



Berghof Foundation

“Changing the past in our heads”

A facilitator’s guide to listening workshops

Andrea Zemskov-Züge & Oliver Wolleh (eds.)

About this publication:

This booklet presents methods and results of the project „Through History Dialogue to Future Cooperation“. The project was conducted by the Berghof Foundation Caucasus Programme in the years 2015 to 2017 and funded by the German Foreign Office. The editors would like to thank all individuals and organisations that have contributed to the Berghof History Dialogue Process throughout the years. Our special thanks for proofreading go to Angie Pataraya, Shota Shvelidze, Rusiko Marshania and Zalina Gabajty. Beatrix Austin, Astrid Fischer and Hans J. Giessmann from the Berghof Foundation have provided patient and knowledgeable support to the editors, greatly contributing to the publication of this manual.

In memory of our friend and colleague Gela Bandzeladze who started the journey with us and passed away in 2013.

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Introduction

The “Berghof History Dialogue Process”

The history of this manual goes back to November 2012, when the Berghof Foundation’s Caucasus Programme gathered young people from Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia to learn how to record biographical interviews and discuss questions of history, memory and conflict. This was the starting point of a process involving Georgian, Abkhaz and South Ossetian stakeholders of war-memorialization: the “Berghof History Dialogue Process”. In the course of this process, relatives of the fallen and missing, veterans from all sides, and eyewitnesses joined the project groups. With the Saakashvili government leaving power in Georgia in 2012, the political constraints reduced to such an extent that it became possible to reach out to citizens on all sides and to set in motion a major peacebuilding dynamic dedicated to addressing the grievances of unrest and war between 1989 and 2008, building trust and enabling empathy across the conflict divides. The need for such a process is still acute, because knowledge about and perceptions of the conflict history differ greatly between sides. In addition, the atrocities and grievances of the wars are widely considered too hard and painful to discuss.

Throughout various project phases, participants recorded interviews, picked relevant episodes and discussed them in “listening workshops”, reflecting on their own and the other sides’ experiences and conflict narratives. Members of the project groups in all three communities came together in Yerevan, Armenia for “trialogue meetings” to discuss memories from all (three) conflict sides. The focus was not on the experience of political actors or well-known experts. Our work concentrated on the memories and every-day lives of ordinary people.

Throughout the years, a stable and trustful team of workshop facilitators was established, communicating across the conflict divide. It took hard work, patience and trust-building to find about 400 interview partners in all regions, who were willing to share their memories and their views on the conflict. Since 2015, in addition to the listening workshops, television shows and radio programmes were created, where people could share and discuss their memories publicly. All these achievements were possible only thanks to our partners: World Without Violence, The Movement of Abkhaz Mothers’ for Peace and Social Justice and Abaza Television in Abkhazia, as well as the Peace Development Centre and Radio Free Europe in Georgia together with numerous individuals who did great work and mobilized a huge amount of patience, trust and dedication to our common cause. The German Foreign Office supported and financed this work generously and supported us enthusiastically, throughout the years. The Georgian Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs supported additional listening-workshops in Georgia.

Rationale of this manual

At the heart of the “Berghof History Dialogue Process” are the listening workshops. They were conducted in community centres, NGOs, administration buildings and schools, with participants of all ages and backgrounds. In our experience, the direct contact in the workshop group and with the facilitators encourages people to think about their attitudes and to listen to each other attentively. The exchange of relevant episodes between the project groups in Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia made it possible for the participants to hear voices of the respective “other sides” in a safe environment. During the workshops, they discussed attitudes that are different from their own societies’ mainstream views. The effectiveness

and potential of the listening workshops, however, depends greatly on the skills and capabilities of the workshop facilitators.

The methods presented in this manual were developed especially to fit the conflict context and the actors engaging in this effort. They are a product of thorough conflict analysis, enriched by manifold discussions and experiences of our international project team throughout the years. At the same time, they offer an opportunity to reflect on general principles and dynamics that shape war memory in protracted conflicts as well as approaches to influence these in a positive and fruitful way.

The manual consists of four parts. Part One describes the political and social context in the societies in Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, where we developed this work, and introduces our “gearwheel” approach that made it possible to transport discussions and contents from small workshop settings to a broad public. Part Two discusses the theory of change on which we base our work, namely that conflict-supporting narratives, which are deeply embedded in people’s and societies’ story-telling, must be understood, and then gradually replaced by peace-supporting narratives. Part Three presents the more technical outline of our workshop setting and deals with the facilitators’ role, workshop settings and ways of overcoming sticking points in this work. Part Four contains a selection of interview episodes along with instructions of how to work with them in order to unpack narratives and reach a new quality of conversation. Throughout the text, we have inserted “facilitators’ voices”. Here, some of our local facilitators who have been crucial in carrying this process reflect on the nature, effects and milestones of their work.

The Berghof Foundation is devoted to creating “space for conflict transformation”. Good facilitators do the exact same thing in workshop settings: they create safe spaces for new conversations and self-realizations to happen. Peacebuilding requires constructive communication that empowers people to speak and reflect about the deep grievances of the past. This manual has been written to inspire facilitators – beginners and more seasoned ones – to tackle this challenging endeavour in new and deeply meaningful ways.

Andrea Zemskov-Züge and Oliver Wolleh, Berlin, November 2017

Part One

Emerging space for confidence-building:

On the conditions for exchange on the past in the Georgian - Abkhaz - South Ossetian conflict system (Oliver Wolleh)

“The human dimension of conflict must become central to peacemaking and building peaceful societies. Only governments can write peace treaties, but only human beings – citizens outside governments – can transform conflictual relationships between people into peaceful relationships.”

Harold H. Saunders

Conflict history & peacebuilding conditions

The Georgian-Abkhaz and the Georgian-South Ossetian wars of the early 1990s were marked by brutal fighting that took place almost exclusively on Abkhaz and South Ossetian soil (Wolleh 2006). They severely affected Abkhaz, South Ossetian and Georgian families both physically and psychologically. Almost every Abkhaz and South Ossetian family suffered the loss of lives or health of surviving war witnesses. The vast majority of the Georgian population in Abkhazia and South Ossetia were expelled and fled from the conflict regions and their homes, becoming internally displaced persons (IDPs) according to Georgian understanding and refugees according to Abkhaz and South Ossetian understanding. In the South Ossetian population and IDP communities, the August War of 2008 has renewed and deepened trauma.

On the political level of negotiations, no major breakthrough has been achieved which would have led to an agreement on the political status of Abkhazia or South Ossetia. Moreover, there is a lack of common understanding between the sides about how relationships could be restored and what rapprochement or normalization should ultimately look like.

In this first part of the manual, the societal conditions, under which this work started and developed further, as well as the process features that were created to function under these conditions, will be outlined.¹

Addressing the grievances caused by the violent escalations of the 1990s (and again 2008) has been considered a very difficult endeavour. One of the reasons is, of course, that the discourses about the wars differ greatly in the communities involved in conflict.

On the Georgian side, the main reasons for these wars are often considered to be “external factors”, in particular the involvement of Russia. The pre-war relationship between Georgians, Abkhaz and South Ossetians is mostly described as a period of “harmony” and “brotherhood”. In this harmony-narrative, the Abkhaz and Ossetian populations are seen as mere objects of international development, not as conflict

¹ For German readers see the following article on the role of memory-based dialogue for confidence-building. Oliver Wolleh, *Wissenschaft & Frieden*, Heft 4/2017 – Eingefrorene Konflikte „Der nachhaltige Weg zur Vertrauensbildung Geschichtsdialog in Georgien, Abchasien und Südossetien“ <http://wissenschaft-und-frieden.de/seite.php?artikelID=2241>.

parties. Contrary to this, the Abkhaz and South Ossetian public discourse emphasizes “internal” and “inter-ethnic” factors that contributed to the escalation process. In this view, the conflicts escalated due to the “dominance of Georgians”. This dominance-narrative is directly opposed to the Georgian narrative.

Due to the dominance of the “harmony narrative” the Georgian public and government greatly underestimate the extent of grievances and bitterness which the 1990s wars caused in the Abkhaz and South Ossetian communities.

For many years the Georgian discourse did not show any understanding of the need for “confidence-building” with Abkhaz or South Ossetian people because the “conflict” was not perceived as one between people but framed as a conflict with Russia. This view commonly found its expression in the concept of the “Russian occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia”. Consequently, Georgian offers for the restoration of relationships or the demand for the restoration of territorial integrity did not address the conflict grievances of the other side. At the same time, these grievances were very present within the Abkhaz and South Ossetian societies.

Within this common “grievance space”, there are important differences. In South Ossetia, the isolation and separation from Georgia was not as strong as in Abkhazia. Due to factors such as geographical closeness of Tskhinval/i in South Ossetia to the towns of Gori and Tbilisi in Georgia, due to existing structures like the “Ergneti market” and due to the large number of ethnically mixed families “people-to-people-contacts” and exchange were practised to a larger extent between Georgia and South Ossetia than in the Abkhaz context.

In the Georgian-South Ossetian context, the system that evolved in the late 1990s can best be described as a multi-layered “semi-formal” confidence-building system, in which official confidence-building measures – e.g. by the United Nations – were complemented by a broad spectrum of informal social encounters.

When the Saakashvili government took over power in what was called the “Rose Revolution” in 2004, this semi-formal confidence-building system came under pressure and was ultimately destroyed. Two incidents, out of many, exemplify the purposeful destruction of this system.

- ≡ First, the shelling of Tskhinval/i town by Georgian artillery on 11th and 12th August 2004, due to which – according to Georgian sources – three South Ossetian civilians were killed. South Ossetian authorities added 28 wounded persons and the destruction of houses to the list of destruction (ICG 2004: 14). The shooting that was ordered by then Georgian Interior Minister Irakli Okruashvili was backed by President Saakashvili.
- ≡ Second, the closing of the “Ergneti market” in September 2004. The market had, until that time, functioned as what is called in theories of peacebuilding a “connector” between the parties.

Since the end of the wars in the 1990s both Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-South Ossetian relationships were never free of fear and were characterized by various incidents of violence, like the Gal/i war of 1998. However, the shelling of Tskhinval/i town in August 2004 marks the beginning of a phase that is characterized by a “climate of violence and fear”, not just in the Georgian-South Ossetian context but also in the Abkhaz-Georgian context. A complex escalation started, involving social, economic and military aspects and resulting finally in the Georgian-South Ossetian war, which transformed into a Georgian-Russian war. It is not the purpose of this publication to sequence the acts of violence in detail and to analyze the complicated chain of action-counteraction and counter-counteractions. Suffice it to say that under these conditions no meaningful and sustainable civil society-based peacebuilding was feasible.

As long as the climate of threat and violence dominated in political circles and in the general public, social peacebuilding activities were undermined. Even if peaceful and mutually enriching meetings between people from the conflict regions and Georgia were possible, activists, particularly in Abkhazia or South Ossetia, were not able to report publicly about these events in a convincing way in their own societies. The relevance of an encounter on the citizen’s level furthermore becomes very questionable if at the same time a member of the Saakashvili government is openly advocating the use of force as a possible means of solving the conflict.

In addition to this, peacebuilding and dialogue initiatives were endangered by negative attitudes towards them in Abkhaz and South Ossetian public opinion. Dominant public opinion was sceptical and not supportive of existing confidence-building activities with Georgians, because these initiatives were

framed by the Georgian government as a means towards the “territorial integrity” of the conflict regions and not as a means of reconciliation amongst the people. Since peacebuilding activities on the civil society level included travelling abroad and trainings, which are particularly attractive for Abkhaz and South Ossetians due to the isolation of these regions, these measures were often perceived as “attempts of bribing” young people or as “cheese in the trap”. A peacebuilding system that is widely perceived as a “trap” has indeed a structural problem.

In 2012 however, with the party coalition “Georgian Dream” succeeding the Saakashvili government, the conditions for peacebuilding in the region improved significantly.

Georgian Dream was the first Georgian government since the end of the wars in the 1990s that advocated – from the very beginning and unanimously – a non-violent solution of what is seen in Tbilisi as the issue of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This strong commitment to the non-use of military force paved (and paves) the way for any kind of peacebuilding or confidence-building process between the sides, both on the level of civil society actors and on the level of political authorities.

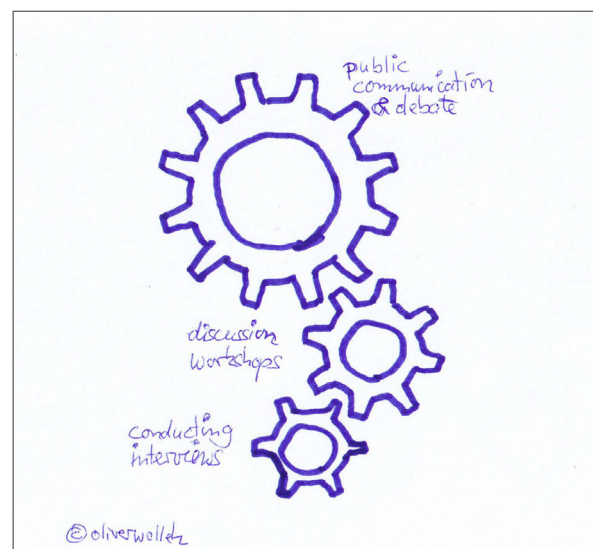
In contrast to the previous government, Georgian Dream made efforts to normalize the relationship with Russia. Though the relationship is not fully restored, there are positive developments like renewed trade relations and flight connectivity.

Moreover, freedom of press has largely improved within Georgia in comparison to the period under Saakashvili. Citizens and social groups do not have to fear sanctions or intimidation in case they start to engage with Abkhaz and South Ossetians to discuss past violence and escalation.

Besides these more general political developments, the Georgian Dream government has taken more specific steps with the purpose of improving the conditions for peacebuilding and rapprochement. Under the leadership of Paata Zakareishvili, the “State Ministry for the Restoration of Territorial Integrity of Georgia” was changed into the “State Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality of Georgia”. The renaming is more than a minor symbolic detail. It implies, for the first time since the violence of the 1990s, that not the restoration of “territorial integrity” is the main direction of the political process but the restoration of “confidence” amongst the people of Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It is an indirect acknowledgment that the “lack of confidence” between people is the main problem, not the “occupation” by an external party. These moderate political changes and developments widened the space for confidence-building on all sides. It must be mentioned, though, that in South Ossetia, repressions and control of civil society activities has grown significantly after 2008 and in parallel with the assaults on Russian civil society in recent years.

The gearwheel approach towards public debate

Discussing memories of the past can be considered as one of the most challenging topics within citizen’s dialogue, no matter whether the groups are discussing within their own societies or in a face-to-face Abkhaz-Georgian-South Ossetian setting. At the same time, a realistic understanding of each other’s grievances and needs is required in order to start building a widely accepted and appreciated system of reconciliation. It was therefore important to us and our local partners to make the discussions transparent to the wider public. For this to happen we implemented what we call the “gearwheel approach”. It contains three types of activities that are interconnected and that involve an increasing number of people with each consecutive step.



Gearwheel one: Conducting biographical interviews

In a first step, members of the project groups in all three communities conducted biographical interviews. In these interviews the respondents from Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia speak about their lives and their experiences with conflict, escalation of violence and war. The interviews could be conducted only thanks to our interviewers who succeeded in explaining to the interview partners the necessity of such work and in winning their trust. After the interview was recorded, team-members listened to it and picked episodes for further work. The interviews were conducted in the preferred language of the respondent, with short episodes being transcribed and, if needed, translated to the languages of the other conflict sides. At present, the interview archive is administered and located at the Berghof Foundation's Caucasus Programme. The project groups have samples of audiofiles and transcripts at their disposal to work with.

