I drew to select subsequent respondents. These contacts originated in respondents' extended social networks I interacted with outside of the interview setting and war-related associations, libraries, and museums, where I collected secondary materials. Hence, following other researchers of violence, "I did not rely on any single person as an interlocutor or any single network of relations… to avoid personal biases" (Fujii 2008, 576).

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[2] This strategy of preventing research bias is unfeasible in many conflict settings (Wood 2006, 379).

Furthermore, when my networks did not provide the contacts needed to fulfill the spectrum of war participation roles, I approached those individuals highlighted in my interviews, secondary research, and informal interactions without referral. Field awareness I developed over the course of my work helped evaluate when this strategy was ethical and would not harm respondents, namely, in cases of official posts, and how to appropriately implement it—through formal appointments.

The interviews with potential respondents, selected through my combined network referral and targeted selection strategy, were generally arranged by phone, with respondents themselves or their office representatives, when I introduced myself, briefly described my research, and asked if they were comfortable with an interview. One woman and three men in fighter and non-fighter roles refused to participate, which indicated that "people did not feel pressured to talk" (Fujii 2008, 574). Following a refusal, I sought other respondents with similar participation status.

The interviews typically took place in respondents' homes, offices, or public areas, such as parks and cafes, where distance from others and privacy of the interview could be ensured. I asked respondents for a preferred location, but suggested alternative options if I felt that the location may compromise confidentiality or security of respondents or myself. My ability to assess these factors increased over time; in general, I trusted the local knowledge of my respondents (Wood 2006, 380).

Since the interviews were clustered within each locale I lived in at a time, my access to the interview location was relatively easy. I used public forms of transportation, mostly traveling alone, but in rare cases, when a formal introduction was necessary or respondents' residence was outside of the public transportation service area, was accompanied by an interlocutor. Due to the relatively

small size of Abkhazia,[3] I was not obstructed in my movement between the locales, but had to limit my movement to the selected locales for security reasons.[4]

I conducted the interviews in Russian, a language spoken by all respondents in my research, and did not require translation or other types of assistance. The interviews lasted one to six hours, averaging two hours. Most were recorded (see consent details below) and transcribed upon return.[5] When recording during the interview hindered the conversation, I reconstructed the interview in my field notes immediately after. No respondent refused interview recording. However, when I judged that it could jeopardize respondents or myself, the interview was not recorded in any form.[6] Finally, respondents were not compensated for participation and, in turn, often offered to share a meal after the interview—an important indicator that my research was seen as valuable by my respondents.

In the course of my field research, I took great care in ensuring privacy, confidentiality, and security of my respondents in the interview as well as protecting the sensitive data I collected, both in the field and writing stages (Wood 2006; Fujii 2012). In the field, the interview recordings were kept in a secure, password-protected location, with the field notes carried with me at all times. My transcribed materials and field notes are not made publicly available as they were collected under assurances of confidentiality and remain sensitive materials in light of the ongoing tensions around Abkhazia. I present interview excerpts without attribution or personal identifiers and in the context of typical war participation trajectories, rather than individual details. These strategies protect my respondents in an ongoing way.

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[3] The area is 8,700km^2 over 170km along the coast and 66km from south to north (Dbar 2013, 23).
[4] For example, I avoided the bordering regions between Abkhazia and Georgia due to the continued violent activity there.
[5] This strategy is feasible in some field contexts (see, for example, Viterna 2006), but is avoided in others for security reasons (see, for example, Parkinson 2013, 420).
[6] This decision was made in exceptional cases of respondents with a sensitive public profile.

Interview Strategies

The interviews followed the semi-structured format, beginning with the thorough informed consent protocol and, only once respondents communicated their full consent, proceeding to semi-structured interview questions on pre-war, civil war, and post-war aspects of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. The informed consent procedure was typically written for high-level government officials and leaders of non-governmental organizations and oral for all other individuals. The written option was offered to individuals in the noted positions due to their public profile and extensive exposure to academic and media interviewing. These respondents often requested me to note their affiliation and post in the interview record and presentation. However, their names are not used in writing and their consent forms are not made publicly available. I stressed at the outset of the consent procedure that the oral option could be taken at any time in the interview.[7] The majority of respondents in my research consented to be interviewed orally, so that no written record of their participation existed or could compromise their identity.

The informed consent procedure followed the same protocol regardless of the distinction in the written and oral form. I introduced myself as an academic researcher completing a Ph.D. degree in Canada. I ensured to make it clear early in the interview that I did not have an affiliation with the government, non-governmental organizations, or universities in Abkhazia, Georgia, or Russia—the main actors involved in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. However, I emphasized that I gained formal approval from the local authorities to conduct my research in the locale where the interview took place. I noticed that this self-presentation format put individuals at ease, as I was not seen as biased

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[7] No potential respondent in my research refused the written option. In contrast, respondents in this group often preferred written informed consent. It is a common practice of elite interviewing in the post-war context of Abkhazia and the region more broadly. However, this option is not advisable in the context of ongoing civil wars (Wood 2006, 380).

by the formal affiliation with political actors in the conflict and took care to secure the local approval viewed as important by most potential respondents.

In-depth examination of the history of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict was the stated purpose of my research. I made sure to clarify that I would consult with a broad range of actors involved in the conflict, including individuals who participated in different capacities and did not participate in the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-1993 and individuals with different affiliations and positions in present-day Abkhazia. I informed potential respondents that while my research focused on conflict processes that have developed in Abkhazia, I would conduct further research in Georgia and Russia to incorporate the views on the history of the conflict on all sides. Making my research purpose and scope transparent was important in general, but especially for those individuals who did not wish to participate in a project that involved the views of the actors they did not accept. While no individual refused to participate on these grounds, this information was central to a fully informed consent.

