

HISTORY DIVIDED BY WAR:

CONFLICTS AND HISTORY EDUCATION IN GEORGIA

Maia Barkaia



2019

კულტურულ ურთიერთობა ცენტრი

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INTRODUCTION

Georgia's current political agenda and development trajectory are still being shaped by ethno-political conflicts that took place at the beginning of the 1990s. The conflicts were precipitated by historical, social and economic resentments.¹ The political importance of the issue undoubtedly impacted subsequent historical analysis, which has been at danger of being directed in ways that suit certain political groups. Hence, it's crucial to shine a more critical light on the history of the conflicts and to ponder the following questions: from what perspective do we write history? What do we choose to remember and what do we forget? What kind of knowledge do we pass on to the new generation about these conflicts? How should we analyse and represent the past in a way that helps to promote greater understanding and mutual respect instead of mutual blaming? These questions attain paramount importance since as a result of the armed conflicts the gap between Georgians and Abkhazians, as well as that between Georgians and Ossetians, is deepening even further.²

Conflict-sensitive education is an indispensable, but not the sole aspect of peacebuilding. The central objective of conflict-sensitive education is the disarmament of the mind through the demilitarization of the entire curriculum and cultivation of a peace-nurturing approach. The aim of this study is to analyze the dominant historical narratives, as seen in history textbooks, through the conflict-sensitive lens. History textbooks are often seen as a potent vehicle through which nations seek to disseminate the official version of history,³ which turns it into a sacred text and makes it difficult to raise pressing and critical questions. How limiting can the national security viewpoint be for history writing? Does it constrain a historian to ask critical questions and to incorporate perspectives of different interest groups? Does the dominant account of the conflict foster reconciliation or, on the contrary, deepen alienation?

It is important to distinguish between peacebuilding education, peace education and conflict-sensitive education. Peacebuilding refers to measures that aim at understanding and seeking to reduce the key drivers of conflict. In addition, the peacebuilding education is not always necessarily conflict-sensitive. Peacebuilding can be a standalone effort, while conflict-sensitive approach cuts across all programs.⁴ The latter aims at understanding the context, minimizing negative and maximizing positive impact. This study draws upon such understanding of conflict-sensitive and peacebuilding approaches that emphasize *preventive*, *protective* and *transformative* role of education.⁵

The stories that dominant groups choose to remember predefine our memory, knowledge and our capacity to understand the opponent's account. Critical reflection on the limits and boundaries of our understanding and memory makes it possible to seek for the traces of excluded perspectives and deconstruction of self-enclosed memory.⁶ For instance, even such „self-explanatory“ terms as „occupation“ and „separatism“ convey distinct meanings depending on the narrator's historical standpoint. Epistemological difference functions simultaneously both as a cause and a consequence of the conflict. The „war between historians“ that preceded the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict serves as an illustration of the embedded epistemic contradiction. The critical intervention enables the process of „double translation,“ which implies double infection of both sides by each others' narratives.⁷ „Double translation“ allows to transform biased history into a multiperspective view of history, epistemic blindness into epistemic pluriversity and dialogue into mutual understanding.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research draws on qualitative methodological framework and includes Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of history textbooks and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with different schoolteachers at the secondary and upper-secondary levels. The material analyzed includes VIII, IX and XII grades history textbooks published by

¹ Jones, S. 2013. *Georgia: A Political History Since Independence*. Tbilisi: CSS.

² Abramashvili, I. & Koiava, R. 2018. „25 Years of Georgia's Peace Policy.“ Caucasian House.

³ Foster, S. 2011. „Dominant Traditions in International Textbook Research and Revision.“ *Education Inquiry*. 2(1): 5-20.

⁴ Woodrow, P. & Chigas, D. „A Distinction with a Difference: Conflict Sensitivity and Peacebuilding.“ Collaborative Learning Projects.

⁵ Smith, A. 2010. „The Influence of Education on Conflict and Peace Building.“ Education for All Global Monitoring Report.

⁶ Derrida, J. 2003. *Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides. Dialogue with Jacques Derrida*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

⁷ Mignolo, W. 2011. „The Zapatistas' Theoretical Revolution: Its Historical, Ethical and Political Consequences.“ In Mignolo, W. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.

Bakur Sulakauri, Diogene and *Klio* publishing houses. Apart from the above-mentioned textbooks, based on the FDG participants' recommendations, I analyzed the XI grade history textbook published in 2003.⁸ Overall, seven Georgian and two Abkhazian officially accredited history textbooks were analysed. Initially, I aimed at covering the Ossetian history textbooks too, but I had to exclude them since they omitted the contemporary period of history and hence, did not fulfil the selection criteria, which revolved around the period when the contemporary armed conflicts unfolded.

Central to critical discourse analysis (CDA) are the concept of power, the concept of history and the concept of ideology. The CDA approach views language as a medium of power and domination. The function of CDA is twofold and it is concerned with „discourse as the instrument of power as well as with discourse as the instrument of social construction of reality.“⁹ Central to a critical discourse analysis that draws on Michel Foucault's theory are issues such as, what constitutes knowledge; what is the relationship between knowledge and power; what impact knowledge has on the constitution of subjects.¹⁰ CDA reveals the contradictions of the dominant discourse and unravels the implicit meanings of insinuations, allusions and presuppositions of the text.¹¹

Critical discourse analysis was based on the semi-structured guide that covered the following discursive strategies:

1. Referential Strategy:

1.1.membership categorization: construction of in-groups and out-groups („us“ and „them“).

1.2.predication: labelling social actors more or less positively or negatively: whose side is the textbook on?

1.3.Does the text include opposing viewpoints?

1.4.Social Actors: What groups are involved in the conflict?

1.5.role: passive/active verb

2. How are the conflicts named and referred?

2.1.How are the conflicts defined in the textbook?

2.2.Does the typology of conflict change over time?

2.3.What arguments are used to justify the dominant typology?

3. Conflict and its causes:

3.1. (a)What are the root, or structural, causes of conflict? (b)What are the proximate causes, or escalating factors of conflict? (c)What are the triggers, or single events that spark violent conflict?

3.2.Argumentation strategies: by means of what arguments and argumentation schemes are the causes of the conflict explained and justified?

3.3.What topoi is used to justify the conflict?

3.4.To what extent are the multiple perspectives and points of view presented?