Gearwheel two: Intergenerational discussion rounds

The intergenerational discussion rounds are a space where people from different age groups come together in order to listen to and discuss the interview episodes that were generated during the first phase. These workshops are conducted in each of the involved societies. These discussions can be very challenging to the group and therefore need to be facilitated by a skilled moderator.

During the workshops, participants have the opportunity to discuss and reflect first and foremost the different experiences of the past within their own communities. However, since the interviews and listening workshops are taking place in three parallel tracks on the Abkhaz, Georgian and South Ossetian side, there is the possibility to exchange interview episodes between the sides. In case a group requests to listen to an interview episode from a person from the other side, the facilitator provides such an episode, leading the groups into "indirect dialogue" on the perceptions and experiences of the speaker.

It has proven effective to work repeatedly with the same group. A cycle of four to eight workshops is desirable. Usually the facilitators proceed from "easier" to more challenging episodes, starting the cycle with the own side's material. During the workshops, one or two episodes are played. Depending on how long the workshops are, there are discussions and exercises around the episodes (see Part Three).

Phase one and two of the gearwheel approach are operating within the activity repertoire of most established citizen peacebuilding. While the moment of interviewing is characterized by two people sitting together (interviewer and respondent), listening workshops are group discussions of 15 to 25 people. In order to transport the insights from the group discussions to the wider public, we created a third level of engagement.

Gearwheel three: Public communication and discussion

Both in Abkhazia and in Georgia, we managed to create public media formats that focus on discussing more widely people's experiences and reflections of people.

In Abkhazia and together with our Abkhaz partners, we established the "Biographical Salon". This is a TV-talk-show format in which a person who gave an interview is interviewed in public. The audience in the studio is allowed to ask questions. In Georgia and again together with our partners, we created the radio programme "Cross-point". In this weekly 25-minute programme, interview episodes that were once discussed in listening workshops are being discussed by two guest speakers.

In this way, the gearwheel approach empowers interview partners and workshop participants alike to reflect their experiences, emotions as well as their hopes for peace and normalization and to feed them into a discussion that reaches a wider public through mass media.

The listening workshops are at the heart of a trilateral Georgian Abkhaz South Ossetian dynamic of communicating about the past. Their methodology is unique and innovative. Our experiences with this approach over the past few years have shown that there is a lot of openness amongst people from all sides of the conflict divide to share their experiences in a genuine, reflective and (self-)critical way. They are willing to address the grievances of what is often the darkest chapter in their life. Moreover, there is space to listen to the statements of people from the other side, facilitating a learning experience that also includes people who are not ready for face-to-face encounters as well as the wider public.

Voices of the Facilitators



*“Don’t be afraid of your past,
whatever happened, it is better to face it,
to look at it and not just to wipe your hands off it.”*

Misha Jakhua, Tbilisi, Georgia

What is the need in Georgian society for the work we have been doing?

We do not talk enough about the problems. I mean to directly talk about the real problem. Only politicians talk about it, in a technical way, but the people who have experienced it are left with their pain. But these emotions exist. We have to work with them, to talk about them, so that they can be directed in the right direction. We need to talk about the real reasons for the conflict and to get to know the society on the other side.

What is your personal motivation to do this work?

I want to change the past. I think this project can change the past. I know it sounds absurd, but I mean the past in our heads. There is a lot of media-influence and we do not have the information that we need to take another look at our memories and change the perspective. I have always wanted to contribute a little bit, to do my little share to solve the conflict. This process is very valuable to me. I want to help bring it forward and do something useful for my society.

What were main challenges in your work?

It was hard for me to record an interview, because having given one myself I knew how painful it was for me to remember.

Another challenge was meeting people, who I did not think existed anymore. I thought my society was very developed, that we left the problems behind, but then I saw that some people have not changed their mind since the beginning of the conflict. This was painful for me, to see that these problems still exist, that we have not overcome them.

What was the most rewarding?

Abkhaz facilitators told me that they played my interview during their workshops and the groups reacted very positively. That it was well received. That was the biggest reward for me.

*“In Georgia and in Abkhazia,
everybody must understand
that there is NO alternative to peace.”*

Dalila Pilia, Sukhum/i, Abkhazia



What is the need in Abkhaz society for this work?

Listening to Abkhaz and Georgian interviews 25 years after the violent conflict is very interesting and rewarding. Why? Because it gives Abkhaz and Georgian people the opportunity to listen to the people who took part in these events. These are ordinary people, combatants, mothers of the fallen, scientists, children of the war, politicians, members of mixed families and others. We see who changed their view of the tragedy that happened. In Abkhazia, listeners hear with great interest how witnesses from Georgia reason about these events.

What is your personal motivation for this work?

For me personally, the project is interesting for many reasons. First I get to know many people who took part in the war. Often these are not very visible, modest, hardworking people. Nobody knows them and nobody remembers them. Second, we see it as a necessity that as many people as possible learn what really happened. This is necessary in order to avoid repeating the tragic mistake. My goal in this project is to give people the opportunity to speak out, maybe for the first time in their life, to get rid of the burden of war and memory. My third motivation is to give the young generation the opportunity to hear about what their elders lived through. They see that many people have not been crushed by grief, that they preserved their positive disposition. Only the love for peace can save the world. This is my main motivation in this project.

What is the most rewarding in your work?

The most rewarding is that we create a non-fictional history of the war, making use of real events told by real participants. My greatest reward will be when we publish all of these stories in a separate book.



*“War is always unfair.
No matter who started it,
in the end, both sides suffer.
On the Georgian side, there
is also a lot of grief and tears.”*

Zalina Gabajti, Tskhinval/i, South Ossetia

What is your personal motivation to do this work?

My personal motivation is quite identical with the need of my society. For me, it is important to be heard. The whole world thinks that Georgia was attacked by Russia, but it looked completely different from our perspective. We have asked everybody for help, but only the Russians agreed to help. It is important for me that this is heard. I think we will live more safely if this is understood.

What were the main challenges?

For our society, it is still very early to listen to episodes. People are not prepared for this. We worked only with very open-minded people. And even with them, there is a lack of trust and very little readiness for dialogue.

Tell us about a situation or incident that characterizes our work.

There was one woman, a refugee from South Ossetia. She took part in workshops in Georgia. After listening to some episodes and discussing, she remembered an incident where she had discriminated her co-workers. She was ready to reflect on her behaviour and took her share of responsibility, even though she was not a politician.

What are lessons you have learned from this work?

The people who suffered most were not those who took the decisions. The decision-makers had time to shelter their families, their property and themselves.

Also, I came to see the situation in a more differentiated way. It has become clearer to me that the Georgian soldiers were not sent by their families with the exclamation “go and kill”!

What was the most rewarding?

I have become acquainted with people whom I value very much. I knew of their existence, but now I know them personally and we are in touch. This means a lot to me. Another rewarding experience was to do the interviews. My interview partners told me very interesting stories and I have come to know people much more deeply than before.

Part Two

Theory of change: Towards peace-supporting narratives

(Andrea Zemskov-Züge)

“Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity.”

Chimamanda Adichie

In her talk “The danger of the single story” the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie points out how one-sided and stereotypical narrative representations often stand in the way of perceiving the complex situations in which individuals and societies live, while not at all reflecting their reality. This is true for stories that are told about the Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-South Ossetian conflicts in all three societies. Since at present, people in Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia are quite separate and isolated from each other, “single stories” have developed on all sides, preventing individuals from perceiving each other’s realities. Such “stories” that people tell about the conflicts are at the center of the “Berghof History Dialogue Process”. The goal of working with them is to give individuals the opportunity to listen to and reflect on the ways their own societies and people on “the other side” remember the wars.

In this second part of the manual, the theoretical base and implications of this work are outlined. Applying findings from conflict research, the first section investigates how society-members in protracted conflicts usually talk about the conflict and why these narratives are conflict-supporting. The second part is dedicated to developing a scheme of action for transforming conflict-supporting narratives. The focus here is on Georgian-Abkhaz relations due to the fact that social pressure, such as state- and secret-service monitoring of civil society activities, threatening of activists and restrictions in working environments in South Ossetia have grown considerably since 2012. Therefore the Georgian-South Ossetian component was kept “on the back burner” in this text.

Conflict-supporting narratives

The Georgian, Abkhaz and South Ossetian societies have remained in a steady state of conflict, moving between different phases of escalation since the late 1980s.² In over 25 years since the beginning of violent escalation, typical ways of speaking about the conflict have developed on both sides. Society members and media “tell the story” of the conflict; they include and exclude topics, choose particular wording, set beginning- and end-points. All these elements define how the involved societies see the conflict. Discussions about the use of the terms “civil war” or “Fatherland War”, for example, show how important these

² While discussion is ongoing whether the term „frozen conflict“ is still appropriate, no peace agreement or even an agreement on the non-use of force have been signed so far. For a recent analysis, see Fischer 2016.

terms and their meanings are for the involved societies. All publications, conversations and discussions about the war, its aftermath and consequences form the “conflict narrative”. These narratives differ quite profoundly between conflict sides. In light of the serious economic, political and social problems caused by the intractable conflict, the deformed and one-sided conflict narratives seem to be a minor problem at first sight. But this is an incorrect assessment. The Israeli researcher Daniel Bar-Tal has estimated that 70 percent of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict setting is at present shaped not by actual conflict stakes but by narratives, influencing the conflict parties’ relationship.³ A similar estimate can be made for the Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-South Ossetian conflict context. While the narratives are no actual conflict stake in and of themselves, they constantly shape all interaction between the conflict actors.

It is worthwhile to take a closer look at the topics that are usually conveyed with the conflict narratives. They help “make sense” of what is going on and convey knowledge, for example explanations why the society is involved in conflict and in need of security measures, “proof” that the opponent is inhumane, positive collective self-images, and evidence of self-victimhood, to name just a few (Bar-Tal/Oren/Nets-Zehngut 2015). During conflict escalation each party’s scope of action narrows down significantly. Furthermore, the conflict parties “regress” and show inappropriate behaviour that does not correspond to their actual state of development (Glasl 1994: 215). In protracted conflict, the parties remain in this state of mind for many years. The “narrowing of spaces” and regression also concern the narratives about the conflict. Certain aspects and topics are emphasized and take vast space, leaving no room for other content. Many aspects are completely excluded. On both sides, the capability of grasping and understanding sensitivities and interests of the other side is diminished. If the conflict endures, young generations adopt the conflict narratives already in childhood. These narratives shape their reasoning about why the conflict is going on and their perception of reality.⁴

During escalation, conflict narratives are needed for society to persist, they help explain why members of the society have to endure the hardship of war. They create a feeling of safety, motivate people to sacrifice, allow society members to distance themselves from atrocities committed and keep up a positive self-perception, justifying the goals of the conflict. At the same time, they simplify conflict history and show it only from one side. Therefore, in de-escalation, the conflict narratives become a persistent obstacle to resolving the conflict (Bar-Tal 2014: 666). On each side of the conflict divide, they inhibit society members from seeing own faults and understanding the other sides’ interests and arguments. Therefore, Bar-Tal calls them “conflict-supporting narratives”. These narratives are used by the vast majority of society members “*to describe and explain the reality of the conflict and [...] as guide to their behaviors.*” (Bar-Tal/Oren/Nets-Zehngut 2015: 224).

Even in times when conflict resolution is in the interest of the sides in conflict, the narratives still take effect, hindering confidence-building and rapprochement. This stage is now reached in the Georgian-Abkhaz relationship. On the one hand, this is good news. As described above, there is room for confidence-building measures on both sides. Unlike the actual conflict stakes, which can be only resolved if one of the parties compromises, it is utterly possible to change and adapt narratives in a way that fits the post-conflict demands of both societies. The task of reflecting on, discussing and re-shaping conflict-supportive narratives opens up a broad field of interaction and communication. Former conflict parties can meet in a safe and fruitful setting, if the exchange is facilitated in a suitable way.

On the other hand, changing narratives is a highly complex and difficult task, since they are “implanted” into each individual and all involved societies have developed mechanisms to protect and preserve conflict-supporting narratives (Bar-Tal/Oren/Nets-Zehngut 2015: 221). Actors who want to change them often meet resistance.

³ In his estimation of the tremendous influence of narratives on conflict escalation, Bar-Tal refers to Anwar Sadat. Bar-Tal, Daniel: “Why is it so difficult to resolve peacefully intractable conflicts?” lecture at the Australian National University: https://youtu.be/3s5_do97E1Y, min 2:44 – 4:06. In following footnotes cited as: Bar-Tal (youtube).

⁴ Bar-Tal (youtube), min 35:20 – 36:48. Vamik Volkan (2000) described convincingly how small children integrate their belonging to a group into their personality. It stands to reason that in creating a positive self-perception under the influence of conflict-supporting narratives, negative images of “others” can be integrated in each individual’s core identity.

Before starting to work, it is also helpful to have a closer look at how the narratives on the different sides relate to each other. When closely examined, it becomes clear that historical conceptions in Georgia and Abkhazia today are fragmented. To fortify territorial claims, Georgians and Abkhaz draw on different points of reference and phases in their respective history (Auch 2004). The same is true for the official narratives that delineate the history of the Georgian-Abkhaz war. In Georgia, the war is seen as a civil war that was imposed on Georgians and Abkhaz by the Russians. In Abkhazia, it is called “Abkhaz Fatherland War”: a heroic narrative has been created, which has much in common with the Soviet myth of the “Great Fatherland War” and is closely linked to the narrative of the foundation of the Abkhaz de-facto-state. A profound contrast must be stated when comparing the perception of the opponents. In Georgia, a “friendship narrative” is widespread, conjuring a harmonic view of the past when Georgians and Abkhaz lived together as friends. The Russians are seen as the enemy of the Georgian and Abkhaz people (Zemskov-Zuege 2015: 24f.). In Abkhaz public discourses, the Georgians commonly are remembered as nationalist “invaders”, while Russia is seen as a protecting power. When analysing the choice of events workshop participants remember spontaneously when asked to call out the historical event that comes to their minds first, it can be observed that those contents that are especially important for one side are often displaced from the memory of the other side. One example is the memory of 1989. In Abkhazia, it marks the outbreak of violence in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. In Georgia, people remember mostly the violent suppression of demonstrations for Georgian independence in Tbilisi by Soviet state forces. Both events are linked to the Georgian national movement gaining power, but they reflect different effects of this process. Each side remembers events that are relevant to the own group in a “zipper-shaped” war memory (Zemskov-Zuege 2012: 168f.). The exclusiveness of these narratives is aggravated by the fact that the narratives mainly revolve around themselves, since the intellectual exchange across the line of conflict is limited. By re-telling and repeating these one-sided narratives, society members confirm each other in the righteousness of their views. At the same time, to understand the conflict, both perspectives on events are equally important.