Finally, I assured potential respondents that I would maintain their confidentiality across all stages of research and that their responses would be excerpted in my writing, without attribution or identifying details. This applied to all potential respondents, including the government officials and non-governmental leaders noted above, unless they specifically requested their affiliation and post to be recorded.[8] I made it clear that no other benefits than academic writing based on the collected materials should be expected from my research. I followed Wood (2006, 380) in offering "different levels of confidentiality" to individuals, with the options to withdraw written or oral consent at any time, control what I recorded during or after the interview, and refuse to answer any of my questions. Combined, this protocol helped shape a full understanding of the interview process and outcomes

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[8] Even in these cases, I am careful not to include individual details in my writing and to note these respondents' positions mainly in the discussion of present-day issues and general conflict processes.

and the interview dynamics where respondents could contribute to the conversation on their terms.[9] This approach appears to have prevented some of the distress that could otherwise be experienced in interviews on traumatic, conflict-related topics.

The remainder of the interview was based on the principles of in-depth interviewing within the interpretive research tradition.[10] This method "is intended to explore the meaning(s) of terms and/or situations and/or events… to the persons who live with and/or lived through them" (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006, 118). I selected this method because the core goal of my research was to explore the meanings Abkhaz men and women attributed to the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict from the historical perspective, with their pre-war commitments, social interaction, and conflict participation setting the ground for understanding their perceptions of conflict at the war onset and mobilization trajectories. These understudied questions are "difficult to locate in documentary sources or every-day interactions" (Soss 2006, 141). In-depth interviewing allowed me to explore these questions in great detail and with the level of flexibility necessary to delve into the dilemmas and uncertainties surrounding mobilization decisions and the relationship between structure and agency in civil war.

What made the interviews in-depth was the discursive mode of interaction I adopted with respondents. "'Conversation' comes close to capturing the character of interviewing in an interpretive mode" (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006, 117). Hence, after the formal informed consent part of the interview, I suggested to my respondents that the interaction to follow was best viewed as a conversation. This removed the sense of interrogation that could be associated with the term "inter-

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[9] See Thomson (2010) on the importance of engaging individuals on their own terms. This approach is especially critical in interviewing people on sensitive issues involving personal suffering or loss.
[10] While my interviews were semi-structured, rather than fully open-ended—the format commonly associated with interpretive interviewing,—they nonetheless had a discursive, as opposed to fixed, format, distinguishing my approach from surveys and preset formal interviews (Soss 2006, 135).

view" and implied that my questions would be used to guide, rather than determine, the course of the interview. My role in the interview was defined as that of an engaged, focused listener.[11] The semi-structured interview plan served to navigate and direct the conversation toward my research purpose, while I was open to and followed up on respondent departures from my questions.[12]

This discursive interview dynamic "allow[ed] the respondent to reflect on and even explore her own ideas, to reveal not only strong views but also worries, uncertainties—in a word, to engage human vulnerability" (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006, 118). It was essential to capturing personal views beyond the master narrative of conflict. Respondents often began with the official narrative, but revealed their nuanced positions in specific stories, silences, and physical gestures in the course of the interview. These "spoken and unspoken" interactions, signaling respondents' "thoughts and feelings," exemplify the "meta-data" that I paid close attention to and engaged in my research (Fujii 2010, 232). For example, the silences following women's accounts on war participation of fathers, brothers, sons, and husbands indicated that retelling of the stories of bravery and goodness of these Abkhaz fighters was a way of coping with their loss. As demonstrated below, the meta-data served as an invaluable source of insight for me to probe and reconstruct individual understandings of conflict and mobilization trajectories, both within and across the interviews.

My semi-structured interview plan followed the individual life histories in the context of the conflict.[13] The questions on respondents' childhood focused on the stories respondents remembered

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[11] The intimate setting produced by this approach allowed me to share in the memories of the war and experience of remembering. It invited me to reflect on my emotional reactions to respondents, both in and outside of the interview setting. See Wood (2006, 384) on "secondary trauma" among researchers conducting interviews on war. See Yanow and Schwartz-Shea (2006) on reflexivity.
[12] The length of my interviews varied largely for this reason.
[13] The interviews took the life history format, "a form of oral history" interviewing suitable to my research due to its scope, covering life trajectories, rather than focusing on singular topics or events (Benmayor 1991, fn. 1, p. 173). While oral history "refers to… recording, transcribing, editing, and

hearing within the family and outside of the household, the relations they developed with Georgian neighbors, teachers, and classmates, and the language they had to speak and history they learned at school—Abkhaz, Georgian, and/or Russian. These questions helped me examine whether and how the attitudes on the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict were formed within the structure of familial or other everyday social relations and reinforced at the national level, for instance, through education policy.

The next phase of the interview plan covered pre-war adulthood, focusing on the university experience, which most of my respondents had due to the Soviet emphasis on higher education, the Georgian-Abkhaz relations in the employment setting, and involvement in pre-war mobilization.[14] I interviewed individuals with a broad range of pre-war backgrounds, which allowed me to capture how respondents in the distinct state and non-state positions thought their group belonging affected education and employment opportunities. The sites of information exchange, affiliation formation, and organization of collective action were discussed in this phase of the interview, letting me probe the interaction between respondents' different pre-war commitments and organizational affiliation and their activism. At this stage in their life histories, respondents were likely to form strong extra-familial relationships within and outside of the Abkhaz group, making this phase of the interview central to gathering egocentric social network data.[15] This data emerged from respondent accounts of who they interacted with and what interactions shaped their views and participation in pre-war conflict events. It was collected across the interviews, as respondents' relationships overlapped.[16]

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making public the resulting product," an important departure in my research was not to edit or make transcripts available publicly to ensure security of respondents (Gluck and Patai 1991, fn. 1, p. 4).