In addition to the critical discourse analysis, I've conducted 11 focus group discussions with history teachers at the secondary and upper secondary school level, teaching in different cities: Tbilisi, Batumi, Zugdidi, Poti, Kutaisi, Gori, Mtskheta, Telavi, Akhalkalaki and Marneuli. In order to collect qualitative data and find respondents, I used a non-probability, purposeful sampling method. The focus groups aimed at exploring the history teachers' experiences of teaching conflicts and their viewpoints with regard to the contemporary conflicts in Georgia. After the transcribing phase, I identified main thematic categories for analyzing the focus group discussions.

⁸ This is a textbook published before the first National Curriculum was launched in 2005.

⁹ Wodak, R. 2002. „What CDA is About – A Summary of its History, Important Concepts and its Developments.“ In Wodak, R. Meyer, M. (eds.). *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: SAGE Publications.

¹⁰ Foucault, M. 1980. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. Brighton: The Harvester Press.

¹¹ Jager, S. 2002. „Discourse and Knowledge: Theoretical and Methodological Aspects of a Critical discourse and Dispositive Analysis.“ In Wodak, R. Meyer, M. (eds.). *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: SAGE Publications.

1. INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL GUIDELINES FOR THE HISTORY EDUCATION OF ARMED CONFLICTS

Prominent critical paradigms of historical textbook research and revision include *conciliatory tradition* and *critical tradition*. The conciliatory tradition aims at bringing about rapprochement between countries and nations through harmonizing their historical narratives and teaching. Historians from different countries and nations work together to develop a shared understanding of the past. The objective to produce more sensitive and objective histories underpins the conciliatory tradition. This paradigm poses a pivotal question: whether school textbooks provide a means to promote greater understanding and mutual respect among nations. After World War I, “The International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation” suggested fostering reciprocal comparative analysis of history textbooks and revising of biased narratives in order to circumvent essential misunderstandings between different countries.¹² If traditional historical paradigm sets an objective to provide facts, the alternative approaches emphasize the need for consensus-based analysis of history. The Cambridge Modern History editor insisted that “our Waterloo must be one that satisfies French and English, Germans and Dutch alike.”¹³

The critical tradition aims at critically analyzing the perspectives, discourse and content of textbooks in order to raise questions about the endemic power relations between historical knowledge and dominant ideological forces. The fundamental questions posed by this tradition are: Whose voice is heard in textbooks? Whose knowledge is included? Whose story gets told? What issues are silenced and why? Contrary to conciliatory tradition, the critical tradition does not seek to harmonize the textbook content or achieve commonalities in history writing across nations, but rather to critically reflect on the biased historical perspectives and to incorporate differing and contested perspectives.

Among the prominent international organizations that address history education and conflicts are the European Council and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The European Council issued a number of recommendations and strategies addressing history education. For instance, Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on History Teaching in XXI Century Europe (2001),¹⁴ and the Recommendations History Teaching in Conflict and Post-Conflict Areas (2009).¹⁵ According to these recommendations history textbook shouldn't have the following propensities:

- History teaching that draws on superficial and biased content, which does not reflect the complexity of the issue.
- History that restricts itself to one narrative, which is projected as unalterable truth.
- History textbook that ignores or marginalizes alternative narratives, perspectives and interpretations.
- Textbook overemphasizes the “us” and “them” dichotomy.
- It creates a false evidence to justify or conceal the truth.
- The content is limited to political history and the past is defined by a series of wars.

Contrary to the above-mentioned representations, the European Council recommends such history textbook that “makes it possible to develop in pupils the intellectual ability to analyze and interpret information critically and responsibly,” and fosters multiperspectivity, especially on controversial and sensitive issues. In addition, history should include not just political, but also economic, social and cultural dimensions.¹⁶ The European Council recommendations draw on new non-traditional history approaches. If the traditional historiography is concerned mainly with political dimension and takes a view from „above,“ the new history, apart from politics, is concerned with other aspects of human life too, such as economy and culture and looks at events from „below,“ from the perspective of non-privileged, subaltern groups, which in turn, requires diversification of perspectives and sources.¹⁷ „History from below“ raises new questions, for instance, what should the military history viewed from

¹² Foster, S. 2011. „Dominant Traditions in International Textbook Research and Revision.“ *Education Inquiry*. 2(1): 5-20.

¹³ Cited in Burke, P. 1992. *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*. PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.

¹⁴ Council of Europe. 2001. „Recommendations (15) of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on History Teaching in Twenty-First-Century Europe.“

¹⁵ Council of Europe. 2009. „Recommendations (1880) on History Teaching in Conflict and Post-Conflict Areas.“ Available at: <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-EN.asp?fileid=17765&lang=en>

¹⁶ Council of Europe. 2001. „Recommendations (15) of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on History Teaching in Twenty-First-Century Europe.“

¹⁷ Burke, P. 1992. *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*. PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.

„below“ concern itself with? the experience of a common army man or of civilians?¹⁸ According to the historian Trevor-Roper, „to study on too narrow a front deprives us of the chance of analogy; but to study too generally is not study at all.“¹⁹

The European Council views history as an indispensable factor in reconciliation, recognition and mutual trust between peoples.²⁰ The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities also emphasizes the significance of multiperspectivity and critical thinking in history textbooks.²¹ Salmi refers to the prevalence of dominant ethnic groups' narrative in textbooks through the omission of other perspectives, as alienating violence,²² while for Galtung it points to cultural violence.²³ Contrary to the biased history education, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities suggests introducing history, culture and religion of ethnic and religious minorities in curricula.²⁴

The content of conflict-sensitive education includes peace education and is not biased towards any side of a conflict. Topics related to peace may include: critical thinking, non-violence, conflict prevention and resolution.²⁵ To study the context of conflict entails consultation of multiple sources and opponents' perspectives, in general, and conflict profile, actors, causes and dynamics, in particular.

Central to conflict-sensitive education is „Do No Harm“ principle. In conflict contexts, history textbooks often favour the dominant group and arguments that justify their actions. Conflict-sensitive education aims at facilitating group cohesion by promoting education that conveys multiperspectivity account of the armed conflict.²⁶ The minimum requirement of conflict-sensitive education is to make sure that new programs do not favor one side of a conflict and do no harm. In addition, conflict-sensitive education aims at building peace by seeking and diagnosing causes and taking actions to remedy them. Apart from eliminating danger, conflict-sensitive education aspires to actively transform social tensions and build peace.