From conflict-supporting to peace-supporting narratives

The zipper-shaped memories seriously affect cross-conflict-line exchange about conflict history. There is a risk of increasing alienation between the dialogue participants. Direct and unprepared contact easily leads to shock and further rejection of the other narrative. For both sides, the other version seems too hard to accept and it is difficult to understand how the other side even arrives at their view of the conflict and the conclusions drawn from this view. If such encounters are not well prepared and facilitated, they can lead to a mere exchange of stereotypes and general views on the conflict. Instead of deepening understanding, the parties come away more convinced of their own concepts. As Rafi Nets-Zehngut and Daniel Bar-Tal point out (2014: 85):

“[...] transformation of the collective memory is closely associated with conflict resolution and reconciliation, while also being influenced by them. Such transformation is thorny, because it often requires a ‘looking into a mirror’ which can lead to recognition of having performed negative deeds in a way that impinges upon ones self-image.”

Such a change of mind cannot be achieved at once, while the parties are already in the room together. It must be reached gradually, by first working with the conflict parties separately. Therefore, the main focus of the Berghof History Dialogue Process lies not in the encounter with the other side. The most important work is done separately on each side of the conflict divide, where participants listen to and discuss voices from their own *and* from the other societies. This is the main and most important function of the listening workshops.

One vital task in working on conflict-supporting narratives is to successively widen the perception of individuals in a way that gradually comes to integrate contents which are displaced from own conflict narratives but play an important role for the other side. Nothing is won if each party suddenly fully adopts the other sides' conflict-supporting narratives. The skill is for each conflict side to analyze and ponder, to challenge the own and other sides' narratives and step by step to enrich and complement contents of the own side's conflict narrative with aspects and elements from the other side. The narratives must widen and gradually become more pluralistic. The parties should take special care to reflect on aspects that are perceived as overbearing or insulting by the other side.

The Berghof History Dialogue Process has developed several techniques and principles that help create an open atmosphere and turn a setting where conflict-supporting narratives compete into a setting where dialogue is possible, with participants developing and referring to peace-supporting narratives:

Focus on specific events and individual circumstances. A distinctive feature of our approach is the focus on individual experiences. To analyze individual narratives rather than collective, generalizing ones sets a focus on the impact that the conflict had on the individual. In order to understand political positions, it helps to know which experiences form the basis of these convictions. For dialogue participants it is much easier to grasp individual experiences and their immediate impact and meaning for a person rather than to evaluate and classify political concepts and their impact on society. It is easier to develop empathy with one person than with a society or state. The main topics of the Berghof History Dialogue Process are individual memories and subjective perceptions, together with the way people frame them in their interviews.

Strong local component. As has been pointed out, the main focus of the work is mono-communal. People come together in their communities and discuss interview episodes with people from their own and the other side(s). Local discussions of "OWN" narratives are helpful in fostering critical self-reflection. It is the facilitators' task to enhance such effects during the discussions. Discussions of "OTHERS" episodes help create understanding and empathy. To overcome the post-conflict deadlock, physical and ideological spaces must actively be created where new narratives are developed and negotiated. The Berghof Biographical Salon in Sukhum/i is such a space. Missing contents must be (re-) discovered in own narratives on all sides of the conflict divide. Other sides' contents must be recognized and if possible re-integrated. In order to understand them better, these contents must be discussed and questioned.

Room for "negative" feelings, such as anger and disappointment, must be created. Only accepting these feelings can open the space to perceive also positive memories. In order to talk about history and memory between former conflict parties, it is not enough to just address "positive" and pleasant sides of their common past. There is an actual value in sharing, listening to and discussing painful and unpleasant memory content from all conflict sides. For the conflict parties, this widens their understanding about what happened during escalation. They have the opportunity to understand what this experience means to the other side. By perceiving and addressing own "unpleasant" feelings such as sadness, regret, anger, etc. the view on the conflict is widened. In facilitating such discussion, the task is to create a balance between pleasant and painful contents.

Intergenerational approach. It is very helpful for different generations to be in the room when one aims to fruitfully discuss conflict-supporting narratives. Older participants often have witnessed escalation and war. At the same time, they have lived with the other conflict party before escalation and sometimes have a more balanced view of what happened. Younger participants can ask critical questions and challenge older people's narratives, asking questions and presenting their own views. Being challenged by the younger generation is a strong incentive for war witnesses to question own beliefs.

Analysis is central. Events and experiences that are important to the “other side” but displaced from own, conflict-supporting narratives are discussed in the workshops. It is a central goal that the participants learn more about their own and the other conflict narrative, their construction principles and central contents, and that they develop a sense of how the events are assessed. It is important that the main question is never “Did that happen?” Instead we ask: “Why does the respondent tell this story?” “How is the story told?” “What does this event mean to the respondent?” “What do such stories mean for society?”. Participants should become aware that there are “blank spots” in their own narratives, as well as in the “other sides” narrative. It is a goal of the process that they name these “blank spots”, saying for example: “In our society, we do not talk about...” or “we mostly talk about the victory when speaking about the war”. In the workshops, any exercise is desirable that deepens perceptions or makes participants reflect on the meaning and construction of the different narratives.

In order to take the painful look in the mirror and reflect on their own conflict history, conflict parties need to provide each other with encouragement and strong incentives. It must become clear that the pain of changing one’s own self-perception in an unfavourable way is rewarded with acknowledgement by representatives of the other side, that a sincere and open-minded approach to one’s own history is met in kind by representatives of the other side. To reach this effect the parties do not have to be in one room together. Support and acknowledgement can be conveyed in interview episodes. Knowing that there are people on the “other side” who tell their stories, and listen to our stories while we listen to theirs, was helpful in our process and motivated workshop participants.

The task of changing conflict-supporting narratives cannot be left to unprepared media or academic institutions with their own agenda and professional necessities. It is best taken on by civil society actors. They can raise awareness, create and influence public discussions, consciously including “missing” contents, keeping in mind societies’ needs for adequate memory on the one and a peaceful future on the other hand. In the long run, the integration of difficult and unpleasant aspects of one’s own conflict history will also help overcome thresholds in political negotiations and pave the way for more effective communication between state and civil society representatives across conflict lines. The Berghof History Dialogue Process has been designed to empower and support local actors to foster such change.

Peace-supporting narratives should:

- ≡ Contain own AND other sides’ failures and wrongdoing
- ≡ Help understand and accept other sides’ grievances
- ≡ Analyze complex conflict causes
- ≡ Foster critical self-reflection
- ≡ Show complex reasons for individual choices and behaviour
- ≡ Avoid stereotypes (good and bad)

In order to prevent one-sidedness, peace-supporting narratives strive to avoid:

- ≡ Idealization of the own role (“We are only heroes/victims”) or the other side (“They are our brothers”)
- ≡ Talking *only* about “good times” (“Remember how happily we lived together”) or *only* about own grievances and others’ failures (“They are all murderers and liars”)
- ≡ Generalizing (“All Abkhaz and Ossetians are separatists”, “All Georgians are nationalists”)

Voices of the Facilitators



“People need the complete picture of the past, rather than selected ‘good’ or ‘bad’ stories about it. Well-chosen episodes reflect problems and obstacles that still exist today and challenge the mainstream understandings that societies have.”

Elene Natenadze, Tbilisi, Georgia

What is the need in Georgian society for this work?

The most recent past of Georgia is not well studied, analyzed or widely discussed. Powerful mainstream narratives form our understanding of the conflicts. We need to establish space for discussion, critical reflection and evaluation of the past in order to widen the perspectives and create positive changes within society.

It is important to discuss and reflect on various information, perspectives and perceptions that ordinary people share for forming positive peace. We need to come to conclusions, to be well-equipped with skills and knowledge for building and maintaining positive peace. I met great people who have empathy and great potential for future dialogue, who believe that it is important to listen to Abkhaz and Ossetian people.

What is your personal need for this work?

Conducting interviews and workshops, meeting people with different opinions and perspectives and reconstructing the past is like time-travel. I want to contribute to the changes society is going through towards forming positive peace.

This project has opened new perspectives. It showed me that conventional learning and already proven techniques are not the only way to teach something and to deal with important issues. This project is innovative, engaging and effective. It enables faster changes, deeper analysis and re-evaluation of the past.

What are the main challenges?

The main challenge is the scepticism of people who are afraid of talking about and discussing the past. Their main argument is that by keeping the silence, they avoid conflict escalation, but in doing so they foster maintaining frozen perceptions about the conflict. In fact, critical reflection and discussion of past events help to de-escalate, encourage empathy, trauma-healing and prevent society from repeating mistakes. People get to see the true face of the war. War ceases to be only heroism and people start asking themselves – “do I really want to be part of this?”

“We ourselves have changed, during this process, we haven’t only learned to hear, but to listen, to better understand our own and the other side.”

Rusiko Marshania, Tbilisi, Georgia



What is your personal motivation to do this work?

My personal motivation comes from my background: after the war, my Georgian husband, our kids and I had to move to Tbilisi. I had to build new relations with my relatives who stayed on the other side of the conflict divide. The war and the break-down of Georgian-Abkhaz relations changed them. They experienced a lot during this time and started to see things differently. Instinctively, I started to listen to their stories, at the same time also telling them mine. And step by step, we started understanding, developed empathy and sympathy for each other and felt relief. Relief, because you understand a relative in the first place as a human being, whose feelings and emotions are close to you and understandable. For me, this was a new

level of family relations, and most likely this is the reason why the Berghof History Dialogue Process has become an important, meaningful stage in my life. I saw that what I had done in my family, this process does on the level of the Georgian and Abkhaz societies.

I have never before seen such a method of working with conflict. In my opinion, it's unique, because the chosen interview episodes are very actual and sensitive. They stimulate the listener to discuss. They motivate the listener to analyze the interview itself, and like a chain-reaction they evoke own memories. They work like a locomotive, pulling forward a whole train of our own memories. As a result of our joint work, each side could feel the pain of the other side.

Tell us about a situation or incident that characterizes our work.

There was a remarkable incident with a student from Batumi University who said after listening to an episode with an Abkhaz ex-combatant: "Now I understand our mistake: we want to bring back our territory, but we need to win back the hearts of these people."

This is what we try to do:

Talk, to prevent history from repeating itself."

Tamila Gvazhava, Sukhum/i, Abkhazia



What is your personal motivation to do this work?

I wanted to hear my own people's voices and I heard things I never knew before. It helped me to understand how my nation feels now. Also, to think about what we can do, to build new contacts and take a step forward to warmer relations. First I felt nervous about meeting Georgians. I was afraid they would hate me, because I live on the land they perceive as theirs. It made me uncomfortable. Now I know that not all Georgians think like that. There are people who are willing to listen to us, to listen to our truth.

What were main challenges in this work?

It was difficult to stay objective during the discussions in the workshops. It is hard to keep your mouth shut and try to understand this person. This is emotionally difficult for a facilitator. Also, when participants argue it is not always easy to return them to the aim of the project. Many people are very much influenced by the media. They have one-sided views and it is hard for them to see the other side, especially when they have lost relatives in the war. But then some participants come back, two or three times, and they start to change their minds. And you see how they try to take a step forward – that's a victory!

What are the lessons you have learned from this work?

In any difficult situation, you can find a way. Good communication decides everything and if you communicate, a mutual connection will develop. It is important to hear out every opinion, even if you don't understand at first. You look deep into people's souls and you see the roots of the problem. If you want to understand somebody, you must understand yourself first.

We need to go on working in our societies. Together with the Georgian team we can reach a new level of communication, when all of us look at ourselves with some distance and become more neutral. Then we will become really excellent facilitators.

Part Three

Facilitating listening workshops

(Andrea Zemskov-Züge)

The Berghof History Dialogue Process was designed to inspire critical reflection on conflict-supporting narratives. This reflection mainly takes place in listening workshops. In this third part of our manual, facilitation techniques and some reflections on the role of a facilitator will be presented. It will be explained how workshops should be prepared and which measures can be taken, if disturbances occur.

First of all, it is important to keep in mind that the task in these workshops is not to teach people something new, but to motivate them to think about knowledge and experiences they already have and knowledge and experiences that people on the other side of the conflict divide have. The goal is not to change people's views, so that they enter the room with one opinion and leave it with another opinion. Instead, the participants' perspectives should be widened. By creating a trustful and creative setting, everybody should be inspired to share, to listen and to think, so that such new, widened narratives can emerge from a common effort. In calling the events workshops, and not trainings, we wanted to evoke the vision of a space where something new is created. The people who conduct the workshops are not trainers, teachers or, even worse, "propagandists" – they are facilitators.⁵ During each workshop, there are many different opinions and perspectives in the room. The task of the facilitator is to make them heard and to encourage people to ponder and question their own and other sides' narratives. The facilitation techniques we use are based on the principles of nonviolent communication (Rosenberg 2003).

We did not provide our facilitators with a ready-made method. Rather, by listening and discussing the interviews, collecting ideas and sharing impressions, exercises were developed, exchanged and experimented with. This part of the manual is an aggregation of these experiences. The first section discusses the facilitator-role. The second looks at how a workshop should be prepared. Next, a model workshop outline is presented. The fourth section explains how to work with interview episodes. And in a last section, possible problems that can occur during the workshops and some solutions will be discussed.

How to be a facilitator?

The facilitator's role is not defined by content knowledge. He or she does not need to convey a certain amount of information. Instead, a good facilitator should open the space for the participants' knowledge and experience to be heard and discussed. To fulfil this role, facilitators need skills and personality. The atmosphere in the room must be comfortable and the group should feel safe. It is the facilitator's task to provide a constructive atmosphere and to guard the ground rules. He or she must be trustworthy and have some authority: people must know that they are taken seriously, that they can say openly what they think, even if their opinions differ from the mainstream in the group. To create such an open atmosphere, a facilitator needs to ensure that nobody will be shamed, laughed at or discriminated against for their opinion. Facilitators cannot tolerate violent communication like interrupting or excessive monologues.

⁵ For a useful overview of dialogue facilitation techniques, see Ropers 2017. For free download: <http://www.berghof-foundation.org/de/publikationen/publikation/Basics%20of%20Dialogue%20Facilitation/>.

It depends on the personal style and temper of the facilitators how they ensure that these basic rules of communication are upheld, but there is no way around doing it.

To gain authority and credibility, it is helpful to give the group some orientation and information about one's own persona. In the personal introduction, the facilitator must make clear where his or her interest in the topic comes from, in which framework the workshop is conducted and which role he or she fulfils in the process.

To facilitate a listening workshop, the facilitator needs to have an interview episode ready that is suitable for the group. She or he also needs to have an idea in which direction the discussion should go, and, for a half-day or one-day workshop, have prepared an exercise for a second session. Good facilitators develop their sense of direction in a discussion and with some experience they become apt in steering a discussion by asking questions rather than making statements.

Paraphrasing – a central facilitation technique

For an inexperienced audience it is not so easy to keep track of all the thoughts expressed in a discussion. Therefore, one main task of the facilitator is to repeatedly summarize and paraphrase the thoughts and arguments brought forward. When topics are emotionally loaded, it can be helpful if the facilitator names the emotions he or she perceives. It is an art to paraphrase thoughts and emotions, without evaluating them or putting them into a hierarchy (Rosenberg 2003: 108ff.). When it is done successfully, the climate of the discussion opens up and people feel encouraged to share more of their thoughts and feelings.

As a facilitator, you do not decide who is “right” and who is “wrong”. Your task is to “mirror” what you observe and hear, and to give your expression back to the group. You can say: “When listening to your discussion, I hear ... on the other hand ... was expressed”. You should not praise or scold individuals for their contributions. Yet sometimes it is helpful to show people that their contribution was heard, especially when they act in an insecure manner. For example: “I hear different opinions here. While X says ‘this would have been impossible’, Y holds the view that such things happened during the war”. Also, it can be helpful to acknowledge the emotions of a speaker. “When I hear X talk about ..., I can hear deep regret/affection/anger, etc.” Paraphrasing also helps to prevent misunderstandings. For example, if you say: “In X’s description I hear a lot of anger”, X may say: “No, not so much anger, it’s more disappointment.”