[14] My respondents fell in two general age groups, young adults under the age of 30 prior to the war and individuals over 30 years old, most of whom had stable employment and families at that time.

[15] Parkinson (2013) adopts a similar strategy.

[16] Respondents often attended the same university and met in the employment context. I purposely selected respondents' family members and friends with varied war participation record to capture

The majority of the interview focused specifically on the first days of the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-1993.[17] I followed the strategy that combined questions on the events that unfolded on August 14-18, 1992, in the individual's trajectory and more broadly, in the trajectories of families, friends, and acquaintances, and proceeded to narrative questions on the individual's understanding of these events.[18] Existing research in psychology and social sciences demonstrates "that more salient, less repetitive events are remembered with particular accuracy… and that highly intense or violent events… are especially well remembered in both the short and long term" (Viterna 2006, 14; Wood 2003, 33-4). Since these features characterized the war onset in Abkhazia, I was able to draw on the recollections of respondents to reconstruct each respondent's step by step mobilization trajectory, exploring how they learned about the Georgian advance into Abkhazia, who they talked to upon hearing the news of the advance, and what actions and with whom they pursued in response.

I then proceeded to ask about respondents' views on the war onset, including whether they anticipated the Georgian advance, how they perceived the anticipated risks associated with it, and what motivated them to participate in the war or not and in which capacity. The result is the highly nuanced collection of individual mobilization trajectories, with the sequences of individual actions situated within the broader structural context of the war onset and the social ties involved, as well as the narratives describing perceptions and motivations as they related to pre-war accounts of family past, personal relations in and outside of the group, and engagement in the conflict before the war.

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individuals' social relations and whether and how these relations persisted in the war. As I gathered data on multiple such networks, the interviews did not privilege certain views or affiliations.

[17] The Georgian advance took place on August 14-15, 1992. I focused on these two days to evaluate the differences in mobilization in the east, which unfolded on August 14, and west of Abkhazia the following day. I incorporated August 16-18 into the discussion of the war onset to establish whether respondents changed their mobilization decisions after exposure to the first episodes of violence.

[18] Viterna (2006, 14) adopts a similar strategy of "[m]ixing the recall of events with more open-ended narrative questions."

While the combination of event and narrative accounts helped me tackle the subject of war onset from different angles and so address the issue of memory in this core phase of the interview,[19] the last phases of the interview on further war and post-war stages allowed me to evaluate, first, the endogeneity of respondent memories to war-time processes and, second, whether and how people's post-war affiliations affected what they said about the past (Wood 2003). On the first issue, Wood (2003, 35) argues that "the telling of personal and community histories in an ethnographic setting is … shaped by the respondent's personal and family trajectories through the war." I employed three strategies to address this issue. First, I paid close attention to how respondents spoke about their war trajectories in relation to their family members and close friends. This strategy allowed me to check when respondent accounts conveyed self-aggrandizing or, in contrast, minimizing motives, rather than actual patterns of mobilization. For example, female respondents often spoke on behalf of men who fought and were lost in the war. Their war-time paths were cast in relation to men. This insight helped me steer the interview toward women's specific activities in support or other war-time roles.

Second, I recorded the occurrence of silences and gestures indicating discomfort and noted in the course of the interview when the information provided by the respondent conflicted with my prior knowledge of the case or their mobilization record, as gathered from their preceding responses and other respondents' accounts and interactions. I was careful not to challenge what appeared to be misrepresented information for ethical and practical reasons. This could "result in hostility toward the project and perhaps toward participants" (Wood 2006, 382).[20] Instead, the semi-structured for-mat of the interview "provide[d me with] freedom for probes and follow-up questions" and I used targeted follow-up questions to cross-check responses within and across the interviews (Soss 2006,

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[19] My interviews took place two decades after the Georgian-Abkhaz war. See Wood (2003), Fujii (2010), and Wedeen (2010) on problems of memory in conflict- and violence-related interviewing.
[20] Researchers often face this dilemma, especially in perpetrator interviews (Wood 2006, 382).

135).[21] For example, the rumors (see Appendix B. Participant Observation Sites, p. 17) surrounding individuals who did not participate in the combat or support roles in Abkhazia, but insisted that they contributed to the war, allowed me to grasp difficult dilemmas of war participation in the interview, including the different normative commitments in the decisions to participate in the war or not and the blame individuals had to bear thereafter if their decisions departed from the social expectations.

Finally, I accessed comparable interview archives collected by other researchers at the time of the war in 1992-1993 and midway between the war and my field research.[22] This strategy helped me assess how war-time processes shaped respondent memories and whether these memories were reshaped with time by validating mobilization trajectories and narratives surrounding the war—the two components of my combined event and narrative interview strategy. In particular, some of my respondents were interviewed by other researchers, allowing me to compare individual paths. The confirmation of mobilization trajectories that emerged using this strategy increased the confidence in my interview responses. More importantly, by using this strategy, I was able to verify the broader patterns I arrived at as a result of my research. Both my interviews and alternative archives support the importance of threat framing across social structures and shared understandings of history and identity based on the so-called Georgianization of Abkhazia underlying this threat framing.