In Georgia, the new standard for history teaching at the secondary education level,²⁷ which is a defining policy document, allows critical revision and endorsement of conflict-sensitive education. The document consists of four sections: goals, results and content, methodical guidelines, evaluation. The goal of history education refers to the „multiperspective assessment of historical figures and events,“ which in turn requires incorporation of multiple sources and interpretations.²⁸ The same purpose is true for the „interpretation and research“ aspect of the „results“ section.²⁹

2. HISTORY AND ITS GEORGIAN FRAGMENT: CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

What kind of a vision of Georgia is advanced in history textbooks³⁰ and how does it affect the narration of conflict? The prevalent theme of the textbook still imagines Georgia in opposition to the world³¹ and there is a negligible acknowledgment of belonging to the Caucasus region, in particular, and to the world, in general. The textbooks emphasize Georgia's location being at the crossroads of Asia and Europe but at the same time, it is depicted as a country that aspires to transcend this in-betweenness and to find its place in Europe. The idea of civilizational hierarchy pervades the curriculum, where Georgia is seen at the transitional juncture from „Orient“ to „Occident.“ „Orient“ is envisioned as backward, undesired political and cultural realm and it is through distancing from it that Georgia can allegedly, secure prosperous future. For instance, ninth grade history textbook states, „in

¹⁸ Burke, P. 1992. *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*. PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.

¹⁹ Trevor-Roper, H. 1969. „The Past and the Present: History and Sociology.“ *Past & Present*, 42 (1): 3-17.

²⁰ Council of Europe. 2001. „Recommendations (15) of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on History Teaching in Twenty-First-Century Europe.“

²¹ Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. 2006. „Commentary on Education under the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.“ Council of Europe.

²² Salmi, J. 2000. „Violence, Democracy and Education: An Analytic Framework.“ LCSHD Paper Series (56).

²³ Galtung, J. 1990. „Cultural Violence.“ *Journal of Peace Research*, 27 (3): 290-305.

²⁴ Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. 2006. „Commentary on Education under the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.“ Council of Europe.

²⁵ Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE). 2013. *Guidance Note on Conflict Sensitive Education*. New York: INEE.

²⁶ Sigsgaard, M. 2012. *Conflict-Sensitive Education Policy: A Preliminary Review*. Doha: Education Above All.

²⁷ The National Education Plan 2018-2024. Available at: <http://ncp.ge/curriculum/satesto-seqtsia/akhali-sastsavlo-gegmebi-2018-2024/sabazo-safekhuri-vi-ix-klasebi-proeqti-sadjaro-gankhilstvis>

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ These are nationally approved textbooks published in 2012.

³¹ Batiashvili, N. 2018. *The Bivocal Nation: Memory and Identity on the Edge of Empire*. Palgrave.

XVIII century Georgian culture gradually was able to *shake off* the oriental cultural shackles and was mastering European cultural achievements.³²

History textbooks depict Georgian history as one of wars and conflicts. However, Georgian past is not only about wars and conflicts, but one of cooperation too. Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian relationships are not only about confrontation and hostility but their past involves long periods of peaceful coexistence too.³³ History textbooks present Abkhazians and Ossetians through the lens of conflicts. Furthermore, despite Georgia's diverse ethnic composition, neither ethnic or religious minorities nor subaltern groups make history of their own and are dependent on ethnic Georgians and dominant classes. Historical silence also reveals itself through the omission of Abkhazian and Ossetian perspectives. In these circumstances, invoking tolerance, when the curriculum depicts the opposite, runs the risk of pupils being brought up to be dishonest.³⁴

Georgian history textbooks³⁵ are fragmentary and episodic. Not only history, but the memory is also fragmented. This, in turn, prevents the comprehensive analysis of the root causes of conflicts or of historical relationships between different sides of conflicts. In contrast, history textbook published in 2003, expatiates on the conflicts at some length, which provides pupils with more thorough understanding of the subject.³⁶ However, similar to textbooks published in 2012, it is underpinned by extremely biased and myopic narrative. None of the textbooks are concerned with social, economic and cultural imperatives of conflicts.

Textbook sections, covering the period of Georgia's First Democratic Republic, portray Abkhazians and Ossetians as tools in the hands of Moscow. Despite being depicted as tools, they are still subjects to be reckoned with.³⁷ The representations change in the description of the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia, Russia changes from being the „supporter of separatists“ into an occupying force, which „occupied Abkhazian and Tskhinvali regions.“³⁸ In the description of conflicts happening in the 1990s, textbooks acknowledge that the Ossetian side has its own agenda but the picture changes in the description of the 2008 conflict, where the interests of Ossetians become negligible.^{39,40} Similarly, a textbook, published in 2003, depicts Moscow's abetment as the enabling factor that led to conflicts. For instance, one of the textbooks states that „Moscow's aiding and abetting led South Ossetia's⁴¹ autonomous region to make illegitimate claims for independence from the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic.“⁴² Furthermore, textbook states that „with the connivances of Moscow tensions were further heightened in Abkhazia.“⁴³

Eighth grade textbook offers a typology of armed conflicts and enunciates that *intrastate* conflict takes place between parties within a single state.⁴⁴ However, *intrastate conflict* transforms into an *interstate conflict* if either sides receives external military support from a foreign government, which further gets involved in a war.⁴⁵ Based on this typology, textbook describes Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts, due to the Russian involvement, as interstate conflicts. Eleventh grade textbook, published in 2003, distinguishes three phases of Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts: the First Democratic Republic, Soviet period and post-Soviet period.⁴⁶

2.1. GEORGIA'S FIRST DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC AND CONFLICTS

The Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts are first mentioned in the context of the First Democratic Republic of Georgia. The only exception is a twelfth grade textbook, published by Bakur Sulakauri, where

³² Janelidze, O. et al. 2012. History of Georgia: Ninth Grade. Tbilisi: Klio. p.239.

³³ Jones, S. 2013. Georgia: A Political History Since Independence. Tbilisi: CSS.

³⁴ Kreiner, J. 2006. „Control Through Education? The Politicization of Israeli and Palestinian School Textbooks.“ In Foster, S. & Crawford, K. (eds.), *What Shall We Tell the Children? International Perspectives on School History Textbooks*.

³⁵ These are nationally approved textbooks published in 2012.

³⁶ Vachnadze, M. & Guruli, V. 2003. History of Georgia: Eleventh Grade. Tbilisi: Artanuji.

³⁷ These are nationally approved textbooks published in 2012.

³⁸ Medzmariashvili, E. et al. 2012. History: Eighth Grade. Tbilisi: Klio. p.210.