Last but not least, a facilitator needs to maintain multi-partiality. Since the task during the discussion is to bring to light a broad spectrum of topics, views, opinions and emotions that are linked to the conflict-supporting narratives, the facilitator must be neutral and cannot push her or his own convictions at the expense of others’ views. Instead, a good facilitator must strive to understand deeply the opinions and feelings that are communicated by the group. Also, he or she should make sure that the group reaches a deeper understanding of why a participant holds a certain view, or what an experience means to the person who is speaking. The facilitator’s task is to keep track of and to mirror equally all the opinions in the room.

Most skills a facilitator needs can be trained and developed according to one’s own personality. There is no recipe of strict rules to follow. Still, there is some advice that has proven helpful:

Facilitators' Advice

Advice no 1

“Own” the room, be present: You are the right person for this and you are “here” and “now”

It is very important to give the group your full attention while you are facilitating. You need to monitor the topics and make sure that everybody stays focused. It is impossible to check your mails, answer your phone, post something on facebook, do your manicure, knit socks or read a novel while you are facilitating. Please switch off your phone, stay in the room with your body and mind and concentrate on your group. Once you have done this, you earn people's full attention. You are the facilitator – the stage is yours!

Advice no 2

One good question is better than 100 answers

Of course, once you are the facilitator of a listening workshop and have carefully prepared your episode, you have a whole lot of very interesting, innovative and mind-blowing thoughts that you are eager to share with the group. But please bear in mind that you are not a teacher. Do not lecture your participants! You don't want people to learn what you think, you want them to come up with own thoughts rather than repeating yours. Try to develop good questions that lead into the direction of the thoughts you have in mind and form working groups for the participants to discuss them. It is worthwhile to test the questions with your co-facilitator before the workshop and to write them down, so that you formulate them exactly the way you need them.

Advice no 3

Decide before the workshops which topics should be discussed by this group and why

Many episodes contain a whole range of topics which can be discussed. There is therefore a risk of talking about everything while not going deeper into anything particular. Such discussions can be disappointing. It is important to imagine before the workshop which topics will be evoked by the episode. The facilitator should have a direction in mind in which the discussion should go. Please be careful not to let the discussion slip in the direction of the respondent's persona or abstract politics. We are working with perceptions and experiences, these are the main fields of discussion and you should ask questions that point in that direction.

Advice no 4

Be creative: come up with “crazy” playful ideas to make the participants think about your topics

As a facilitator, your knowledge of your region and target group is very important. You know the narratives, the interests, problems and capabilities of your group best. Therefore you are the one who develops the method. You can also use methods you know from other contexts, but keep your goals in mind. Which are the topics you see in this episode? And how can you make sure the group thinks about the questions raised or the contents conveyed in the episode in a deep way? In our experience, working with a transcript deepens the level of analysis.

The topics we deal with are mostly sad and sometimes not easy to discuss. This does not mean that an exercise cannot be fun or relaxing. On the opposite: after a difficult discussion, a fun game can help the participants to get rid of negative energies they have accumulated.

Advice no 5

Be neutral: reflect and summarize all positions that are in the room

Of course, it is not always easy to leave aside own views and convictions. But these should not interfere with your facilitation. Keep in mind that as a facilitator you are in a powerful position. It is your responsibility to make fair use of the power you have. Make sure that speaking time and frequency of contributions are distributed evenly. Also, when you summarize and paraphrase the contributions, you are called upon to subsume all aspects and emotions that have been brought up, not only those you liked best or those you agree with.

Advice no 6

Nobody likes to be manipulated. Ask open and neutral questions

Often we manipulate, not even noticing it ourselves. This happens easily when we ask questions in a way that already includes an assessment or an evaluation. It is one thing to ask questions leading in the direction of a topic or field of reflection. But it is a completely different thing to ask a question that insinuates or anticipates an opinion or view. No matter if it is a positive or negative evaluation, it will always influence the answer. Working with conflict-supporting narratives, we deal with a broad range of evaluations and implications. Therefore it is extremely important that we try to speak as neutrally as possible. Be careful also not to adopt the evaluations in the episode. This will also help the participants become aware of evaluation and assessments in their own comments and questions. Ask yourself, where do I convey conflict-supporting narratives? And try to speak neutrally.

Advice no 7

Talk only when you are listened to

It is important to value your own words. They are something precious you have to give. You do not want to waste them when nobody is listening. This is a matter of respecting yourself and your group. If it is difficult to catch the group's attention you must ask yourself whether there is anything wrong with the topic or whether there is another reason for the lack of attention: Hunger? Exhaustion? Feelings that have not been expressed? It is better to ask the group what's wrong than to go on shouting against the high noise-level.

Advice no 8

Keep your opinion to yourself, better share what you hear

The role of the facilitator is to be neutral, so that the participants' views, ideas, feelings and opinions can find space to develop. If you state your own convictions, it becomes more difficult for the participants to say what they think, especially when they hold a different opinion. Remember, your task is to open the space for many different views and perspectives to be pondered and discussed. You are in a position of power and participants might feel inclined to agree with you, because you are in a leading role. Therefore, it is very important to keep your own views to yourself. Your task is to share what you hear and observe.

If there is really no way around stating a view you have, then do it at the end of the workshop, not in the beginning and while you are saying it, leave the role of the facilitator aside and make clear that this is your personal opinion.

How to prepare a workshop

1. Know your group

Each workshop is planned separately. Before you start, you have to answer the following questions having in mind the group you work with:

- ≡ Which is the best working time for the participants (weekends, afternoon, etc.)?
- ≡ Which topics are interesting for these people?
- ≡ What do they know already? What should they learn?
- ≡ Do they have a long or short attention span?
- ≡ What is their occupation?

The more you know about the group, the better you can adjust the programme to their interest. Knowing the group also helps to foresee in which direction a discussion might head and help you bring up topics that are different from what this group would usually discuss. Keep in mind that the task of the discussion is to leave the beaten track of conflict-supporting narratives and offer the group something new and different.

2. Plan time and cooperation with your co-facilitator

Introduction, exercises, project introduction, any part of your workshop programme needs time. In order to create a feasible programme, it is best to write down how much time which part should take. While you conduct the workshop, stick to your timetable as closely as possible. If you have a co-facilitator, it helps to divide up and share the tasks BEFORE the workshop. Agree who is responsible for which part. You can take turns: one person is facilitating, the other checking the time, taking notes, taking care of any needed material, writing on flipcharts or whatever side-task is needed. During the next workshop unit, roles are changed.

3. Carefully choose and mix methods

If you prepare a full-day workshop, you want to make sure that there are several units with different working style. To keep your group interested, it helps to mix methods: After a listening session or input, plan a break, a game or a working-group session. It is easier for the group to follow and keep concentrated, if there are several short units rather than one long one.

If you develop exercises for working groups, start with carefully reading the episode you will be working with. What are the main topics, how are they addressed? Why are they interesting for you? Why are they interesting for the group? What could be an exercise that helps the group to discover the topics by themselves?

Carefully formulate the instructions and write them down on a flipchart. Plan the time realistically and keep in mind that “less is more”.

4. Prepare material and workshop venue

Take a look at the workshop venue beforehand. It is desirable to have natural light and windows that can be opened for fresh air. If you plan an exercise with working groups, see if there is space for the groups to spread out across the building.

To create an open and equalizing atmosphere, the preferred seating arrangement is a circle of chairs, without tables. The facilitators sit in the circle, together with the group.

To stimulate self-regulating discussion, we recommend using a small soft ball. It is helpful to explain to the group in the beginning that the person who holds the ball is speaking. Make it clear that the purpose of the ball is for group members to pay attention to each other and share responsibility.

While you plan the exercises, make a checklist of material you need, for example: flipchart, markers, paper, moderation cards, ball, participants list, episode printouts, etc.

Model workshop outline

Depending on the target group, facilitator capacities and workshop goals, listening workshops can be conducted as:

- ≡ One-day-workshops (6-7 hours), with one or two episodes played and a deeper analysis part, including two coffee breaks and one lunch break
- ≡ Half-day workshops (3-4 hours), with one episode played and a deeper analysis part, including one coffee break
- ≡ Listening sessions (1,5-2,5 hours), one episode played and discussed

1	Introduction	Project introduction, facilitator and participant introduction	30-45 min	Listening session (1,5-2,5 hours)	Half-day workshop (3-4 hours)	One-day workshop (6-7 hours; Part 2 and 3 are repeated after the lunch break)
2	Listening and Feedback Part	Facilitator asks neutral feedback questions, participants share their thoughts and impressions, facilitator collects, summarizes and reflects points	1-1,5 hours			
3	Deep Analysis	Prepared exercise, maybe in working groups, with transcripts, etc.	30 min-1 hour			
4	Sharing Results, Final Feedback	The group comes together, working groups present results: participants share their insights	30-45 min			

Working with episodes

The Berghof History Dialogue Process has been designed purposefully to focus on individual memories. In the discussion, this creates space, because it allows the discussants to refer to the interview's subjective character. We listen to the respondent's attitude, trying to understand where the attitude of this specific person comes from. This is often easier to accept than a history book text or a newspaper article, claiming general validity. In offering a personal, individual experience, the interview invites the listener to empathize as a person, avoiding the "deadlock" of general political positioning.

Also, the focus on individuals offers an opportunity to learn more about practical implications that the conflict had on the other side and about circumstances that motivated people to take action. Hearing other sides' perceptions of a specific situation helps to develop a deeper understanding and fosters empathy. Reflecting on the construction of the own side's narratives fosters critical self-reflection.

Usually, the narrative interviews are between 30 minutes and 4 hours long. For the use in workshops, a big archive of rich interview-episodes has been created by our team, most of them 5-15 minutes long. Very often, these narrations contain a specific situation during which a person experienced something and people remember themselves in an active role. Often, such "stories" are followed by an evaluation of the situation, providing the speaker's insight and reflection on what happened. Such a combination of experience and evaluation is, as a rule, quite a fruitful basis for discussion.

The layers of an interview-episode

Each interview and also each episode contain different types of information about the past. We call these the "layers" of an episode.⁶ The distinction of layers can help create "space" in the discussion. To identify and define these layers broadens the spectrum of possible topics that can be discussed. It helps to find

⁶ These layers have been described in Grasse/Jirous 2008, 114f.

common ground between conflicting parties in a discussion. If they do not agree on the representation of a certain historical event, they can still have similar views on the relevance of the experience linked to this event or about the construction of the narrative. The facilitator helps a group to identify and distinguish these layers and address them in a differentiated manner. The layers are:

Event: A proceeding or time-span a person has witnessed, and historical facts, linked to this event.

Perception: The way the individual respondent perceived (saw, smelled, felt, etc.) what was going on around them at the time of the event.

Memory: The way facts and perceptions are imprinted in the mind and reconstructed at a given point in time. Memory reflects equally past and present since it changes over time.

Experience: Combines perception, reconstruction and conclusions drawn from several events, witnessed by a respondent.

Narration: The way a story is told, depending on audience, society, discourses, education, political views of the respondent, etc.

During the discussion, the facilitator can directly address these layers. For example: “So we have heard that the interviewee witnessed event X. How did he/she perceive what was going on?” Or “Many of you have said that this experience was very difficult for the speaker. Now, what do you think about the way she/he tells the story?”

Therefore in preparing the workshop, while picking the episode it helps to have in mind the different layers. With time, facilitators become more experienced in identifying and addressing episode layers.

How to pick a suitable episode?

During workshop preparation, the facilitators choose one or two episodes that are especially interesting for the group they want to work with. In general, the episode should have two characteristics, a **linking element** and a **surprise element**.

For example, in working with schoolchildren it is interesting to pick an episode in which the respondent remembers the time when he or she was the same age as the pupils. If there are ex-combatants in the room, it might be interesting to pick an episode of an ex-combatant. In short, it helps if the workshop group can relate to some feature or quality of the interviewee: this is the “linking element”.

At the same time, there should be a “surprise element” in the episode. This feature evokes curiosity in the listener, it makes sure that the participants stay interested and focused. Also, this is often the element that breaks or challenges the conflict-supporting narratives. In the case of the schoolchildren, this could be that the speaker is a person who now lives on the other side of the conflict divide but studied in the same school or region as they do now. In the ex-combatants case, it could be that some views of the ex-combatant from the other side do not match the world view often associated with the “enemy”, or that he describes an aspect little known to representatives of the opponent side.

There can be no general assessment of linking and surprise elements an episode may contain, because they are different for each specific group. In general, though, facilitators should look for “broken” episodes containing different perspectives on one situation in order to challenge simplified and one-sided conflict-supporting narratives.

Asking neutral questions

At the heart of the listening workshop, there is the work with the episode. As we have outlined, it is crucial that the facilitator strives to create a neutral space, so that diverse opinions, perspectives and views can resonate. Asking good questions is a key to this endeavour. The question in an interview-listening workshop is like a raindrop, fracturing the light so that all colours contained become visible. The colours

of the rainbow are, in this picture, the different perspectives and views of the participants.

Two general remarks:

- ≡ Ask only ONE question at a time; if you ask several, the group becomes confused.
- ≡ Silence is good; be patient and do not rush to the next question or activity. Give people time to think and feel.

After listening to an episode, the group usually is silent. Hearing the voice of a person who remembers difficult times creates an emotional moment. It is crucial that during the first feedback round an open question is asked. At the same time, the facilitator motivates the group to stay with the episode rather than commenting on the person or the conflict in general.

Feedback

The first feedback question is therefore:

“What have you heard?”

It allows for all aspects of the episode to be reflected. The participants are free to refer to different layers of the episode. Answers could be “I have heard sadness”, “I have heard that the person witnessed event X”, etc. The attention of the group should be focused on the interview and its content, not on the person or the historical event. In the answers to this question, various attitudes and perspectives in the room become visible. It is important that the participants should not jump to conclusions or interpretations. In this first step, they mirror what they have heard in the interview and let the different aspects of the episode resonate. The facilitator should actively stop general evaluations or contributions that make assessments of the speaker or historical facts.

When the different aspects of the episode have been addressed, the feedback round turns to the listener’s emotions. The second feedback question is:

“What do you feel when you hear this?”

It is an important task for listeners to identify and name their own emotions. Especially in conflict situations, where many of the participants are personally affected, interviews can trigger various emotions. Also, the conflict-supporting narratives are designed to trigger emotions. Often, it is not an easy task to name them. It is worth the effort nonetheless, because these emotions open the possibility to keep working with them at a later stage. It is also a suitable moment to bring to the participants’ attention that it is one thing to perceive an emotion, and a completely different thing to act out the emotion. Emotions that are vented, perceived, heard and shared will not so quickly be acted on in the future. The facilitator should consequently stick to this question, and if people start speaking about other topics, return them to it. It can be quite enlightening to encourage the group to reflect on the relationship between the speaker’s and the listener’s emotion. In some cases, they are similar, in other cases completely different.

The general rule for feedback is: People speak for themselves and do not yet enter into discussion, referring to each other. The facilitator should not interfere with his or her own opinion during feedback.