Triangulation with additional primary and secondary materials provided an additional level of validation. My extensive review of local academic studies, official documents, and news reports supplemented individual accounts on mobilization with macro-level data on the war, which further

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[21] Fujii (2008) follows a similar strategy of cross-checking interview responses with meta-data.
[22] In using this strategy, I drew on Scott (1985, 90), whose requirement for research locale selection was "that the village be one that had been studied before." The main sources of published interview transcripts on my case include Bebia (1997, 2011) and Khodzhaa (2003, 2006, 2009). Brojdo (2008) is based on interviews conducted during the war and offers base-line information for my research.

situated my interview data in the socio-structural context.[23] My elite interviews and interviews with respondents affected by the conflict in Georgia and Russia closed the remaining gaps in the structural context of the war.[24]

Beyond the strategies I adopted to engage the issue of memory, I was aware of the potential effects of post-war processes in Abkhazia on the interview. As Wood (2003, 35) suggests, "present political loyalties, beliefs concerning the likely consequences of participation in the interview and of expressing particular views, and present personal objectives" influence what respondents choose to tell the researcher or not. As demonstrated above, I paid close attention in the informed consent procedure to conveying that respondent confidentiality would be preserved, that participation in the interview did not conflict with local authorities, and that no participation benefits existed other than academic writing. The protocol and respondent flexibility in the interview helped ease the concerns about voicing personal views. Respondents often spoke critically of the official conflict narrative and present-day politics in Abkhazia. My unaffiliated status in the region suggested that I did not have political influence and my research would not advance respondents' political purposes. Most respondents worked to present their stories in as much detail as possible, using personal documents, photographs, and notes to support their accounts.[25] As other researchers of conflict, I realized that for many respondents, "sharing their life story with an engaged listener [eager to comprehend their history] was some sort of service that I provided in the course of my research" (Wood 2006, 382).

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[23] I surveyed major archives, libraries, and museums in Abkhazia (Sukhum/i, Gagra, and Gudauta), Georgia (Tbilisi), and Russia (Moscow) to locate official documents, secondary literature, and news archives on the conflict. See list of secondary materials appended as Table 5 (p. 29).

[24] I conducted 30 interviews with former Georgian residents of Abkhazia displaced as a result of the war and elite interviews with experts on the conflict in Georgia (Tbilisi) and Russia (Moscow). See interview details appended as Table 6 (p. 30).

[25] I did not request, but was frequently presented with supporting materials during the interviews.

Furthermore, to evaluate the extent to which post-war loyalties impacted the interviews and ensure that I did not privilege a single set of views on the war, I interviewed individuals with varied political affiliation in post-war Abkhazia. I expected that individuals disillusioned by the outcomes of the war, including the dire economic conditions and blockade of Abkhazia that followed, would not speak positively of the Abkhaz war effort. On the other hand, individuals who fought in the war and received high regard or leadership posts in the de facto Abkhaz state would be favorable toward it. To capture such differences, I interviewed state officials in local administration and police office and national ministries, including justice, defense, and foreign affairs. Respondents in the non-state group included leaders of non-governmental organizations, journalists, community leaders, such as the elders, and regular men and women. I noted how individuals in these distinct post-war positions spoke about the war and their participation. While ideological differences existed, the mobilization trajectories that emerged from the interviews, namely organized fighters, spontaneous fighters, and non-fighters, were represented across the post-war political divides. This suggests that present-day affiliation cannot explain the presented data. However, the pattern of how individuals learned about and decided to respond to the Georgian advance and the distinct motivations behind the trajectories were repeated across the interviews, with minor differences shaped by situational factors.[26]

APPENDIX B. PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION SITES

Participant observation as a data collection method supplemented my in-depth interviews.[27] In each of my research locales, I engaged in "participating in the daily life of the community through ordinary conversation and interaction; observing events (meetings, ceremonies, rituals…); [and] recording data in field notes" (Bayard de Volo and Schatz 2004, 267). The two methods went hand

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[26] I stopped interviewing in each locale when respondents repeated the information I had received.
[27] See Yanow and Schwartz-Shea (2006), Schatz (2009), and Wedeen (2010) on combining the two.

in hand in developing insight and focusing my research on insider perspectives, what Schatz (2009) calls "ethnographic sensibility." I outlined above my use of participant observation in this research, as a way to situate respondents and what they reported in the interview setting within their war-time and present-day social context. This brief appendix describes my sites of participant observation.

First, I attended all national and local-level events related to the war I was aware of during my fieldwork in Abkhazia. These events included medal award ceremonies, memorial gatherings, and celebrations of the Abkhaz victory in the war. During the events, I recoded notes on the content of presented speeches and remarks, gestures, and facial expressions in the audience. Observation at these events helped better grasp the official conflict narrative and the ways in which individuals in different post-war positions reacted to it.[28] This not only created opportunities for me to broaden my networks and conduct interviews with individuals I met at these events who fit my research design, but also informed my questions and understanding of people's perceptions on conflict. For example, the use of the term Patriotic War of Abkhazia to refer to the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-1993 in speeches was repeated in the interviews by those who fought or lost dear ones in the war. Attendant remarks and expressions signaled disillusionment of others, such as mothers of disappeared fighters or fighters who had not been awarded a medal, and formed the basis for follow up in the interviews.

Second, I participated in multiple interactions within respondents' organizational contexts. In particular, my primary and secondary research was frequently located in the offices of veterans' associations, mothers' organizations, and war-related libraries and museums. When conducting my research in these organizational settings, I was often invited to observe and participate in formal and informal discussions about the war and the post-war challenges that these organizations addressed.