³⁹ Akhmeteli, N. et al. 2012. History: Twelfth Grade. Tbilisi: Diogene. p.328.

⁴⁰ Kighuradze, N. et al. History: Twelfth Grade. Tbilisi. Bakur Sulakauri Publication.p.282.

⁴¹ The terms „Shida Kartli,“ „Tskhinvali Region,“ and „South Ossetia“ are interchangeably used in Georgian textbooks.

⁴² Vachnadze, M. & Guruli, V. 2003. History of Georgia: Eleventh Grade. Tbilisi: Artanuji. p.174.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.174.

⁴⁴ Sanikidze, G. et al. 2012. History: Eighth Grade. Bakur Sulakauri Publication. p.10.

⁴⁵ Sanikidze, G. et al. 2012. History: Eighth Grade. Bakur Sulakauri Publication p.11.

⁴⁶ Vachnadze, M. & Guruli, V. 2003. History of Georgia: Eleventh Grade. Tbilisi: Artanuji.

conflict history omits these circumstances and begins with the Soviet period: declaration of Abkhazian Soviet Republic in 1921 and establishment of the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast in 1922.⁴⁷ A twelfth grade textbook published by Diogene, fails to adequately observe that the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict developed against the background of the Bolshevik Russian and Menshevik Georgian hostilities. Such omission leads to the ignorance of ideological imperative of the conflict and views it exclusively through the ethnic lens. Contrary to it, in the description of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict, textbook pays adequate attention to the tension of the Bolshevik-Menshevik forces.⁴⁸ In the eleventh grade textbook, published by Klio, under the title „Abkhazian Question“ and „Ossetian Question“ the text goes on to describe the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts as the „battles for Georgia’s territorial integrity.“ Despite the ethnic overtone of the title, the text tells the story of Bolshevik-Menshevik rivalry: Bolsheviks „aspired to secede Abkhazia from Georgia and assimilate it into Soviet Russia.“⁴⁹ Moreover, the textbook does not depict the sides unequivocally in terms of ethnic groups but makes it evident that the conflict was between „Georgian rebels“ and „Bolsheviks.“ Along the same line, textbook brings into the open the Ossetian rebels’ demand, which revolves around the „establishment of the Soviet Rule.“⁵⁰

Twelfth grade textbook does not include historically elaborated version of conflict origins and identifies only the escalating factor – a third party, which interferes with an otherwise harmonious political coexistence. The textbook does not offer a multi-layered classification of the causes of conflicts and restricts the analysis to the single factor – Russia’s aiding and abetting: „Soviet Russia supported the separatists groups in Abkhazia and Shida Kartli.“⁵¹ It is noteworthy that the textbook published earlier in 2003, holds Turkey accountable besides Russia for supporting Abkhazians, which is not mentioned in the textbooks published in 2012.⁵²

Textbook sections covering the First Democratic Republic of Georgia, delineates demands of Abkhazian, Ossetian and Georgian sides as follows: Abkhaz Bolsheviks demanded „Abkhazia’s integration into the Soviet Russia“,⁵³ the Ossetian side aimed at the „encroachment on Georgia’s territorial integrity“ and „integration of Shida Kartli into the North Ossetia,“ whereas the Georgian side aimed at „preserving the territorial integrity.“⁵⁴

Textbooks emphasize violence committed by the opponents but Georgia’s military action is described as a necessary response to the rise of separatism. „Separatists committed mass killings of local political leaders and popular front warriors, in response the government of Georgia’s First Republic sent its military forces to Shida Kartli.“⁵⁵ Another textbook goes on to dehumanize the opponent by regarding Georgia’s military actions as „cleansing“ the Abkhazian territory.⁵⁶

Abkhazian history textbooks dedicate several chapters to the events taking place in the 1917-1921 period (in comparison Georgian history textbooks dedicate only up to one page to this issue). Textbooks, first and foremost, review differences of opinion regarding Abkhazia’s political future and secondly, make enquiries into the military action. On the one hand, Georgian and Abkhazian Mensheviks envisaged Abkhazia’s future in a tight relationship with Georgia, whereas some sections of the Abkhazian provisional government sought an alliance with the North Caucasian people.⁵⁷ Textbooks portray Abkhazia as the battlefield of the rivalry between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. Abkhazian textbook expatiates on the political and military tensions at some length and does not neglect military campaign led by the general Giorgi Mazniashvili and the endured casualties of war. Abkhazian textbooks assert General Mazniashvili’s cruelty.⁵⁸ To emphasize the issue, textbook assigns pupils to give an account of the general Mazniashvili’s military actions.⁵⁹ There is a separate chapter dedicated to general Mazniashvili in the X-XI grades textbook.⁶⁰

⁴⁷ Kighuradze, N. et al. History: Twelfth Grade. Tbilisi. Bakur Sulakauri Publication. p.240.

⁴⁸ Akhmeteli, N. et al. 2012. History: Twelfth Grade. Tbilisi: Diogene.

⁴⁹ Janelidze, O. et al. 2012. History of Georgia: Ninth Grade. Tbilisi: Klio.p.322.

⁵⁰ Janelidze, O. et al. 2012. History of Georgia: Ninth Grade. Tbilisi: Klio. p.323.

⁵¹ Akhmeteli, N. et al. 2012. History: Twelfth Grade. Tbilisi: Diogene. p.141.

⁵² Vachnadze, M. & Guruli, V. 2003. History of Georgia: Eleventh Grade. Tbilisi: Artanuji. p.110.

⁵³ Akhmeteli, N. et al. 2012. History: Twelfth Grade. Tbilisi: Diogene. p.141.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.141.

⁵⁵ Akhmeteli, N. et al. 2012. History: Twelfth Grade. Tbilisi: Diogene. p.141.

⁵⁶ Janelidze, O. et al. 2012. History of Georgia: Ninth Grade. Tbilisi: Klio.p.322.

⁵⁷ Kuakaskir, I. 2010. History of Abkhazia: V-IX Grades. p.192.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.201.

⁵⁹ Kuakaskir, I. 2010. History of Abkhazia: V-IX Grades. p.205.

⁶⁰ Bgzhba, O. & Lakoba, S. 2015. History of Abkhazia: X-XI Grades. p.320.

The Georgian textbook is predominantly concerned with the political history, while Abkhazian textbook, besides political and military events, is concerned with the effects of war on civilian population.⁶¹ However, detailed account of emotional aspects of the war permits a representation of Abkhazians as heroic victims vis-a-vis „other“, „demonized“ Georgians. Thus, in both Abkhazian and Georgian textbooks, war is depicted as a clean-cut affair, an epic tale of good versus evil.