Deep Analysis

After feedback, a new working phase begins. Many topics and emotions have been named during feedback and are now “on the table”. It is the facilitator’s task to pick some of them and go into deeper analysis. Usually, the facilitator has prepared an exercise or some discussion question, referring to important topics

of the episode, which now can be put to the group. If the workshop is a listening session (short format), deep analysis can be conducted with the help of analytical questions the facilitator has formulated beforehand and now introduces to the discussion with the whole group. If the workshop is conducted as a longer format, we recommend changing the working setting and do an exercise which participants work on in small groups or individually. This will help to keep the participants focused.

Working groups

Small groups can be helpful to discuss a topic thoroughly and do analytical work. There are different ways to compose the groups, according to the requirements of the exercise.

- ≡ **Random Groups:** it does not matter who is in the group, the participants should get to know each other better.

Composition Methods:

Count: each participant calls a number in seating order around the circle. Then groups are formed, 1 with 1, 2 with 2, etc. If you need four groups, then let the participants count up to four.

Fruit Salad: Chooses as many fruit names as you need groups and assign each participant a fruit. To change the seating order, mix the group by playing “fruit salad”. One participant stands in the middle of the circle. His/her chair is removed. She/he calls a fruit name, for example “apple” and all apples swop places meanwhile the “seat less” person in the middle tries to take a seat. If he/she calls “fruit salad”, all ”fruits” have to swop their seats. After the game, each type of fruit forms a group.

Puzzle: the facilitator cuts postcards in puzzles. Each participant draws one piece from a bag, then participants must find the missing parts. Each postcard forms a group.

Sweets: before the session, the facilitator sticks coloured chocolates under each chair, the participants form groups according to the colour of their chocolate.

- ≡ **Chosen Groups:** The facilitator picks participants in order to discuss sensitive topics. For example, “talkers” are combined with “talkers”, people from different backgrounds or with different views are in one group, experiences are mixed on purpose.

Composition Method: write each name on a little piece of paper, form groups and change around until the composition fits the purpose.

A possible exercise can be to ask the participants to share personal stories in small groups. The topic of the stories that are told in the group should be related to a central topic of the episode that was heard before. The goal is to enhance empathy with the respondent and to empower the participants by drawing their attention to their own experience.

In formulating the exercise, the facilitator should be careful to address empowering experiences rather than perpetuating feelings of helplessness or regret. For example: if the respondent describes an experience of changing his or her mind, the participants can be asked to remember a situation where they changed their mind and tell each other about this experience.

To enhance storytelling in small groups, the facilitator should:

- ≡ Ask an open question: “Please tell each other about a situation when you experienced ...”
- ≡ Form groups of 3-5 people
- ≡ Plan with 10 min per person
- ≡ Give the small groups RULES, so the participants focus on communicating in a constructive and nonviolent manner. Write the rules on a flipchart.

Rules for storytelling in small groups:⁷

- ≡ The participants share a situation they have experienced themselves.
- ≡ Participants decide individually for themselves, and are responsible for what they want to share with the group.
- ≡ Everybody has the same amount of time to share their experience, each person takes responsibility for not exceeding the timeframe.
- ≡ Participants do not interrupt each other.
- ≡ Participants listen attentively to each other.
- ≡ Participants do not evaluate each other's experience.
- ≡ Participants do not give each other advice.
- ≡ After a person has finished their account, questions can be asked.

Problems and solutions

The endeavour of transforming conflict-supporting narratives is complex and needs time. Since we do not work with a fixed teaching curriculum, all sorts of minor or major disturbances can occur. It is important to perceive them as constructive rather than destructive. The facilitator can and should avoid problems caused by insufficient preparation: it is important to be on time, bring all materials, check the computer and speaker beforehand, prepare an episode and check the venue before inviting participants, etc. But there are disturbances that cannot, and should not be avoided, because they reveal to us information about the group or the topic. In fact, resistance can be a good sign. Remember that the narratives you are working on have a central function in the societies affected by the conflict. Letting them go or transforming them will always cause resistance.

Therefore: Disturbances have priority!

If you feel, that something is going not so well, you should first analyze the situation with your co-facilitator. When did the disturbance start? Are there “troublemakers” and if yes, what do they want to tell you? Did they have the opportunity to speak openly?

It is important to know that the “rainbow” of attitudes and opinions of your workshop participants is a mirror of society. And in each society there are opinion leaders who guard and defend traditional views and narratives. In a conflict society these will include conflict-supporting narratives. When these are touched and challenged, opinion leaders of the mainstream will resist. It is also possible that these people defend themselves and their own role as conflict actors in the past. Their protest does not necessarily mean that other arguments leave them untouched.

If there is one or more “troublemakers” in your group:

- ≡ Don't spend too much time “arguing”. Trust the group they will come back to it.
- ≡ Don't stigmatize “troublemakers”, their view is also important.
- ≡ Give “troublemakers” acknowledgement and a task.

In general, to create a disciplined and constructive working atmosphere, the following measures are helpful:

- ≡ Let the group give itself rules: If you have an unruly group, or you know that you have a hard time keeping discipline, you can ask the group in the beginning to name rules that will help them to feel safe and work productively. Each person writes one or two rules on a card. The facilitator collects the cards and clusters them on the flipchart or board. Then the group agrees on following the rules. If there are problems later on, the facilitator can direct the group's attention back to their own rules.

7 The rules are based on Grasse/Jirous 2008: pp.58f.

- ≡ Give participants equal space and time: Encourage the passive to share their opinions and “slow down” very dominant participants.
- ≡ Value discipline: Don’t let everybody talk at the same time. Use a ball.

Facilitating listening workshops is a challenging but at the same time very interesting and inspiring endeavour. Do not let yourself be deterred by your own mistakes. If you reflect on your practice, there is a lot to learn from your participants.

Voices of the facilitators



*“We always accept peoples’ opinions
and do not try to change them.
But at the same time, we accentuate
how important it is to listen and to talk.”*

Mramza Djikirba, Sukhum/i, Abkhazia

What was your role in this process?

I started to participate in the very beginning. In 2012, I started recording interviews, then I became a facilitator and conducted workshops. Also, I moderated evening events in the biographical salon.

What is the need in Abkhaz society for this work?

The most important need is that people who have witnessed the war have the opportunity to speak out and share their experience. During the interview, the respondent frees him- or herself and others hear about their fate. Another need is to collect and preserve the information about our war. Workshops are also necessary because they give people the opportunity to reflect and think about their experience and discuss what needs to be done to prevent a new war.

Not long ago, most people didn’t want to hear or say anything. But to build a Chinese wall, that’s no way out. If you are always silent, then you will never know if you could be heard. It is important to talk. Another thing that’s important in this process is the exchange between facilitators of all sides. People who conduct workshops need to listen to each other and exchange. An important principle of our work is openness. We never hide anything, we speak about everything. In the Caucasus, the personality is important. In the beginning, only people we knew came to the workshops. Then, they started bringing their friends and step by step, groups were formed.

Tell us about a situation that characterizes our work.

When Rusiko came, she lives in Georgia, she and I conducted a workshop together. People listened to her very carefully and the group was ready to meet her.

During another workshop one woman, a nurse who had seen terrible things in the war, got up and left. Afterwards we conducted an interview with her and she started coming to the workshops. She softened a lot and started perceiving our work calmly.

*“To be heard is the first step
to transforming anger and aggression.”*

Linda Argun, Sukhum/i, Abkhazia



What is your personal motivation to do this work?

As a child, I have experienced the horror of war. When I was little, I sat in the basement, listening to the shelling and bombs of Georgian artillery. It was difficult for me to speak about the war. Even now it's not easy. But when I joined this project, I went through several steps of personal development: first I started speaking about my emotions, feelings and mortification. Then I developed an interest to listen to the other side. After that, my stereotype was broken that all Georgians think about the war in the same way. I became a facilitator – in distancing myself from my personal opinions, I started studying various opinions and contributed to people's understanding of each other.

The method of using narrative interviews is extremely productive. Also, because it's so innovative, younger and older participants are equally interested in this work. I played various interviews, but most of all people were interested in hearing Georgian voices. Feedback and discussions were different every time. But on the whole I have to say that most participants of our big process were very thankful and emphasized how important this work is.

What is your vision of the future?

I want to believe that we and our future generation will study only wars that took place in the past. Our children will know the word war only from literature.



*“I often say that I take the role of an Abkhaz or Ossetian
when talking to the Georgian public. I need to do this,
because I understood what a big difference there is
between what Abkhaz and Ossetians say, and the
image Georgian society has of them.”*

Nugzar Kokhreidze, Kutaisi, Georgia

What is your personal motivation to do this work?

In 2011, I started taking part in Berghof events. I cannot count how many meetings and workshops I have attended and how many I have conducted myself. Each event is different and new. For me, these meetings have opened the opportunity to see the conflict sides not only with my own interest in mind, but to feel, realize and understand what the other conflict side wants to get across. This is not easy; it's a major fight inside oneself: With your stereotypes, falsified information, the wish to prove that your own position is correct, with your own pride and your self-perception as a victim – everything mixed together. I think, for all of us, it is a difficult process of reflection.

Tell us about a situation or incident that characterizes our work.

Once I conducted a workshop for young people. We listened to interviews with an Abkhaz and a Georgian woman. The participants had the task of identifying the most important sequences. They worked hard and prepared good visual material and presented it brilliantly, but all the time, something was missing. I asked them: what do you think, which sequences would Abkhaz and Ossetian listeners pick from the episode if they were participating in the workshop? The answer was that likely they would have emphasized the war, victims and fighting. I asked then why is nothing of this in your presentations? They answered that on the one hand, they understand that something is missing, but at the same time, it was difficult for them to put aside the influence of their own perception. We repeated the exercise and their presentations looked completely different. They had fulfilled the aim of the workshop: to hear, realize and understand the other conflict side.

Part Four

Working Units

The following working units are examples that have been tried out in workshops in Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia. They are shared in the spirit of creative inspiration rather than as strict instructions. Other interview-episodes and other topics can be used, and different methods and didactical approaches can be tried out.

Unit 1: **Experiences of a Georgian veteran**

Interview G 059 (05:33 – 09:46):

1 ... And we went to Abkhazia. Well, in general, for about two months we fought, we mainly freed the main road
2 that links Sukhumi and Ochamchira, somewhere. In general, we dislodged two units from there, there were not
3 only Abkhaz, there also were very many North-Caucasian peoples. There were also Kalmyks, as far as I know,
4 I have not seen them. They said there were Arabs and many hired fighters, fighting for money. And, well, we
5 were practically already approaching Tkvarcheli when we got caught in an ambush one day. It was the first
6 of June and from our battalion, 12 men died on this day. Altogether we were 36, no 35, and we 12 returned.
7 All the others fell, at different times, but just this day we suffered the biggest losses. It was 12 people and the
8 Shavnabada Battalion came to our help, and of them, eight guys fell. And, well, the bodies of our fallen boys
9 we carried away from there and only three we could not carry out, and then, two-three weeks later, we went to
10 negotiations and asked for an exchange of bodies of the fallen. And just then, one guy came and says, that, ...
11 well, he had fought on that side, and takes off a watch and extends it to us and says, that “this” he says, “is the
12 watch of your fallen guy, I don’t need what’s not mine”. He gave me the watch, turned around, he was leaving
13 already and suddenly turns around and says “But all in all”, he says, “your guys did well, fighting till the end,
14 they died with a song”. And then I could barely hold back, it was hard not to cry. Because of course nobody
15 wants to show their tears to the enemy. But this impressed me so much. See, he was an enemy, after all, but he
16 was a fighter, just the same as yourself and he also fights for some ideals. And he thinks that he fights for his
17 homeland, because for him, I am, basically a stranger. Because he comes up with a simple question: “What
18 have you, Tbilisi guy, lost here? We will take care of it ourselves, somehow. Why do you come to my home?”
19 and for me, the Tbilisi guy, also questions came up: “What has some North Caucasian lost here in my place,
20 some Arab, some others swarm up to my homeland and kill my friends here. For what?” Basically, we could
21 really have come to terms by ourselves, Abkhaz and Georgians, and I think this would not have happened if
22 there was no instigation from the side. But anyway, this respect existed between us, regardless of the fact that
23 we were basically shooting each other, killing each other.

Content and possible topics:

The speaker talks about his time as a Georgian fighter in Abkhazia during the Georgian-Abkhaz war 1992-1993. He describes how, after a heavy encounter with many dead, an Abkhaz fighter approaches him and returns the watch of his fallen comrade. This incident stimulates the respondent and he reflects on the conflict and the positions of both sides.

The narration is built on a two-fold contraposition. In the beginning, line 3-7, he distinguishes between ethnical Abkhaz fighters and hired fighters of other ethnic backgrounds (Kalmyks, Arabs and North-Caucasian ethnic groups). In this context, the Abkhaz are represented by the respondent as noble warriors,

who fight for ideals, while the others fight only for money.

On a second level he distinguishes between Abkhaz and Georgian positions. These two sides are described as equal and their positions both represented as valid and equally justified. These positions are depicted in an imagined conversation, starting in line 18. While the Abkhaz might say: “Foreigners (Georgians) came to our land and we had to defend ourselves”, the Georgian narrative is basically identical “Foreign fighters (North Caucasians, Arabs, etc.) came to my homeland (Georgia) and kill my friends.” The respondent hints at “instigation from the side”, thus showing that the relations between Georgians and Abkhaz are still in order. Both narratives do not only resemble each other but contain crucial elements of the Soviet narrative about the “Great Fatherland War”.

The goal of working with this episode is for the participants to formulate the depicted thoughts, and understand that they mark a certain view of the events. When this is understood, it can be discussed what might be the reasons behind this narrative. In a Georgian group, a second step could be to reflect on how this view of the conflict could be perceived on the Abkhaz side.

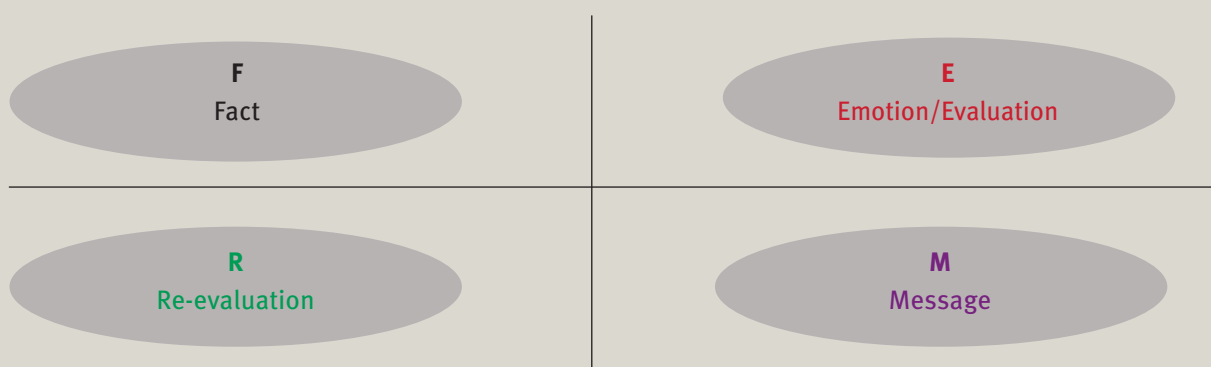
Working with the episode:

1. The episode is played to the group. Afterwards, a short feedback round is conducted.
2. For the analysis part: Split the group into working groups of three to five participants. Give one transcript to each working group. They have 20 to 30 minutes to discuss in the small groups.
3. Give the groups the task to discuss the following questions and write down their answers:
 - Which types of fighters are depicted in the episodes and how are they described? (Write down the actual attributes.) Who describes the Georgian fighters?
 - Which part of the conversation between the respondent and the Abkhaz fighter is real, which is imagined?
 - How are the motivations to fight on the Abkhaz and Georgian sides described? Where do you think this narrative has its origin? (Write down your guesses.)
 - Which conclusion is drawn by the respondent?
4. Bring the group back together and invite each working group to present their findings.
5. Direct the discussion: How does the respondent interpret his experience? Why does he see it this way? Which could be other ways to see it?
6. Final feedback/reflection round: ask each person to formulate one new thought they had during the discussion.