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[28] I knew some attendants through my daily interactions and interviews, while others, such as high-level officials and war commanders, I learned about and approached during or after these events.

My main goal in these interactions was to trace the persistence of social networks from the time of the war into the post-war environment and identify for further interviews individuals related to one another through war-time bonds and those whose ties with war relations were severed. This helped me update my theoretical expectations on the transformation of social networks in war and tap into the questions of which social networks were salient for individuals with distinct war-time pasts. For instance, individuals who experienced injury or loss in the war later created or joined new networks to reflect their war-time experience, which pointed me to the relationships forged before the war, as opposed to present-day friendships, in trying to reconstruct the social patterns of war mobilization.

Finally, I engaged in informal conversations on a daily basis and was occasionally invited to social events, including dinners, holiday celebrations, and weddings. In addition to broadening my networks, two features of these informal interactions proved to be central to my research. First, the table traditions involved pointed to the significance of the war for regular Abkhaz men and women. For example, every event began with a toast to those lost in the war, reflecting the effort to preserve war memory within social institutions and contextualizing my respondents' efforts in the interview to reconstruct their war paths in great detail. Second, jokes about certain individuals' self-glorifying tendencies as contrasted with stories of their war participation and rumors surrounding individuals who, for example, did not participate in the war, helped me probe accounts presented by these and other individuals in the interviews, strengthening the overall interview process and its outcomes.

APPENDIX C. DATA ANALYSIS

As the discussion of field methods suggests, my research was characterized by the constant exchange between data and analysis, with analytic memos consistently recorded in my field notes and my theoretical expectations adjusted and further probed based on the patterns arising from the

data.[29] However, systematic analysis of the data followed the transcription of my field materials. This appendix describes two major aspects of my data analysis, coding and process tracing.

Coding

Coding in qualitative research, what Miles and Huberman (1994, 10) call "data reduction," "refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or transcriptions." My analytic choices for coding were guided by the existing theoretical knowledge on mobilization in civil war as well as the patterns that emerged during my field research. The combination of induction and deduction in the analysis allowed me to distinguish the effects of the alternative explanations and focus on the process underlying Abkhaz mobilization at the Georgian-Abkhaz war onset (George and Bennett 2005, 19-22).

My coding strategy consisted of three stages. In the first stage, I applied broad background categories to the interview data and identified pre- to post-war occupations and mobilization roles adopted by my respondents. Table 1 (below) provides my sample code. The Summary of Interview Data in the article (see Table 1) is based on the full version of this code. The background categories include gender, group self-identification, age, and location of the interview. Coding each interview according to these categories led to two important analytical results. First, I produced the detailed demographic breakdown of Abkhaz fighters and non-fighters carefully selected for the interviews, which helped place the case of Abkhazia within the broader universe of civil war cases. Second, I confirmed that the interviews were balanced across the four locales that form the basis of my micro-comparative research design and reflected the local-level spatial and temporal differences at the war onset that could have differentiated mobilization processes between the locales.

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[29] See Saldaña (2009, 32-4) on analytic memos.

Table 1. Coding Sample, Stage 1

| Log	Date	Gender	Self-identified	Age	Location	Pre-war		War Mobilization	Post-War	
						Occupation	Mobilization		Occupation	Mobilization
xxx	xxx	M	A	75	xxx	NS	SM	SM (SR)	NS	OM
xxx	xxx	F	A	45	xxx	S	OM	EF	S	N/A

Legend:
A   Abkhaz
EF   Escaped fighting in Abkhazia
F   Female
M   Male
NS   Non-state
OM   Organized mobilization
S   State
SM   Spontaneous mobilization
SR   Support role
xxx   Identifying details

Respondents' pre- to post-war occupations and mobilization roles were coded to ensure that

a broad range of pre- and post-war affiliations were captured in the interviews and that the issues of

potential bias discussed above, namely, endogeneity of memory to war processes and homogeneity

of responses due to common political loyalties, were adequately addressed across my interviews. In

terms of occupation, I coded respondents' pre- and post-war employment as state or non-state, thus

capturing formal affiliation. I coded respondents' participation in pre- and post-war conflict-related

events according to their organized or spontaneous character to reflect organizational affiliation.[30]

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[30] The "organized mobilization" code was applied to those respondents who were mobilized by the organizations of the Abkhaz movement before the war and the Abkhaz de facto state after the war.

Figure 1. War-Time Mobilization Roles
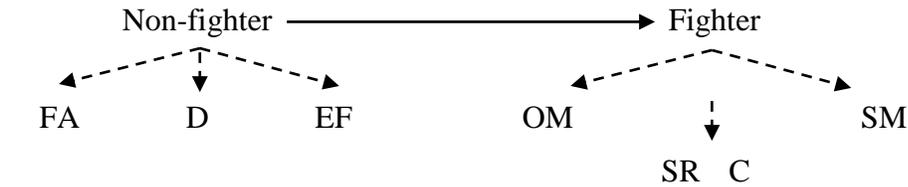
Legend:
C   Combat
D   Defected
EF   Escaped fighting in Abkhazia
FA   Fled Abkhazia
OM   Organized mobilization
SM   Spontaneous mobilization
SR   Support Role

While the pre- and post-war categories provided important background information for the analysis, central to the analysis was the variation in the war-time mobilization roles. The roles were coded according to the mobilization continuum, from non-fighter to fighter roles. Figure 1 (above) illustrates the continuum. The non-fighter side of the continuum incorporated individuals who fled Abkhazia, defected to the Georgian side, and escaped fighting in Abkhazia in the course of the war. The fighter side included individuals organized by the Abkhaz leadership prior to the war and those who mobilized on the Abkhaz side spontaneously, in support or combat roles.[31] This detailed code allowed me to surpass the simple fighter-non-fighter dichotomy, which often characterizes studies of civil war mobilization, and move on to textual analysis of the different mobilization trajectories (Parkinson 2013, 422).