2.2. THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE POST-SOVIET CONFLICTS

The post-Soviet conflicts are highly differentiated in the textbooks. The information about the 1990s conflicts is scarce, while the 2008 war is expounded on at length in the textbooks. In the description of the 1990-s conflicts textbook neglects its prehistory and political circumstances preceding the war,⁶² whereas in the description of the 2008 war the textbook covers its causes, military actions, international response and consequences.⁶³ However, textbooks do not offer a multilayered classification of the causes of the 2008 war. Georgia's aspiration to seek closer ties with the West and Russia's discontent with it, is cited as the single cause of the conflict. According to the authors, Russia's discontent resulted in the „anti-Georgian provocations in the separatist regions.“⁶⁴ These differentiated approaches to the post-Soviet conflicts are illustrated by the following instances: In the recount of the 1990s Georgian-Ossetian war, textbook offers only a single sentence to explain the political circumstances preceding the war: „In South Ossetia, since the Communist rule, Georgian cultural heritage sites had been vandalized and the Georgian toponyms had been replaced by the Ossetian ones.“⁶⁵ Contrary to it, the causes of the 2008 war are narrated at some length but only partially.⁶⁶

The causes of conflicts are discussed without any historical circumspection, neglecting detailed analysis. The textbooks cite a single cause - Russia's support. It's a simple answer to complex conflicts, which does not allow to delineate root causes, enabling factors and triggers. It's too narrow to encompass various aspects of social life (social, economic, cultural, political), which generates conflicts. To explore the conflicts in isolation from these aspects forecloses the discussion. The case of Ergneti Market is the only instance where the textbook covers an economic issue. The authors note that the market „brought Georgians and Ossetians closer to each other“ but had a detrimental effect on the Georgian economy.⁶⁷ Undermining the state budget is cited as an argument to justify the closure of the market by the Georgian authorities, which actually threw thousands of Georgians and Ossetians into unemployment.

Considering the scarcity of information that the textbooks provide, it is noteworthy that the authors emphasize the North Caucasian involvement in the conflicts.⁶⁸ This information is cited across all textbooks, except one published in 2003, which refers to the presence of „Russian soldiers and other mercenaries,“ without specifying the ethnic origins of those mercenaries.

Some conflict-sensitive examples are evident in textbooks published in 2012. For instance, ninth grade textbook depicts the losses on both Abkhazian and Georgian sides and conjures empathy, which is important in enabling a better understanding of marginalized histories. The textbook states: „as a result of military operations tens of thousands people died in Abkhazia. Three hundred thousand residents were driven out from their homes. Abkhazians also incurred serious damage. The war undermined the long history of Georgian-Abkhazian coexistence, kinship relations and generated alienation.“⁶⁹ The textbook goes on to depict the repercussions of war for both Ossetians and Georgians: „Georgian population escaped from Tskhinvali and surrounding villages but Ossetians too fled from Georgian villages.“⁷⁰ Contrary to the above-mentioned balanced accounts, the textbook

⁶¹ Kuakaskir, I. 2010. History of Abkhazia: V-IX Grades. p.201.

⁶² Akhmeteli, N. et al. 2012. History: Twelfth Grade. Tbilisi: Diogene. p.324.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp.328-329.

⁶⁴ Kighuradze, N. et al. History: Twelfth Grade. Tbilisi. Bakur Sulakauri Publication. p.282.

⁶⁵ Janelidze, O. et al. 2012. History of Georgia: Ninth Grade. Tbilisi: Klio. p.366.

⁶⁶ Akhmeteli, N. et al. 2012. History: Twelfth Grade. Tbilisi: Diogene. p.328.

⁶⁷ Medzmarishvili, E. et al. 2012. History: Eighth Grade. Tbilisi: Klio. p.215.

⁶⁸ Akhmeteli, N. et al. 2012. History: Twelfth Grade. Tbilisi: Diogene. p.324.

⁶⁹ Janelidze, O. et al. 2012. History of Georgia: Ninth Grade. Tbilisi: Klio.p.366.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.367.

published in 2003 tells the story of only Georgian population's suffering: „Three hundred thousand Georgians were driven out from Abkhazia.“⁷¹

Another example of conflict-sensitive approach can be observed in the question asked in the textbook, which encourages students to imagine peaceful alternatives: What do you think, was it possible to circumvent the 1991-1992 military encounters?⁷²

3. CONTRADICTORY STANDPOINTS: GEORGIAN-ABKHAZIAN FRAGMENTS

The narration of historical events is largely concomitant with contradictory standpoints and the discussion about the reasons for military action in Abkhazia hasn't been an exception. A harmonized account of the conflict requires persistent endeavours at all levels. Meanwhile, in this chapter, I attempt to incorporate certain aspects of heteroglossia or interaction of various discourses by presenting Abkhazian and Georgian viewpoints next to each other.⁷³ Heteroglossia deals with social voices and is in fact an expression of the struggle between these two voices. This double-voiced fragment of history is dialogical and draws upon the official narrative of the Georgian and Abkhazian textbooks. This chapter does not aim at analyzing the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict or providing an objective account of the conflict, but instead, aims at juxtaposing one – dominant for us – Georgian narrative of the conflict against another – marginal for us, but dominant for Abkhazians – the Abkhazian narrative.⁷⁴

Abkhazian narrative: The march of Georgian National Guard on Abkhazia on August 14, 1992, is viewed as „Georgian aggression.“⁷⁵ The Abkhazian textbook attempts to demonstrate the opponent's narrative when referring to the reasons for the march of Georgian forces on Abkhazia. These reasons include: 1. Some Georgian government officials were held in captivity by the supporters of Zviad Gamsakhurdia and the march was a mission to rescue them. 2. To protect the railway line.⁷⁶ Further, the textbook attempts to repudiate the above-mentioned rationale behind the Georgian National Guard's actions through the following arguments: 1. The government officials were already released by August 14. 2. The cases of robbery on a railway line were not restricted to the Abkhazian region.⁷⁷ In order to undermine the opponent's rationale even further the textbook states that these are „fabricated reasons“ to justify the „occupation of Abkhazia.“⁷⁸