(Andrea Zemskov-Züge)

Figure 1: Four-component structure of narrative - biographical interviews

There are usually four components in episodes that can be discussed, 1) facts, 2) emotions/evaluations, 3) re-evaluation, 4) messages.



A Fact is an event, case, story or factual, descriptive information, which the interviewee tells as an already occurred event. It might be information or data, based on which it becomes possible to accept or deny some conclusion. The descriptive factual components represented in the narrative interviews make it possible to reconstruct past events. They transmit specific and detailed information about actors who were involved in the events, names of the territorial entities, quantities, dates or other specific information.

An Emotion/Evaluation is an emotional perception a respondent has towards an event. The evaluation is consisting of an attitude, which, as a rule, demonstrates the emotional attitude of the storyteller towards an event, fact or case. With the specific narrative, which is transmitted with emotional weight, a storyteller constructs a general attitude towards a wider chain of events and creates an important ground for reconsidering the past.

A Re-evaluation is an assessment which is distanced from facts or events in the time continuum, which invites us to see an event or fact from a new perspective. Re-evaluation considers the change of an existing point of view after some time has passed since the action or event. Re-evaluation can be done by an actor involved in an event or a person who observed an event.

A Message is an information-containing part of the story which the respondent sends to the recipient, as a main idea of the episode (interview, story, event) – some sort of lesson, a conclusion of his/her own narrative, which the respondent constructs in a manner of advice or appeal. The message is often directed to the side of the speaker, to the other side of the conflict, or to both sides in a wider audience.

The model helps to show the structural build-up of narratives. Participants in the listening workshop can see how individual memories and discursive frames are linked with each other. After separating the components of information, in further discussion, groups and facilitators can choose which of the identified levels they want to focus on.

For more detail, see Natenadze 2017

Unit 2: Experiences of an Abkhaz veteran

Interview A018 [5:35 – 17:41]:

- 1 *“...then came the August of ’92. I was still in that same Tamysh, I think, if I had not been in this Tamysh,*
2 *perhaps, 89 and 92 would not happen, if I would have been... somewhere else! I am trying to joke, but here is*
3 *actually nothing to joke about. The war came... They said the war was imposed; I just want to say how I see it:*
4 *... it is not the war itself that is so terrible, as... not the frontline itself, as... all that is going on behind the front.*
5 *The way everything is done on either side...*
6 *For a long time I didn’t know where my Georgian friends were... let’s say, where my Abkhazian friends were...*
7 *where my Georgian relatives were... Seems like complete isolation, nevertheless this village Tamysh, it is*
8 *located in Oчамchira region, and we were just unaware what was happening in Sukhumi...*
9 R: On the main road...
10 *Yes, on the road! We did not know what was happening in Sukhumi, beyond Sukhumi, and we were not aware*
11 *what was happening in the world, just... we had to survive! If someone is starting a war against you, I think*
12 *you can only survive... taking the necessary steps to defend yourself. Unfortunately, the war touched me*
13 *personally; I was forced to, fff... to go to the trenches and kill human beings like me, although I could have*
14 *been killed in exactly the same way, there’s nothing new here. [Laughing]*
15 R: at war – as at war!
16 *Yes, sometimes there’s fire... Unfortunately, I had to, again I must stress unfortunately!*
17 *Like thousands of my comrades, I wasn’t scared... and there wasn’t even a moment of doubt, and I’m not*

talking about how great I am, how proud, when I surrender – there was no one to surrender to! That’s what I think now – no one to surrender to. Because it wasn’t like that then, whether to surrender or not – I will raise my hands and will be pardoned, because I saw from the first moment what was going on! Because, when an armada attacks a sleeping village, naturally, I don’t know whether that was an order from the Soviet government’s armed forces, but of course, people are all different, everyone has a different psyche. I saw how an old man was tortured, just here in Anua-Arhu, he was being made to lift water with a bucket out of a deep well, it was 25 meters deep, water with a bucket. This trooper, a huge fellow, and an old man fetches his water and pours it. In August, it’s really hot here, he was pouring water on him – you see, he was showering near the well. And it was like that, and even without that it was clear that there was no way to avoid war, that we had to arm ourselves. And for that, you must sacrifice all. I don’t mean possessions,

J.(or G.): – material possessions?

I don’t mean material. I had to sacrifice my soul, for example, I always thought I was an orthodox Christian. And until this day I consider myself an orthodox Christian and when I was baptized, they gave me a Christian name Alexander, as far as I know, that means defender. Well I don’t know who I could protect... such concepts as homeland, as honour, I could not leave aside honour, I had to go to war, I say it again, and maybe I didn’t move mountains, didn’t do anything, but today I am not ashamed to look people in the eye... and always hold my head up high, not from pride, but for the fact that my small people have survived. That for me is a huge happiness, although, the war, of course, is where there is shooting, and shooting, of course, people; all my acquaintances and friends from this village, there is basically no one left from my generation, there are some older and some younger, but from my peers, I am the only one today, and may be one more, and no one else. Unfortunately! I wouldn’t want talk about the details, about this war, but it always reminds me of itself, every day. I do not have any nightmares, but I am always missing my friends. But, unfortunately, what are you going to do about it – such is their fate, they had the honour to give their life for their homeland, unfortunately! Regarding our adversaries, so to speak. To be honest, D., today, I do not feel they are the enemy, they were the enemy, so to speak, when we were sitting opposite each other, going after each other; after that I don’t have Georgian enemies, of course, until it all begins again. But those who have been to war will understand me, that it never ends deep in their heart, each person awaits a repeat of it, I don’t want to say nightmare, although war itself is of course nightmarish... everything before 92, after 89, again coming back to what I’ve already mentioned, everyone was waiting for this war. There were these events, foreboding nothing positive, everyone was waiting for the war and got used to the idea of it. They were used to the idea that the war is unavoidable, as my great friend Daur Zantaria would say: no one knew its face. War, excuse me, is sweat, blood and tears, and naturally, there is nothing good in it. Well, the war is over, our old school was reconstructed, my home school, from which I graduated, and my father, and all my friends, and so I went to work there and still do until this day. What do they say about teachers – ‘bringing the light of kindness and knowledge to children’ [laughs]. Well, I don’t know how I do it all but just like that, day by day, so we live. Just like that.

J: Yes. Have you got, umm.. maybe a moment in your life which you would like to share or a story about, or do you have something you regret, or on the contrary, something you are proud of. You can... anyway, maybe something else you have missed, maybe intentionally, or maybe it just happened, that you can add?

A: J., Luckily, God has been kind to me, because I am one of those people who do not regret anything. The Lord has been kind and gifted me this happiness that I don’t regret, I have no reason to regret anything, God didn’t give me such a heavy burden to regret anything all my life. Yes, of course I regret having lost my brothers, umm, lost time, ripped out, ripped out of my life, so to speak, by wartime. So I never want to talk about one thing I always remember. Well, that helicopter of ours, with the elderly, with women, that was shot down above my favourite village Lata, on December 14th 1992. The thing is that I myself was in the second helicopter, I was ill, I was being transported to the mainland Tkvarcheli, and one of, there were two helicopters, and one was shot down; and meeting this helicopter, I mean, the burnt remains of children, you can believe me, that is terrifying, terrifying. The only thing I says God is the judge of us all! We will see. The scariest thing I have ever seen, something I would not wish upon anyone, are burned corpses of children, blackened! I, after that, even after that, again, God gave me strength not to hate anyone, not to hate anyone after that. That is the only thing

67 I don't ever want to talk about, and you yourself know perfectly well, but along with that, but currently, that's
68 the only thing, and what am I proud of? I am proud that I have known good people.

Contents and possible topics:

Our speaker works at the time of recording as an Abkhaz village teacher. He was born in 1967 and fought in the war. What is noticeable in this episode is that the interviewee speaks to us about what he and others had to “sacrifice” in this war. He himself feels blessed because he does not suffer from trauma like many other war veterans. The episode gives insights into the horror and dilemmas of war. At the same time, our respondent has a clear understanding of the “need for defence” and explains that he would fight again if he was attacked. He shares with us his view of the former enemies and emphasizes that he does not see them as enemies at present.

This text is a good example of a “broken” episode. On the one hand, atrocities are remembered that were committed by the other side. On the other hand, the respondent refuses to engage in one-sided rhetoric, categorizing the other side as enemies. He mentions own Georgian friends and family members. The episode is especially suitable for reflection on questions of reconciliation and its circumstances.

Working with the episode:

1. In the beginning of the workshop participants listen to the episode, then feedback is conducted. After the listening session is finished, participants receive transcripts of the episode.
2. Split into groups for group-work (20-25 min)
3. Groups should draw a cross on the flipchart (see Figure 1). The facilitator can give the following instruction: Discuss, identify and write down on the flipchart:
 - Which facts are mentioned / discussed in the interview?
 - Identify evaluation/ emotion in the narrative. What kind of attitudes does the storyteller have about the events?
 - Find the passage/s in the episode which demonstrate the respondent's re-evaluation of the past.
 - Identify the messages the storyteller has. To whom are the messages directed?

(Elene Natenadze)

Unit 3:

A Georgian veteran about his post-war-life

Interview G059 (22:35 – 30:14):

1 We arrived in Tbilisi. By the way, as the ancient Romans used to say: “War is over, be afraid of peace”, and it
2 was really like that, these were again terrifying years – absolute ruthlessness, unrest, everyone was running
3 around with weapons, most part of the youth was traumatized, because of the war, as well as because of the
4 conscience of the defeated soldier, this syndrome of the defeated soldier was really quite... By the way, the
5 Americans have studied this problem very well, with the example of the Vietnam War. The participants of the
6 Vietnam War, their post-war psychological condition... There are numerous movies about this, the same was
7 happening here. I know, for example, several people who ended up in the madhouse, many became drug-
8 addicts, many started drinking, etc. The lives of many boys were destroyed; many are not alive any more.
9 But then some time passed, this Rose Revolution happened, the situation improved by itself as time went by,
10 and people started to believe in some perspective and a better future, also in my generation. When you see
11 that the state can regulate the situation in a country, this already gives you hope, and when you know that

the lawlessness has stopped, you go outside and no one will shoot you with a machine gun, just like that... 12
Everybody started believing that Georgia will stand on her feet again and we will go back to normal life. Of 13
course, when I compare today's Georgia to the Georgia of past years, it's worlds apart. I hope that in five to 14
ten years the Georgia of today and Georgia of that future will be worlds apart again, just like these past years 15
we have been talking about. So, everything is normalizing day by day, wounds are healing, the mortification is 16
calming down and if... 17
Then I was basically 22 years old, I was a really young lad; as you already know, young 18
people are very radical in their views. I don't want to say that they are brutal and severe in their activities 19
and opinions and everything, maybe in those years I was the same and... Much time has passed by already, 20
soon I will be 45 years old, and I look at this conflict in a different way, and I see the regulation of this conflict 21
differently. I still think that there is a peaceful way for this conflict... right now I see some light... I think that 22
from today's perspective, there might be a chance to regulate peacefully, although many say that what is 23
taken away with war must be returned with war. 15 years ago I accepted this, now I don't agree, because with 24
war nothing can be returned. With war you can only lose. 25
 And, by the way, I will give you a great example: I 26
 will say that my decision to go to war was taken, the final drop was when the corpse of my friend was brought 27
 here. This man was Sul Khan Sul Khanishvili. He was known better by the name Sukhia. When Sukhia's corpse 28
 was brought here, I decided to go and take revenge. But of course, I did not only not take revenge for Sukhia, 29
 besides Sukhia, I lost another 25 men there. So, with war you cannot return anything. With war, you will lose 30
not only territories... It's a huge spiritual loss, because it harms humanity and humanity always plays a minor 31
role when the language of guns is spoken. There is no love, nothing, and therefore I suppose returning is only 32
possible in a peaceful way. Today, I have a wife and three children. I sing in a famous Georgian choir and do 33
 a lot of travelling. I have lots of friends and I am grateful to the Lord, that during my whole life I met so many 34
 good people. In fact, this helped me to maintain some spiritual qualities, good ones, if I have them, of course, 35
 it's their merit.

Contents and possible topics:

This episode comes from an interview with a Georgian ex-combatant, who today lives in Tbilisi. In this episode, he speaks about the post-war situation in Tbilisi and about life as an ex-combatant. What is noticeable in this episode are the interviewee's comparisons between "then" and "now". He compares his attitudes and beliefs of the time and relates them to his understanding today. In this respect, we get insights into his changing perspectives and value structures. We also learn about his perceptions of Georgia's broader development and his hopes for the future.

Another topic that can be reflected on is the motivation of individuals to fight. In the episode, we learn that at the time of the conflict, the respondent decided to take revenge for his fallen friend. In the present, he has re-evaluated this decision.

Working with the episode:

1. In the beginning of the workshop the participants listen to the episode, a short feedback round is conducted.
2. Split the groups for group-work (20-25 min), give them transcripts of the episode.
3. Groups should draw a cross on a flipchart (see Figure 1, p. 31). The facilitator can give the following instruction: Discuss, identify and write down on the flipchart:
 - Which facts are mentioned / discussed in the interview?
 - Identify evaluation/ emotion in the narrative. What kind of attitudes does the story-teller have about the events?
 - Find the passage/s in the episode which demonstrate/s re-evaluation of the past.
 - Identify the messages the storyteller has. To whom are the messages directed?

(Elene Natenadze)

Unit 4:

Pre-war memories of an Abkhaz woman

Interview A068 (04:33-10:34):

1 We used Russian as language of communication. And when I left for Russia, everybody thought I am Russian,
2 well, in the best cases they thought I am Jewish. I was a little red-haired. Then I enrolled at the Kuban Medical
3 Institute. I had a lot of friends, with whom I had constant contact. The nationality question was never
4 emphasized anywhere at that time. We lived very friendly, as it seems to me. Even if Russians sometimes felt
5 their – well, such feelings all big nations might have – but we never gave, we were not many, but we never
6 gave, this thing...[laughs] because, well, we, Abkhaz, were not many there, maybe two or three people in the
7 Kuban Medical Institute at those times. Georgians there were many, but it was a good fortune that we studied
8 well, we were special, we spoke Russian well, we mastered everything and we had a good image then. When
9 I graduated from University I came here to work, and here times were already so heated, it was very difficult
10 for Abkhaz to live in Abkhazia. There's no doubt. How old did you turn yesterday?

11 Interviewer: 30.

12 30. That's anyway too young for you to feel it, but we lived through it all. You know, it was very unpleasant
13 when...