The subsequent stages of my coding strategy involved textual analysis of the interviews—single and grouped according to the different war-time mobilization roles as well as in their totality and broken down by the pre-war, civil war, and post-war stages—in order to "represent and capture

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[31] War-time mobilization was coded for the period of the war onset, as most Abkhaz fighters were later incorporated into the Abkhaz army, which was formed during the war.

[each] datum's primary content and essence" (Saldaña 2009, 3). As discussed above, my interview strategy consisted of the combination of event and narrative accounts. My second and third stages of coding addressed these different aspects of the interview respectively.

In the second stage, I focused on the respondent recollections of the events that unfolded at the moment of war onset in Abkhazia. I analyzed relevant parts of the interviews according to four categories. Table 2 (below) presents a sample of a coded interview excerpt. First, I coded references to expectations of the war, as indicated by the expressions of prior knowledge about the possibility of the Georgian advance and preparation for it, for example, through arming, and such descriptions of the advance as sudden and others' reactions to it as confused. Second, the source of information about the war was specified in the reports of the individuals or groups and the location—physical or media—where respondents heard about the Georgian advance. This category was as well recorded if respondents informed others, for instance, by telephone. Third, I coded the content of information that respondents received, with a particular focus on the different framing and perceptions of threat. Threat framing emerged from the use of alarming terms in describing received information, such as armed clashes, shot at, and casualties. Threat perceptions were evident in the acknowledgement of this information. The final aspects of coding targeted the social networks involved in mobilization. First, I differentiated between the collective and individual nature of action and decision-making in response to received information. Second, I coded the individual's location at the war onset and that at the time of mobilization, which indicated the importance of certain social networks, for example, those in one's home town. Finally, I recorded the instances of specific reference to social networks. This stage of coding prepared my interview data for the reconstruction of step by step mobilization sequences, essential for the process tracing method I use (see section below), following individual respondents and grouped across the interviews according to the different mobilization trajectories.

Table 2. Coding Sample, Stage 2

Interview Excerpt	Code
The day of the war, in 1992, I was in Sochi, [Russia].	Location at the war onset
On my way back [to Abkhazia], I saw that cars were standing and people [at the border] were passionately discussing something.	Source of information about the war
I did not know what happened.	Expectation of the war
At that time, the first armed clashes were happening in Ochamchira. The first casualties appeared.	Threat framing
They [Georgia] sent their troops here [to Abkhazia] suddenly.	Expectation of the war
We began calling everyone by phone. We called all the friends.	Source of information about the war Social networks
Everyone was confused at the administration. No one could understand the situation.	Expectation of the war
We gathered [with my sports team] at the sports ground [in Gagra where I am from]: what do we do?	Collective action; Social networks; Location at mobilization; Coll. decision
[I was told that m]y brothers were coming [to Gagra] from Gudauta and were shot at in Kolkhida. They died.	Threat framing
Now we understood who it was that we faced. The armaments, heavy weapons, small arms: they had it all and we had nothing. The Abkhaz population of Gagra was armed with double-barreled guns and had no [army] structure when the war began. Our strengths were uneven.	Threat perception Expectation of the war
We formed around our close ones.	Social networks

The final stage of coding focused on recurring themes in the narrative part of the interviews. My

proximity and continuous engagement with the interviews, along with the insight on the case I

developed in the course of my primary and secondary research, helped me identify and code salient

Table 3. Coding Sample, Stage 3

Interview Excerpt	Code
Abkhazia had statehood for 2000 years. It was only during Stalin that we were reduced to an autonomy. But Georgians thought that Abkhazia did not exist.	Georgianization (political status)
To sweep Abkhazia with Georgians, Georgia… led the process of Georgianization of the Abkhaz nation.	Georgianization (demography)
There were localized clashes and more everyday ones. It was scary when big crowds gathered on both sides. [Soviet] leaders did not allow significant bloodshed to happen. But it still happened.	Pre-war violence Violence containment
Fights always began with: "Why the Abkhaz do not know the Georgian language…"	Georgianization (culture)
We did not attack them. They did. We do not have another motherland as opposed to Georgians who are both here and there. They have their motherland, Georgia.	Attack Motivation (belonging to Abkhazia)

themes. Table 3 (above) offers a sample code. The so-called Georgianization of Abkhazia emerged in references to the reduction in Abkhazia's political status, Georgian demographic expansion, and cultural repression through language policy, among others. Mention of pre-war violence and Soviet violence containment added to the structural context inferred from these themes. The description of the Georgian advance as an offensive and attack and motivations listed for participation in the war, including belonging to Abkhazia and the Abkhaz as a group and fear for personal security or that of close family and friends, related to this context. This stage of coding helped me distinguish between the understandings of conflict and motivations of individuals in the varied mobilization trajectories.