Georgian narrative: Some Georgian textbooks view the protection of the railway line as the reason for Georgian National Guard's entry in Abkhazia but some omit this part and frame the beginning of the war, in broader terms, as a response to the emergent Abkhazian separatist movement. According to this version of events, „Georgian National Guard, after informing the local Abkhaz government, crossed the administrative borders of Abkhazia on August 14, 1992. The Abkhazian side did not comply with it and fired on Georgian forces. The political conflict turned into a shooting war.“⁷⁹

The critical narrative of a historian: According to historian Davit Jishkariani, contrary to the popular memory⁸⁰ and textbook version of history, the official statement reveals that Tbilisi's objective besides the protection of the railway line, was „to end the rampancy of oppositional political groups in western Georgia.“⁸¹ Further, Jishkariani argues that the military operation, which was triggered by the civil war and aimed at establishing control over the territory dominated by the opposition, turned into „Georgia's war against Abkhaz Separatism.“⁸²

Abkhazian narrative: Abkhazian history textbook insists that the war in Abkhazia united previously divided Georgian society. For instance, if Georgian population in Abkhazia previously was divided between the supporters of Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Eduard Shevardnadze, after the 1992 military operation Georgians put aside their differences and endorsed the Georgian National Guard.⁸³ As a result, Georgian population of Abkhazia - who

⁷¹ Vachnadze, M. & Guruli, V. 2003. History of Georgia: Eleventh Grade. Tbilisi: Artanuji. p.177.

⁷² Akhmeteli, N. et al. 2012. History: Twelfth Grade. Tbilisi: Diogene. p.325.

⁷³ Bakhtin, M. 1982. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. University of Texas Press.

⁷⁴ Mahmood, S. 2016. *Religious Difference in a Secular Age*. A Minority Report. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

⁷⁵ Kuakaskir, I. 2010. History of Abkhazia: V-IX Grades. p.246.

⁷⁶ Kuakaskir, I. 2010. History of Abkhazia: V-IX Grades. p.246.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.246.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.262.

⁷⁹ Medzmarishvili, E. et al. 2012. History: Eighth Grade. Tbilisi: Klio.

⁸⁰ Point of view that the war broke out during the attempt to protect the railway line.

⁸¹ Jishkariani, D. 2018. „Why did the War Start in Abkhazia?“ Netgazeti. Available at: <https://netgazeti.ge/news/298092/>

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Kuakaskir, I. 2010. History of Abkhazia: V-IX Grades. p.248.

supported the Georgian National Guard - is depicted as „fifth column“ within the region.⁸⁴ By contrast, those Georgians (Gali region residents) who took a neutral stance and did not support the Georgian officials' actions in Abkhazia are portrayed in a positive light.⁸⁵

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Abkhazian narrative: When describing the events of 1918, textbooks refers to Georgia as the „occupier.“⁸⁶ Since then Georgia continues to be identified as the „enemy.“ Abkhazians complained of „Georgianization“ policies from the 1930s onwards and the Soviet repression of Abkhazian public figures is viewed as exclusively ethnically motivated repression. The textbooks cite several examples of „Georgianization“ policies including the replacement of Abkhazian toponyms, giving the top party posts to Georgians, the transcription of Abkhazian language into a new Georgian alphabet and the suppression of teaching in Abkhazian language: „you could not find any Abkhazian holding top posts in the bureaucracy. All the posts were given to the „newcomers.“⁸⁷ The promulgation of Georgian alphabet was viewed by Abkhazians as a tool to deprive them of their national uniqueness. Language is an essential element in the maintenance of ethnic and cultural identity and an assimilative policy against the will of an ethnic group would provoke dissent and cause ethnic tensions.⁸⁸

The critical narrative of a historian: Abkhazian history textbooks omit the change in Soviet politics after Stalin's death, which halted the „Georgianization“ process in Abkhazia. In 1954, the Abkhazian language was once again given a Cyrillic alphabet and in the 1970s quotas were introduced for ethnic Abkhazians in the bureaucracy. Affirmative action and favorable policies towards Abkhazian residents led to significant Abkhazian political influence in the autonomous republic which, in turn, fed insecurities and a sense of unfairness among the region's Georgian residents.⁸⁹

Georgian narrative: The 1990s conflicts are depicted against the background of the tension between the „imperial center“ and „unruly Republics“ and expressed as „Russia's undeclared war“ against Georgia. The textbook authors argue that „there was not any actual reason for confrontation between Georgians and Abkhazians“ and the main reason lies in Russia's desire to punish the unruly Republic by instigating unrest among national minorities.⁹⁰

4. HISTORY AND ITS ABKHAZIAN FRAGMENT

While Georgian textbooks dedicate approximately 1-2 pages to the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, Abkhazian textbooks dedicate 42 pages (pp. 231-273) to the issue. Abkhazian history textbooks illuminate certain aspects of Georgian-Abkhazian relationship and cultural interactions between them. This unintentionally imbues in the young a sense of shared historical past. In contrast to Georgian textbooks, Abkhazian textbooks emphasize the presence of „neighbouring people“ including Georgians and North Caucasians. In addition to the entwinement of political past, the textbook reveals close kinship ties and cultural familiarity between Georgians and Abkhazians.⁹¹

Abkhazian textbook argues that one of the precipitating factors leading to the conflict had been „war between historians.“ Georgian and Abkhazian historians waged their own battles decades before an armed conflict broke out. Some Georgian historians insisted that the Abkhaz/Abasgoi tribes were in fact ethnically Georgian tribes and the present-day Abkhazs had only arrived in Abkhazia later.⁹² This way, the Abkhazian textbooks became an instrument of defining ethnic boundaries and of searching for the traces of indigenous population.⁹³ The emphasis on ethnic borders is significant in so far as the origins of Abkhazians can be traced back to its position vis-a-vis others (neighbouring people). For instance, the textbook cites a single sentence from the Italian missionary Archangelo Lamberti's book „Description of Mengrelia:“Beyond Mengrelia there is a country of Abkhazs and Jiks.“⁹⁴

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.260.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.263.

⁸⁶ Kuakaskir, I. 2010. History of Abkhazia: V-IX Grades. p. 201.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

⁸⁸ Bush, K. & Saltarelli, D. 2000. *The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict: Towards a Peacebuilding Education for Children*. UNICEF: Innocenti Insight.

⁸⁹ Jones, S. 2013. Georgia: A Political History Since Independence. Tbilisi: CSS.

⁹⁰ Sanikidze, G. et al. 2012. History: Eighth Grade. Bakur Sulakauri Publication.