14 Interviewer: That was at what time?

15 It was already the 80s and here, well, here we did not feel like we were the masters, unfortunately. And
16 with my love for my home country, such a, maybe, exaggerated love, because when you live somewhere else,
17 you always love strongly from far away, it was very sad, because when I lived there I thought: "I will come
18 home, and there I will have everything". Of course, it's naïve, but such a pleasant naïveté. Maybe the world
19 is based on such naïveté. And what happened here... I barely found a job, at work there was always this
20 question: Mingrelian, Abkhaz, all of it, all of this, this... Zviad⁸. Well, I don't think I idealize us... in general
21 we behaved with dignity. We were patient enough, we closed our eyes to it, for a long time, I mean their
22 demonstrations, arrogance... for a long time, really. But I did not believe that this will end with war, because
23 I always believed in something good. I believed just because I was young. Maybe it happens when people are
24 young. Well, I think it was like that. And, for me, for example, the 14th of August was an unexpected event.
25 Despite the fact that I read lectures in medicine at the University before that, and there also were certain...
26 you know, at one time, our University was common, Georgian – ... well, Georgians studied, well, everybody
27 studied... You do know this history, don't you?

28 Interviewer: Well, no. I want to hear it [laughs].

29 [Laughs] There was such a story, well, the department of medicine, where I worked half-time because I had to
30 enrol at post-graduate studentship. You had to do some work, that's all, and generally, why not, right? They
31 took me, and I was the only Abkhaz at the department. And then when the break was coming up, they began to
32 do these things... – I remember the Georgian philological faculty, at the first lecture they found out – I worked
33 there more than one year already – they found out that I am Abkhaz. My last name is J., but they sniffed out
34 that I am Abkhaz and they simply declared a boycott on me. They said: "We will not listen to her" at the very
35 first lecture, just like that – "We will not listen to her, she is Abkhaz".

36 Interviewer: Students?

37 Female students. "Don't we have Georgian doctors?" And the head of the department, may he rest in peace,
38 it was professor J. – his wife was Abkhaz, she is still alive – he asked them, I do understand when they speak,
39 he told them: "But she is so good. And her mother is of our nationality. And, why are you doing this at all?" He
40 barely calmed them down and got me in. But this offence, when you feel yourself a little discriminated in your
41 own country, it is not only a personal offence, you feel offended for the country. That I had to struggle to go to
42 the students and then I told myself "Calm down", and I said: "Leave all this behind, let's engage in medicine".
43 Of course I [unclear] well, this is their level... they were such, but anyway, everybody was so beautiful, everybody

⁸ The speaker refers to Zviad Gamsakhurdia (1939-1999), dissident and leader of the radical Georgian national movement, first elected Georgian president.

like... Sakartvelo⁹. I say: “we will forget this. We will engage in medicine” and the team, well it was still civil 44
 defense, it was still Soviet Union. It was taught in Russian. I’m not speaking Abkhaz. “Anything else?” Just like 45
 that. It was awful, girls. You did not live this and I want you to know that this happened, that it can happen, 46
 and that if we want to make a claim, we must be on our guard, we must be prepared internally, that everything 47
 repeats in history. And then, when we won, I never thought that it will be what we have now. 48

Content and possible topics:

At the time the interview was taken our speaker is working at the University in Sukhum/i. The episode brings us back to the time when she was a young woman in her 20s. We learn about her studies in the Russian Soviet Republic and how the political situation in Abkhazia started to affect her life and in particular her work at university. The episode gives us insight into the early stages of conflict escalation and situations of interethnic confrontations. The respondent points out that regardless of this experience she did not expect war or violence to happen. The episode depicts multicultural life, displaying the diversity of languages, ethnic backgrounds and the issue of dominance between different ethnic groups.

Discussion questions and observations for working with the episode:

Section 1 (lines 1-10)

Topic: **Life abroad**

How is ‘life abroad’ described?

Why does the respondent mention her hair colour and what does this tell us about the life abroad?

What do we learn about the relationship between big and smaller nations? She wants to say something about the Russians, “Russians sometimes felt their...” She is not outspoken or clear on this.

Discuss what she might mean.

Topic: **Small but special**

There are not many Abkhaz at the Kuban Medical Institute. Yet still, the respondent feels “*special*” (line 8).

Discuss: What are the factors that are being mentioned that make her feel “special”?

Topic: **Life in Abkhazia**

The situation in Abkhazia is assessed. Words are used like “*times were heated*” (line 9) and “*very difficult for Abkhazians to live in Abkhazia*” (lines 9-10). At this stage, she does not tell us details about this hardship but the times of being “special” are certainly over.

Topic: **Certainty of own assessment**

There are two different evaluations in this paragraph.

“*We lived very friendly, as it seems to me.*” (line 4)

“*It was very difficult for Abkhazians to live in Abkhazia. There is no doubt.*” (lines 9-10)

Discuss the difference between “*...as it seems to me.*” and “*There’s no doubt.*”

Section 2 (lines 12-19)

Topic: **Emotions and expectations**

The respondent reports about the time when she was “abroad” and reflects about her emotions towards “home”. Emotions and expectations are always an important topic. How were they at the time?

9 The interviewee refers to the beginning of the Georgian-Abkhaz war on August 14th 1992.

The respondent reflects about *naivety*. **Discuss:** Why does she speak about naivety? Is there a message to us, the listener? If so, what could this message be?

Section 3 (lines 19-22)

Topic: **Life in Abkhazia**

It is a general description of life in Abkhazia.

What are the specific problems in Abkhazia that are indicated and named?

How did the Abkhaz community behave in this situation?

Discuss the words “dignity” (line 21), “patient enough” (line 21), “we closed our eyes to it, for a long time” (line 21). **Discuss:** What are the reasons for such behaviour? What else could one have done?

Section 4 (lines 22-28)

Topic: **Not expecting the war**

The respondent is surprised by the war and did not see it coming. Analyze the words she is using for explaining this, like “I did not believe” (line 22), “I always believed in something good” (line 23), “I believed just because” (line 23). The word believing is used a lot in this section.

Discuss: What would have been an alternative to believing?

Topic: **Self-reflection “Maybe I could have known”**

Her reflection about the unexpected war leads to her description of her experiences at Abkhaz University.

Discuss the sentences “And, for me, for example, the 14th of August was an unexpected event. Despite the fact that I read lectures in medicine at the University before that, and there also were...” (lines 24-25).

Section 5 (lines 28-49)

Topic: **Life in Abkhazia - confrontation**

In this section, she describes how her Georgian students demonstrate against her being a lecturer. The respondent becomes detailed and descriptive on what was described earlier as “heated times” (line 9). Moreover, she shares with us that she was a witness to important events that could have shown her that violence and war might be possible. She reveals to the listeners that she was not just a *believer* but that she also had important insights.

Discuss: What problem and challenges does she describe at her workplace?

(Oliver Wolleh)

Unit 5:

The situation of mixed families

Interview SO 024 (00:00 – 07:00):

- 1 1992 ... I would like to talk about the events between 1989 and 1992. I my memory they are imprinted very
- 2 clearly, though many years have passed since then. In 1990 I finished school and for me this was a very
- 3 difficult time, because there were many Georgians in my class and many of them were my friends. I had a
- 4 close friend, her name was Irma, and we were so close that we even spent the night at each other's. I couldn't
- 5 imagine my life without her. It was such a close friendship that in 1999 I chose her as my son's godmother.
- 6 Regardless of the war and that they left without telling us, just as all Georgians left the town leaving behind its
- 7 borders. Of course I was hurt, but I loved her so much and was so close to her that I forgave her and decided
- 8 in 1999 that she will be my son's godmother, and she became my son's godmother.

Of course it was very hard, because I am from a mixed family. My grandmother was Georgian. We suffered a lot. My aunt, my mother's sister, married a Georgian and after the Georgians left the town in 1992 and the Georgian Militia with dogs decided to attack the sleeping town, after that, there was a very strong reaction. They started to go to the Georgians' houses and throw out those who had stayed. And of course it was hard. Because my aunt, she was Ossetian and her husband was Georgian and the children were Georgians, too. And regardless of the difficult situation, they came to live with us. Their house had been burnt down and they lived with us. Then my mum decided that her son-in-law should leave the town, together with the children, because the children had to go to school and we were afraid to send them to school with their Georgian family name. And my mother and father decided to take them to the border and from there they should go to Gori or somewhere else to rent an apartment, so that they could live somewhere. My aunt didn't want to leave Tskhinval, but in the end, we convinced her all together. That she needs to go to her husband and the children and take care of them. Well, she left, but it was very hard for her. My Georgian grandmother was alive, my mother's mother. She understood the whole situation and it was very difficult for her, because her grandchildren were Ossetians and the other grandchildren Georgians. She suffered most of all. And we tried to soothe her, because she did not speak, she kept everybody in her heart and of course it was hard for her. She began to have Alzheimer's, her emotional state caused Sklerosis. She had married an Ossetian and had done very much for the Ossetian people. During the hardest times, when there was shooting in town, on the front page of the newspaper "Juzhnaja Ossetia" a long article was published for her birthday, she was a Georgian doctor and had dedicated her life to South Ossetia, to the Ossetians. It was a heroic step of the editorial board, to publish it on the front page. She suffered most of all.

But when my aunt left, she started to call us and say that the children could not adapt to their other aunts in Gori. They were used to go to school here. As a reaction, my father suggested to her to send her oldest son and my aunt's oldest son lived with us all these years, far from his father, mum and younger brother. We brought him up and he lives here with us. He has a daughter and works here with us.

And I want to say that this conflict from the beginning had the effect of making it most difficult for mixed families, I want to emphasize this. Because the mixed families did not know how to behave with the Ossetians or with the Georgians. That was hard.

Content and possible topics:

The respondent speaks about her close relations with Georgian friends, classmates and relatives. In the account, various developments in these relationships are described and two examples are given where people held on to these positive relations, in spite of the conflict.

The interview partner speaks from a double perspective. With great empathy, she describes the psychological consequences of the break between the conflict sides, giving examples from her family and close friends.

The episode is suitable for discussing the development of individual relationships between the conflict sides during escalation. It can be discussed under which circumstances these are preserved. The interview gives a strong impression of the situation that mixed families experience during escalation. The goal of the discussion is to draw the participants' attention to the potential of mixed families in fostering a better understanding between conflict sides.

Working with the episode:

1. The episode is played to the group. Afterwards, a short feedback round is conducted.
2. The group is divided into two working groups. They work with different questions for 20 minutes. Write the questions on moderation cards and give each group a flipchart and a card with the described task.

Questions for the first group:

- How does the speaker describe the relationship to her Georgian friends before and after conflict escalation?
- What do you think, why was it possible to maintain positive relations with her friend and the Georgian relatives?

Questions for the other group:

- How does the speaker describe the impact of the conflict situation on her relatives (grandmother and aunt)?
 - What do you think were the reasons to publish a positive article in an Ossetian paper about a Georgian doctor (the speaker's grandmother) during conflict escalation?
3. The groups present their results in plenum, the flipcharts are hung up.
 4. Ask the group: What do you see when you look at your results? What have you learned about the situation of mixed families?
 5. Brainstorming: What do you think, what could mixed families do to support the process of building peace? The facilitator writes down possible actions.

(Rusiko Marshania & Andrea Zemskov-Züge)

Unit 6: Memories of a man from Svaneti

Interview G05 (07:02 – 13:24):

- 1 ... When Zviadi came, the “People’s Front” dissolved. Everyone went to Zviad¹⁰. I met Zviad on a “People’s
- 2 Front” gathering and talked... Because I did not get any response from Natadze. I also met Kostava, but
- 3 Kostava was very brave, his attitude was “we should not concede, let’s mobilize and go for it”... Zviad did not
- 4 manage to say anything... He said he will take care of it through the Helsinki laws, through councils... I told
- 5 him that councils would not help, the war can start any day and we are sitting naked. He answered “no”. But
- 6 personally, I had such a feeling coming from our people, that war is inevitable. And we should get prepared
- 7 somehow, we should also be prepared if anything... prepare with weapons, or get mobilized in groups or... I
- 8 mean militarily. They did not manage to organize anything at all...
- 9 And then they sent Jaba here to Abkhazia... What can I say about Jaba. These were the guys I had the first clash
- 10 with. Because they were all criminals – either drug addicts, or former prisoners. People who were gathered
- 11 around him would not understand me. They had weapons. I did not like that they were seen with weapons in
- 12 my town, in my village. It was also bad for me if the Abkhaz saw my connection to them, because then talks
- 13 about dialogue and brotherhood or anything like that would be over. “So you are also with them and you are
- 14 also armed!” But I don’t want any weapon. If something happens and I need it, then I will take it but... The
- 15 situation is escalating, escalating ... war is unavoidable...
- 16 With those guys I always had arguments. Not just an argument, we had serious confrontations. Actually, they
- 17 existed only on money donated by rich people.
- 18 By whom?
- 19 From officials who had money. They were giving them funds. But, if it had been some kind of official
- 20 organization, a Georgian organization with ordinary people working on the mobilization of people, weapons,
- 21 etc., it would be another thing. If they had given me these donations I could have done it the official way but...
- 22 I don’t know where this money was going. This money was not donated voluntarily. But it was quite a lot of
- 23 money, thousands, tens of thousands... No one knows where it was going, maybe in their pockets, maybe they
- 24 were getting armed. They had cars. This was a very strong organization. But this organization was dangerous

¹⁰ The speaker refers to Zviad Gamsakhurdia (1939-1999), dissident and leader of the radical Georgian national movement, first elected Georgian president.

for us, it was destroying our reputation. If the Abkhaz would see us together, then the dialogue was over. And they also used to say to others “You see? They are sending ‘Sondergruppen’, bandits from Tbilisi”. So, it was impossible to talk, talks were failing. We tried, tried many times.

There was a big settlement, Bzipi, and a lot of Abkhaz were living there. In Bzipi there was also one Svan village. We were 150 Svan families living there. The Abkhaz had big respect for them. The first meeting took place right there. Actually, I have told this only to a few people. Our elders were summoned by the Abkhaz elders. I was invited too as a young leading deputy, I was chairing the meeting. So, what did these Abkhaz want? They said “let’s talk, discuss”, they also did not really want these tensions, but this “Mkhedrioni” escalated everything. So they started to talk. They spoke about toponymics... names... we are here, etc... Our elders responded to them “Why so? Why only yours? It is yours and it is ours too!” They continued with historical debates and this talk was going nowhere, we tried to stop them but the dialogue was failing. After that they confronted us and said directly: “We want to establish the Republic of Abkhazia, separately... to separate and you Svans should support us!” Hearing this, our elder Svans were shocked. “What are you saying? How did you come up with this, it betrays... We are Georgians, we will not agree on this...” And the Akhaz said “You will not do this, ok, no problem. You can blame yourselves. Dialogue between us is over.” Then a fight started, but others separated us. After this they began to dislike us, especially our village.

In this period, Zviadists were working hard. Their approach was: “Do not engage, we will take care of it... I’m in charge... I have business with them...” And many believed in this, but no one could convince me, because not even Zviad knew better than me who the Abkhaz were... I was born there and knew better than them... So what I am saying is that this was the situation at that time... They said: “no, people, don’t worry!” And our society split in two, in three... “Mkhedrioni” was standing for itself. I joined the moderates, because I did not like “Mkhedrioni”. These Zviadi people also did not suit me. They were always making these demonstrations and demonstrations, these women in tents shouting “Zviadi will save us! Zviadi will help us!” They were worshiping him like a god, day and night. I was telling them “How can Zviad help you? Men should stand in their places, there should be mobilization because something bad is coming... or we shall start talking, compromise...” because Russia is standing there... We knew for certain that it would be taken away and you couldn’t do anything against it... So, the promises of our government that they will “do this and they will do that” were foolish. Only youths, inexperienced, only idiots could believe in what they were promising.