Process Tracing

I applied the method of process tracing to the coded data because my core theoretical aim in this research was to discover the process underlying civil war mobilization in the understudied case that is poorly predicted by the existing approaches to mobilization.[32] As George and Bennett (2005, 215) argue, "[p]rocess tracing is particularly useful for obtaining an explanation for… cases… that have outcomes not predicted or explained adequately by existing theories."[33] The focus in process tracing on causal mechanisms lies at the core of such discovery.[34] "In process-tracing," Beach and Pedersen (2013, 49) explain, "we theorize more than just X and Y; we also theorize the mechanism between them." The threat framing mechanism that resulted from the interaction between inductive and deductive analysis in this research is discussed in detail in the theoretical section of the article. Figure 2 (below) presents the mechanism in the outline form to specify the steps I took to assess it, as compared to the alternative explanations.

To assess the mechanism, the method directs us to "sequential processes within a particular historical case" (George and Bennett 2005, 13). The following sequence should be observed if the threat framing mechanism holds. In general, individuals should mobilize at the war onset following threat framing. In particular, three steps should be observed. First, actors across social structures should address individuals in private and public in an attempt to frame the Georgian advance as an aggression against the collectivity. Second, respondents should reference this framing in how they learned about and perceived the advance. Third, respondents who reported to have perceived threat

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[32] See Beissinger (2002, 222) on the application of the existing approaches to Abkhaz mobilization.
[33] See Beach and Pedersen (2013) and Bennett and Checkel (2014) for a discussion of the method.
[34] The definition of causal mechanisms is contested (Checkel 2008). However, causal mechanisms can be understood as "ultimately unobservable physical, social, or psychological processes through which agents with causal capacities operate, but only in specific contexts of conditions, to transfer energy, information, or matter to other entities" (George and Bennett 2005, 137).

Figure 2. Threat Framing Mechanism

Threat framing	Threat perception	Outcome

Social structures

Shared understandings of conflict

National, local, quotidian level interaction

Collectivity-oriented ⟶ **Fighting on the weaker side**

Self-oriented ⟶ **Escaping the fighting alone**

Roles continuum
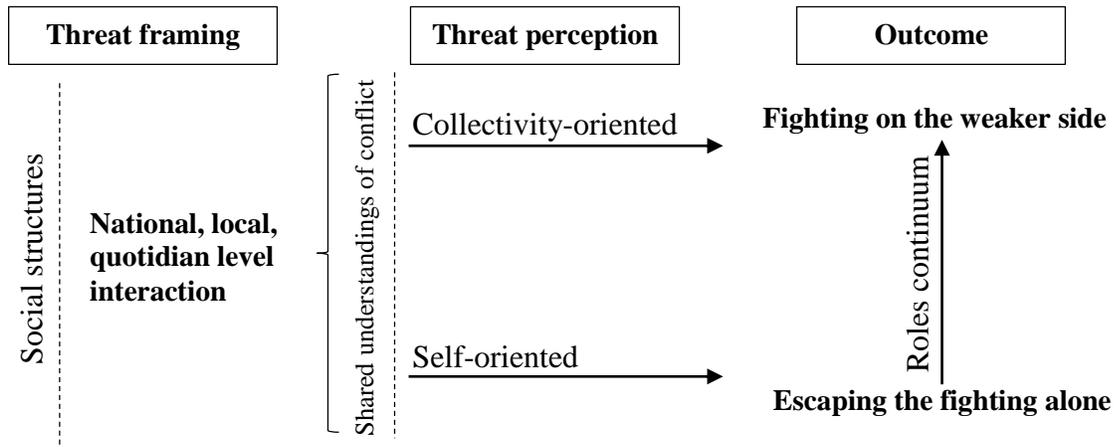
as directed primarily to themselves should hide, flee, or defect to the stronger, Georgian side. Those who prioritized threat against Abkhazia and cited the shared understanding of the conflict as part of the so-called Georgianization of Abkhazia should mobilize to fight on the weaker, Abkhaz side.

I verified this sequence by reconstructing individual mobilization trajectories to the lowest level of detail and grouping these trajectories across the interviews to produce the general organized and spontaneous fighter and non-fighter trajectories of mobilization.[35] The resulting rich account of Abkhaz mobilization at the Georgian-Abkhaz war onset improves on the alternatives in the relative deprivation (Gurr 1970), collective action (Weinstein 2007), and strategic interaction (Kalyvas and Kocher 2007) approaches to mobilization. Table 4 (below) charts the observable implications and application of these theoretical approaches to the case of Abkhaz mobilization at the war onset.

Relative deprivation concerns the conditions of relative inequality before war and attributes mobilization to ethnic, economic, political, and cultural grievances (Gurr 1970). Individuals should mobilize on the side that is marginalized due to its ethnic belonging and is excluded from economic opportunities, political process, and cultural development. While ethnic marginalization does not

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[35] The most representative interview excerpts within each trajectory were selected for presentation.

Table 4. Alternative Explanations

Theory	Relative Deprivation			Collective Action			Strategic Interaction
OIs	Ethnically marginalized	Economically deprived	Politically/ culturally excluded	Materially incentivized	Coerced	Socially sanctioned	Security seeking
CA	○	◔	●	○	○	●	○

Legend:
OIs   Observable implications
CA   Case application
○   Does not hold
◔   Partly holds
●   Strongly holds

hold strongly, economic, political, and cultural access are important in the Abkhaz case. Exclusion based on ethnicity—nationality in the Soviet terminology—was a serious breach of the Communist ideology, punishable by dismissal from leadership positions, and checked through the titular status that guaranteed representation in the Soviet republics to native groups, such as the Abkhaz. As the Union disintegrated before the war, the Abkhaz were overrepresented in Abkhaz institutions, with a quota of seats in the Supreme Council achieved through the power-sharing arrangement with the post-Soviet Georgian leadership that surpassed that of Georgians (45% of the population in 1989).