⁹¹ Kuakaskir, I. 2010. History of Abkhazia: V-IX Grades. p.157.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p.135.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.170.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.106.

The Abkhazian textbook argues that until the 1860s, Abkhazian territory was inhabited predominantly by Abkhazian ethnic groups.⁹⁵ It is only after the abolition of Abkhazian principality by the Russian Empire that hundreds of thousands of Abkhazians, as punishment of their anticolonial struggle, were deported to the Ottoman Empire and the once densely populated Black Sea coast became depopulated. A separate chapter is dedicated to migration and settlement of Mengrelians, Svans, Greeks and Armenians in Abkhazia.⁹⁶ However, Derlugian states that Abkhaz popular memory overlooks the relationship between the arrival of other ethnic groups and the policies of colonial development and hence, downplays the effects of Russian conquest.⁹⁷ By the end of the 19th century the demographic landscape had changed and the textbook highlights the decrease in numbers of Abkhazian population and, simultaneous with it, the increase in the total population due to the newcomers.⁹⁸ The textbook describes the new wave of immigration that began between 1937 and 1953 (Georgians constituted 6% of the population in 1886; 24% in 1897; 30% in 1939 and 40% in 1959) and insists that „the objective of mass immigration was to assimilate Abkhazians into the Georgian ethnocultural environment.“⁹⁹

The Abkhazian history textbook begins the history of Abkhazian resistance movement from 1965 and identifies four distinct periods: 1965-1967, 1977-1978, 1983-1989, 1989-1992. The Soviet assimilation policies are viewed as the main reason for Abkhazian resistance.¹⁰⁰ The textbook expatiates on the Georgian intellectuals' support of the assimilation policy.¹⁰¹ Georgian historians' arguments about the present-day Abkhazians not being indigenous to Abkhazia and the denial of their nationhood alienated Abkhazians from their history.¹⁰² As for Ingorokva's theory, the textbook accuses it of „depriving Abkhazians of their past.“¹⁰³

Overall, the textbook emphasizes hostility towards Georgia by portraying it as a historic enemy who is desperate for „annihilation of Abkhazian nation and culture.“¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, Georgia is seen as an „imperial“ actor. This tendency can be traced back to the discussions on „the national question“ in general, and the „Georgian question“, in particular, in the 1920s. In April 1923, at the XII Party Congress (Russian Communist Party Bolsheviks) Stalin was against Georgia's secession from the Transcaucasian Federation and attempted to deprive Russians of their monopoly on imperialism and to define „local nationalism“ as „great-power chauvinism writ small.“¹⁰⁵

Soviet leaders promoted group (ethnic) rights and proclaimed that all nations were equal and sovereign.¹⁰⁶ Although all nations were not equal in size, were not equally developed („civilized“ and „backward“ nations), and were not equal in their economic agency („oppressor nations“ and „oppressed nations“), they had the same basic rights.¹⁰⁷ Sovereignty was guaranteed and maintained through an ethnoterritorial federation and a right to secession. However, N. Marr considered nationality to be too „transitory“ and too complex a category to be defined by „primitive territorial demarcation.“¹⁰⁸ Moreover, he viewed language as the most dependable, albeit insufficient and not necessarily universal indicator of ethnicity. Public discontent with the Soviet policies among Abkhazians was not a mere worry about their native language, but also an imperative factor for cultural and economic development, as well as a key component of Abkhazia's political status. Furthermore, to become official, a language had to be „modernized,“ which involved the creation of a literary standard rendered through a „rational“ phonetic alphabet (writing systems were changed).¹⁰⁹ Gradually, the administrative units, created just a few years before to demarcate nationalities, became the most important defining features of those nationalities.¹¹⁰

⁹⁵ Kuakaskir, I. 2010. History of Abkhazia: V-IX Grades. p.135.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.171-172.

⁹⁷ Derlugian, G. 2007. „Abkhazia: A Broken Paradise.“ Sarai Reader 2007: Frontiers.

⁹⁸ Kuakaskir, I. 2010. History of Abkhazia: V-IX Grades. pp.172-173.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.215.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.232.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.234.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.234.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.241.

¹⁰⁴ Kuakaskir, I. 2010. History of Abkhazia: V-IX Grades. p.263.

¹⁰⁵ Slezkine, Y. 1994. „The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism.“ *Slavic Review*, 53 (2): 414-452.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Marr, N. *Plemennoi sostav naseleniia Kavkaza: Trudy Komissii po izuchenii plemennogo sostava naseleniia Eossii* (Petrograd: Rossiiskaia Akademiia nauk, 1920), 3: 9, 21-22.

¹⁰⁹ Slezkine, Y. 1994. „The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism.“ *Slavic Review*, 53 (2): 414-452.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

5. SCHOOL TEACHERS AND HISTORY EDUCATION IN TIMES OF WAR AND PEACE

This chapter explores Georgian history teachers' pedagogic experiences and their viewpoints with regard to the contemporary conflicts in Georgia. The scarcity of information in the textbooks makes it difficult for teachers to „give adequate answers to pupils' questions.“¹¹¹ Their knowledge is predetermined by popular memory,¹¹² but some of them did not want to create the impression that they were politically prejudiced. The ambiguity of the issue leads teachers to not confront the issue directly or offer explicit assessment. However, some teachers view this ambiguity as an opportunity to manoeuvre away from the text and state that „teachers must have their own evaluation and interpretation and should not depend on the textbooks.“¹¹³ Focus group discussions conducted in ten Georgian cities reveal that teachers residing in the cities, where the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is higher, are more informed about the conflicts than those living in cities with fewer number of IDPs and more ethnic minorities.¹¹⁴

Teachers often rely on a single textbook, which does not offer a holistic and comprehensive analysis of the issue. One of the respondents notes that: „if we draw upon the textbook, it does not offer us any historical genealogy and precipitating political events... it just reveals a fragment.“¹¹⁵ Majority of interviewed teachers are dissatisfied with the lack of content, which requires extra preparation from them:

„The textbook dedicates only three pages to the conflict history. How is it possible? This subject is superficially overviewed, only some facts are given without any comprehensive historical account, which is necessary for pupils to connect fragments and stimulate inquiry. This is the greatest challenge.“¹¹⁶