However, economic, political, and cultural grievances played a role in Abkhaz mobilization. Economic deprivation partially holds in the Abkhaz case as Georgia controlled most of Abkhazia's economy, with leading economic positions in enterprises and the state held largely by Georgians. This pattern can be explained by the proportion of the Abkhaz (17% in 1989) in the population and did not affect access to regular employment, where the Soviet standards based on inclusion applied, giving the Abkhaz access available to other demographic groups and special titular quotas favoring the Abkhaz in education and employment opportunities, especially in the last decade of the Union. While economic access was part of Abkhaz pre-war concerns, it is political and cultural grievances

that formed the basis of Abkhaz claims. These grievances were related to the change in the political status of Abkhazia, from the Soviet Socialist Republic established in 1921 to the autonomous part of Georgia in 1931, and the so-called Georgianization of Abkhazia, or the corresponding Georgian demographic growth and suppression of Abkhaz language, schools, and other cultural institutions. Most Abkhaz shared in these grievances, but relative deprivation does not tell us how they mattered in producing the variation in organized, spontaneous, and non-fighter trajectories at the war onset.

Similarly, the collective action approach offers important insight into Abkhaz mobilization. According to this approach, mobilization poses a free-riding problem, which can be overcome with selective incentives and social sanctions (Weinstein 2007). Individuals should mobilize on the side that offers material and social rewards or punishment. While the Abkhaz side was unable to coerce mobilization or provide material incentives at the war onset, it is a typical strong community able to reward participants in status and punish non-participants through future exclusion from community benefits. The small size of the Abkhaz population (93.267 in 1989) and the history of demographic, political, and cultural changes in Abkhazia added to the strength of familia (family name) ties and Apsuara (duty) norms. Passed through generations in households and other social institutions, these strong community pressures applied to most Abkhaz, yet not all mobilized to fight at the war onset.

Finally, according to the strategic interaction theoretical approach, the Abkhaz should have been observed to mobilize on the stronger, Georgian side at the war onset or defect to the Georgian side early in the war, as Georgia established control over most of Abkhazia. This would provide the Abkhaz with the increased chances of survival in the war—a goal that security-seeking individuals should follow (Kalyvas and Kocher 2007). However, mobilization on the Georgian side among the Abkhaz was rare. Moreover, the Abkhaz mobilized both armed and unarmed and in the areas where Georgia controlled the territory. Despite the casualties on the Abkhaz side and the exit options that

existed, especially at the war onset, Abkhaz mobilization continued, to attain control over strategic western Abkhazia and form the Abkhaz army in the course of the war. Whereas this army structure provided access to skills and resources for fighters joining the Abkhaz force later in the war, which should promote participation in line with the security-seeking explanation, it did not exist at the war onset and does not explain this immediate mass mobilization against the superior Georgian force.

As a result, alternative explanations address significant factors, but do not fully account for Abkhaz mobilization. Relative deprivation and collective action shed light on the socio-structural context of mobilization, yet cannot explain why some Abkhaz mobilized and others did not despite the common presence of grievances and social sanctions for mobilization. The strategic interaction approach struggles to account for the outcome of mobilization in the case, as the Abkhaz were the weaker side in the war and joining it did not increase but jeopardized individual security. The threat framing mechanism I propose draws on these approaches and provides a theoretical alternative. It survives the comparison across space and time in Abkhazia, as required in my micro-comparative research design, and informs the variation in the observed fighter and non-fighter trajectories.

APPENDED MATERIALS

Table 5. List of Secondary Research Sites

News Archives
Abkhazia
1. Apsnypress (1994-2011)
2. Echo Abhazii (1995-2011)
3. Respublika Abhazija (1999-2011)
Georgia
1. Georgian Chronicles (1992-1997)
2. Svobodnaja Gruzija (1992-2006)
3. The Armed Forces in Georgia (1998-1999)
4. The Army and Society in Georgia (1999-2001)
Russia
1. Current Digest of Russian Press (1992-2011)
International
1. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (1992-2011)
Other Archives
1. State Statistics Administration Abkhazia in Numbers (2002-2010)
2. State Republican Library of Abkhazia War Archive (1992-1993)
3. Ekaterina Bebia Private Video Archive (1992-2008)
4. Gagra TV Video Archive (1992-2008)
5. Gudauta War Museum War Archive (1992-1993)
6. Published Interview Archives (Khodzhaa, 2003, 2006, 2009)
7. Published War Document Archive (Volkhonskij et al., 2008)
8. Private Archive of Aidgylara (1989-1992)
Libraries
1. Gagra Library № 1, Gagra, Abkhazia
2. Gudauta War Museum Library, Gudauta, Abkhazia
3. State Republican Library, Sukhum/i. Abkhazia
4. National Parliamentary Library of Georgia, Tbilisi, Georgia
5. Russian State Library, Moscow, Russia

Table 6. Summary of Secondary Interviews

			Total[36]	Percentage (rounded)
General information	Gender	Male	23	62%
		Female	14	38%
	Location	Georgia	31	84%
		Russia	6	16%
Interview type	Expert[37]		24	65%
	Focus group[38]		7	19%
	War witness[39]		6	16%

[36] Calculated based on 37 respondents in 30 interviews and one focus group.

[37] This category includes university professors, governmental officials, and representatives of non-governmental organizations and research institutes.

[38] The focus group was carried out with support of the Ministry of Education of Abkhazia in exile with respondents who witnessed the war in Abkhazia and were displaced to Georgia.

[39] This category includes respondents who witnessed the war in Abkhazia and were displaced.

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