Teachers interviewed confirm the need for learning material that presents the past in a more comprehensive manner and for workshops to debate the teaching of conflicting episodes.¹¹⁷ Dominant academic literature similarly lacks a multiperspective account of conflicts. Teachers often rely on online material,¹¹⁸ which is not academically reliable. Consequently, the interviewed teachers discuss conflicts from the dominant Georgian perspective. As for the opponent's account of the conflict, the teachers opinions were divided: some of them argued that it's necessary to be informed about the Abkhazian and Ossetian narratives so that teachers could have answers to the pupils' questions and pupils in turn could be equipped for debate.^{119,120} The rest of the teachers did not approve the transmission of a multiperspective knowledge as they thought that it might mislead both teachers and pupils.¹²¹

The teachers views are influenced by those historians who are preoccupied with the search for an indigenous population in Abkhazia. Majority of the interviewed teachers consider Abkhazians and Ossetians as immigrants settled in Georgia.¹²² Furthermore, some of them repeatedly stress that „Abkhazian nation does not exist, Abazgs are Georgians“ – a phrase that is unacceptable to Abkhazians.^{123,124}

When it comes to the reasons for conflict the teachers' opinions are divided into two: some argue that the tensions between Georgians and Ossetians, on the one hand, and Georgians and Abkhazians, on the other hand, had been present and it was exploited by Russia.¹²⁵ However, others dispute that there were Georgian-Abkhazian or Georgian-Ossetian sides and maintain that Georgians fought not with Abkhazians but with Russians.¹²⁶ This view deprives Abkhazians and Ossetians of their political agency but it might be generated due to the fact that the conflict was largely anticipated and provoked by elites and the common people were not willing to accept it. Both Abkhazians/Ossetians and Georgians saw themselves as victims and not culprits. As Stephen Jones notes „it was not an ethnic war that welled up from below.“¹²⁷

¹¹¹ Focus Group Discussion 9

¹¹² Focus Group Discussion 1

¹¹³ Focus Group Discussion 2

¹¹⁴ IDP statistics. Available at: <http://mra.gov.ge/geo/static/55>

¹¹⁵ Focus Group Discussion 1

¹¹⁶ Focus Group Discussion 1

¹¹⁷ Focus Group Discussion 1

¹¹⁸ Focus Group Discussion 11

¹¹⁹ Focus Group Discussion 6

¹²⁰ Focus Group Discussion 3

¹²¹ Focus Group Discussion 3

¹²² Focus Group Discussion 2

¹²³ Focus Group Discussion 8

¹²⁴ Focus Group Discussion 8

¹²⁵ Focus Group Discussion 7

¹²⁶ Focus Group Discussion 4

¹²⁷ Jones, S. 2013. Georgia: A Political History Since Independence. Tbilisi: CSS.

Some history teachers try to strengthen the dialogue with Abkhazians and Ossetians through social media. They emphasize the common Caucasian heritage and shared cultural values in the hope of finding sympathy.¹²⁸ At the same time, the involvement of the North Caucasian mercenaries in the Georgian-Abkhazian war is a recurrent theme throughout the teachers' narratives.¹²⁹ Nevertheless, the Caucasian regional dialogue is still viewed as a viable solution to the conflict.¹³⁰ Despite its linguistic, religious and ethnic diversity, Caucasus developed a shared historical-cultural identity.¹³¹ However, Georgian textbooks do not cover adequately the Caucasian peoples' histories and teachers were alarmed by lack of teaching about neighbouring peoples.¹³² One of the teachers notes „we teach history of France, Britain and Holland, but children do not know what's going on in the Caucasus region.“¹³³ To view the history from either a singularly national perspective or a singularly international perspective is to promote a narrow conception of history and the teachers' concerns confirm the need for a multidimensional inclusive historiography that locates Georgian history within the broader history of the region and of the world as a whole. Moreover, some of them insist on the inclusion of the „History of the Caucasus“ as a separate curriculum subject.¹³⁴

CONCLUSION

The conflicts are recurrent theme throughout the history of contemporary Georgia and since the textbooks have power to bring closer or to alienate Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian societies, this study aimed at analyzing the dominant historical narratives through the conflict-sensitive lens. The biased and myopic historiography needs to recast the underlying political and ideological boundaries or else we miss out on the possibility of comparative analysis and critical interpretation that are vital aspects of history writing.¹³⁵ Georgian textbooks analyzed often exclude the opponents' voice and experiences and predefine our knowledge and understanding.

The negligence of social and economic imperatives is one of the key shortcomings of textbooks. The ethnic dimension is present in so far as it is depicted as a tool exploited by a third force. Politically prejudiced analysis hinders any prospects for consensus and peace. A key element in both Georgian and Abkhazian history textbooks is an instillation of a sense of veneration for the nation's glorious past and a self-elevating account of history. While some Georgian textbooks reflect a slight desire to correct past wrongs, others omit such aspects and adhere to the „deceived“ and „oppressed“ but „fair“ discursive topoi.

Although the Georgian history textbooks aim at developing an analytical and critical way of thinking through encouraging pupils to critically discuss material, achieving this objective is not realistic since the given textbooks do not offer countervailing perspectives for discussion and prematurely constrain the opinion-forming process by its content.

The objective of history is not to provide a set of given facts and answers, but to stimulate and expand readers' imaginative capacity and critical and independent reasoning.¹³⁶ However a controversial, dialectical historical texts call for an interpretative approach, which in turn requires teacher's commitment. To achieve this goal it is not enough to develop appropriate teaching materials, but teachers must receive sufficient wages and adequate trainings too.¹³⁷ The juxtaposition of dominant historical narratives against each other, complemented by a conflict-sensitive approach, revealed the epistemic blindness, biased accounts and limits that affect the trajectory of Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts.

¹²⁸ Focus Group Discussion 4

¹²⁹ Focus Group Discussion 9

¹³⁰ Focus Group Discussion 10

¹³¹ Baramidze, T. 2016. *Caucasus: At the Crossroads of Time and Space [Kavkasia: Droisa da Sivrtsis Gasakarze]*. Tbilisi: Caucasian House.

¹³² Focus Group Discussion 8

¹³³ Focus Group Discussion 9

¹³⁴ Focus Group Discussion 9

¹³⁵ Trevor-Roper, H. 1969. „The Past and the Present: History and Sociology.“ *Past & Present*, 42 (1): 3-17.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Kreiner, J. 2006. „Control Through Education? The Politicization of Israeli and Palestinian School Textbooks.“ In Foster, S. & Crawford, K. (eds.), *What Shall We Tell the Children? International Perspectives on School History Textbooks*.

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HISTORY DIVIDED BY WAR:
CONFLICTS AND HISTORY EDUCATION IN GEORGIA

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