Content and possible topics:

Our interview partner in this exercise is a Georgian IDP from Abkhazia (village Bzipi, Gagra district). Before the war, he was a local official in his village and also a politically active person.

The episode represents a good example of the conflict escalation period and is an “insider story” from a person who witnessed political turmoil starting in Abkhazia and Georgia in the period of 1989-92. We can see in this episode his assessments, many years after the war ended and he became an IDP living now in Batumi, Georgia. There are some important political figures mentioned in the episode and it is described how our respondent meets and relates to them. The first is Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the first President of Georgia whose presidency was short-lived. After a coup d’état in January 1992, Gamsakhurdia was forced to leave the country and actual (*de facto*) control was taken by a so called ‘Military Council’ which comprised three leaders. One and the most influential of them – Jaba Ioseliani – was leading the paramilitary organization *Mkhedrioni* which is also mentioned in the episode. It is interesting how he describes these political actors, their actions, approaches and their impact on the situation in his village and in Abkhazia in general during the escalation period.

The episode can be used to discuss the questions:

- › How does the respondent try to de-escalate the situation?
- › Is he successful?
- › How does he see his role today?

Discussion questions and observations for working with the episode:

Section 1 (lines 1-8)

Topic: **Meeting/addressing political leaders in Georgia**

He describes how he met the political leadership of Georgia. He mentions politicians and what he thinks about how they were responding to this problem.

- › What do we learn from his description of politicians?
- › What is the respondent's attitude towards the politicians and the Georgian government?

Topic: **War is coming, we need to do something**

In first paragraph we also see that he describes a "feeling coming from our people, that war is inevitable".

Discuss: Who has this feeling, that war is inevitable? What persons, or group of people, does the storyteller refer to?

In what role does he see himself when such an appeal comes from "his people"? And what does he suggest to do?

Section 2 (lines 9-27)

Topic: **Mkhedrioni and the danger of no dialogue**

- › How does he describe *Mkhedrioni*?
- › How does he describe his relationship with *Mkhedrioni*?

Discuss: "But this organization was dangerous for us, it was destroying our reputation"

From what perspective is he speaking? Who is "us" and what consequences does he see in case the Abkhaz see *Mkhedrioni*? In case the Abkhaz would see what they call "Sondergruppen, bandits from Tblisi" (line 26) they would tell the "others" (line 26).

Discuss: The word "Sondergruppen" and who are the "others"?

Section 3 (lines 28-40)

Topic: **Elders and facilitation from inside**

The elders see need for dialogue and negotiations. This is an important example of social crisis management. In the meeting of the elders, the speaker acts as a dialogue facilitator. He is what can be called an insider-facilitator. To what group does he belong formally?

Discuss: Is he describing his role in a neutral way or in a biased way? What challenges is he facing during the facilitation?

What do we learn about the position of the Abkhaz elders and how do the Svan elders respond to the Abkhaz proposition?

Section 4 (also lines 28-40)

Topic: **Attempts for dialogue/de-escalation**

He says that "we tried, tried many times"... He gives an example of how an influential group from Abkhaz society – Abkhaz elders – reached out in a meeting with Svan elders from his village. This is an attempt for dialogue because "they" (the Abkhaz) also did not want escalation, but the arrival of *Mkhedrioni* made the situation even more tense (line 32). Why did *Mkhedrioni* make it worse? What political proposition did the Abkhaz elders offer? How did the Svan elders react?

Section 5 (lines 41-52)

Topic: **The split of society**

The respondent describes political actors who are active in Abkhazia and Georgia.

"Do not engage, we will take care of it" (line 41). How do the Georgians living in Abkhazia relate to these demands of the Zviadists? Why does the respondent reject this? What are his motives and vision?

(Oliver Wolleh & Shota Shvelidze)

Unit 7:

War experiences of schoolchildren

Interview A053 (02:35-07:56):

There were five of us, young girls. And only on the fifth day my aunt and my brother came. So, for five days we were by ourselves. I remember very well how Kh., the oldest of us, when they started robbing the neighbours, she gathered us. We took glass bottles and poured solar oil into them and propped rags into the bottlenecks and kept them, just in case. But we didn't really realize anything. We didn't even know how to burn them, maybe throw them, but we felt calmer that way. And Kh., she had always been the fighter among us, she knew how to shoot a hunting rifle. Father had a rifle and we took it to bed at night. We all slept in one room, so we didn't go away from each other. Well and my second grade uncle, he doesn't live far from us. He looked for us every day. If anything happens, he said, run to me, then into the forest. We had our bags ready with toothpaste, brushes, some underwear, I understand that that's not the most important, but anyway, if we have to run through the forest, so we have the most, what's most important. On the fifth day, my uncle came with his family. On the way, my brother was nearly arrested by the Georgians, the women were asleep, they were travelling by bus. They had come nearly on foot from Sukhumi, so they had a long way. Then, for some more time, I was in the village that we call Zagan, Akuaska, there I stayed until the end of August. And in Tkvarcheli at that time they were throwing bombs from helicopters. And since we were on the mountain, we saw helicopters fly by to bomb Tkvarcheli and they were flying over us. When they flew by, we saw already that they are headed in our direction and we ran out of the house and hid in the tangerine plantations, because they sometimes would shoot people directly with machine guns. Such cases happened, thank God nobody of our neighbours died, but they were shot at. My first bomb attack was the most terrible one. I was extremely shocked. I remember that moment, when I ran out of the house and sat under a tree and prayed to God "save and shelter me". That was most likely the most terrible moment. After that I obviously got used to these bomb attacks but was afraid anyway. I always followed them, looking after the helicopters, I always saw how they came flying back, I always yelled, we ran and hid in the plantations. Then, when we started to be afraid that they would reach our village, me and my five sisters were sent to Tkvarcheli, to our aunt. I remember September 5th, that was one of these moments, because since August 14th I hadn't seen mum, dad and my brother. I had no idea what happened to them and on September 5th somebody came, I don't remember who, an uncle, one of the brothers and says: "C. is supposed to come with a helicopter, today from Gudauta." Nobody believed it, but I said, you know, he will come, I feel it. And after some time, a car arrives. And they say: "E., your father has arrived, let's go." I remember that moment, when they brought me to the Tkvarcheli Gorsovet building. I sit in some small room, something like a reception and wait until I see dad. A crowd gathered around dad. Of course everybody asks, what's happening on the other front, what's going on. I don't remember how long I waited for him, quite some time and finally the door opens and they lead dad from the conference hall into the small room. I walk through that crowd, tears on my face, I don't see dad, and call "Dad, dad where are you?" Then finally I saw him, he hugged me and turned away from me and I understood that this is also very hard for him and he is crying.

Interview G 058 (00:50-08:10):

I guess my most beautiful childhood memories are linked just to this period, how we grew up in Kelasuri. In Kelasuri we lived together, friendly, with my grandmother, my uncle, etc., but then we received an apartment for ourselves in Agudzera and the last years, and the period before the war, we spent mainly in Agudzera. And I can remember how everything was very beautiful, everything was very, very colourful before the beginning of the war, of course. I remember that day very well. We had planned to go to the dacha with the family. We wanted to leave on Friday and then stay Saturday and Sunday. Then we would come back on Monday. And we decided to go for a longer time, maybe it was even Thursday, for about four days. For many days we wanted

8 to go to the dacha and we bought a lot of food, preparing to go there, I don't know. As it happens we should be
9 going the day when the shooting started. The cannonade woke us up, machine guns, rumble, anyway, tanks,
10 and so on. We guessed that something very bad had started. Of course we couldn't go to the dacha, but I don't
11 know, it was like God sent us these groceries, because everything disappeared from the shops right away.
12 There was no bread, no sugar, nothing, and for some time, while coming to our senses, we were eating the food
13 we had wanted to take to the dacha.

14 That one year, when we lived in the conditions of war, was very gloomy. I cannot link it to that Sukhumi of
15 my childhood that I remember, and with how I remember the last months. Just when the war started, most of
16 the families – Abkhaz families that lived in our block – they left. We did not see them throughout all the war.
17 But with some families who stayed, with them we had a great relationship. You know, there was this estranged
18 relationship of the local population to the soldiers and troops who arrived, because we did not understand
19 what was going on in the beginning and of course we had absolutely no aggression to our Abkhaz neighbours.
20 We even tried to shelter them. I remember there was one case, when military people with weapons from one
21 of the Georgian military units came to our block, and they said that they needed to exchange prisoners of war.
22 Their friends had been taken captive and they were looking for Abkhaz in our neighbourhood, they wanted
23 to take somebody and exchange him for one of them, you know, a Georgian. And somebody had said that an
24 Abkhaz lives here. And I remember I was little then... How old was I? Maybe 11 years old. I remember vividly
25 this scene, how people gathered. Nearly the whole block came and we did not allow them to take this person.
26 And they left very bitter, because of this, with nothing, because they couldn't take this man captive. Such
27 incidents happened very often. I remember even that we celebrated, New Year I think that was, and it was
28 very hard for everybody. There was no food, we had nothing, and we, my parents and the neighbours, decided
29 to celebrate together. If I remember right, it was New Year. And we invited our Abkhaz neighbour, who lived in
30 the neighbourhood and we celebrated all together. It was so sublime. We sat together at the table and for us
31 this war was somehow... well all this blood-shed made no sense at all. It seemed to us that it was forced on us.
32 None of the local people needed this. And somehow everybody waited for it to end quickly and we didn't think
33 that it will last so long and surely we didn't think that we will have to leave Sukhumi and will never have the
34 chance to return there. But people hoped, till the end, I remember. Nobody planned to leave. But then, it was
35 already the 27th of September. It was early in the morning, even still the night before the 27th, we suspected that
36 it's impossible to stay. My parents of course feared for us, for the children, because there were many rumours,
37 terrible rumours about violence and killings and so on. So that we, Georgians, obviously, the way I looked, and
38 the rumours we heard... well, basically it was impossible to stay.

Content and possible topics:

In this working unit, two episodes are used. The accounts are especially suitable for comparison, because the respondents are similar in age. The female Abkhaz speaker was fourteen years old when the war began, the male Georgian interviewee 11 years old. Both were living in Abkhazia and directly witnessed the beginning of the war. At the end of the war, the Georgian speaker had to leave Abkhazia with his family. Today he lives in Georgia proper.

In both episodes, there is a focus on the first days of the war. While the young woman had been, by fate, separated from the grown-ups in her family and had to cope with the situation together with her sisters and cousins, the young man's family had been preparing for a trip to the countryside when the war began. In both accounts it becomes clear that the war situation occurred unexpectedly for the children and it was very difficult to adapt to it. While in the Abkhaz episode a focus is on measures of defence and shelter the girls need to take, and on the fear of being separated from relatives, in the Georgian episode there is more information about food shortages and the relations in the neighbourhood, including with Abkhaz neighbours.

The suggested exercise has been successfully worked with in Abkhaz schools. It proved interesting for the children to hear an account about a time when the respondents were approximately their age. Also, not many pupils had ever before heard the voice of a person who had lived in their neighbourhood and was forced to leave to Georgia. The sympathetic, nonviolent tone of the account was very much appreciated.

The goal of working with this episode is for the participants to reflect on similarities and differences between the experiences and perceptions of the two respondents. In a second step, they are encouraged to imagine a dialogue between the two respondents.

Working with the episode:

1. Both episodes are played to the group. After each of them, a short feedback round is conducted.
2. The group is divided into two equally big working groups. Group A works with the Abkhaz transcript and Group B with the Georgian transcript. Equip the groups with flipchart paper and copies of the transcript, and write the questions for each group on a moderation card. They have 20 minutes to discuss the following questions:

Questions for Group A:

- Which events does the respondent mention in her account?
- What feelings did she have during the events she describes?
- How does she describe the relationships with neighbours and family?
- In your opinion, how does she think about the war and the people on the other side of the conflict divide today?

Questions for Group B:

- Which events does the respondent mention in his account?
- What feelings did he have during the events he describes?
- How does he describe the relationships with neighbours and family?
- In your opinion, how does he think about the war and the people on the other side of the conflict divide today?

3. The groups come together and present their findings. There is a short question round and discussion of results.

In the framework of a half-day or one-day workshop, the exercise can be developed further:

4. After a break, form small groups of two to four participants. Make sure that in each group representatives of Working Group A and Working Group B are present. Write the following instruction on moderation cards and hand them to the groups:

Imagine the two respondents meet one day. What, do you think they would like to ask each other? What do you think they would like to tell each other? Write a small dialogue between the two respondents.

Give the groups 30 minutes to work.

5. The groups come together again, each group reads their dialogue. Discuss commonalities and differences between the texts. If you have more time, a next step could be to ask the groups to perform their dialogues like a little play.
6. Feedback: Ask each participant to formulate one question they themselves would like to ask a representative of the other conflict side.

(Andrea Zemskov-Zuege & Julietta Leyba)

Unit 8:

An Abkhaz elderly woman about war memory and the young generation

Interview A034 (19.34 - 23.01):

[...] I'm a pensioner now, nursing my grandchildren. In general, life has returned to normal, everything's great. 1
 Life is now better than before the war. You can live, if you live wisely, but, anyway, if you look at these youngsters, 2
 who behave not right... One needs to spend a lot of time with them, bring it to their attention, stir their interest, 3
 createsome initiative, so that they, the young people, know what it is. Some of them ask when these film-sequences 4
 are shown, "What do you need that for? Switch on another channel!" I say: "I'll change your channel 5
 to the time twenty years ago. You'll forget your own mother!" Then, you know, these young people, 6
 we have to work and work with them. You are working, you know, that these young people, they are not 7

8 all the same, right? Not all of them obey. And it all depends, I believe, on the parents. How you present
9 it to your child, about the war, what the guys have died for, how Abkhazia was freed, at what price,
10 all of it. Every evening, you have to say at least one word and sometimes show these films. Show them
11 to the children. I think we will come to this. Otherwise, when I saw what happened on March 16th
12 ... have you seen what the kids did there? I guess you were on the bridge, on top? I think we are not forgotten and
13 our boys are also not forgotten. Every day we get older and older and our wounds open wider. It's impossible
14 to forget. Yes, life has improved, but in our souls living has not become better. Every day it is getting worse and
15 worse, because every day we lose a fighter, or two, or three. Every year we lose somebody. And it becomes more
16 and more painful for us, more and more painful. The most important thing is that our children understand
17 at what price this victory came to their hands. We are also not young any more. We get older, we leave this
18 world, we will all be gone, and the growing generation, they must preserve all this with their hearts and souls.
19 Not commercially, not with money, not economically, but with their hearts and souls they must preserve our
20 Abkhazia that we have freed with our hearts and souls. Three of them are sitting here. And looking at them, at
21 these fighters, we, women, could not stay at home, because our conscience didn't allow. We took it for our duty
22 to be next to them and we fulfilled our duty. Now our children must fulfil their duty before us and before their
23 fatherland. So I don't have anything to add. So, young people, live happily, I wish you to flourish. I know, that
24 we have 10% spoiled children and the other 90%... I see the youth community also in Gagra and Gudauta, I
25 was everywhere, conducting meetings in schools, reading and as I told you now, I told the children... in some
26 places it was funny, some places we cried, somewhere we danced and sang, drank and ate. The war came as
27 war. But today they must have a different attitude towards life, so that we do not feel the pain for those we
28 lost at that moment.

Content and possible topics:

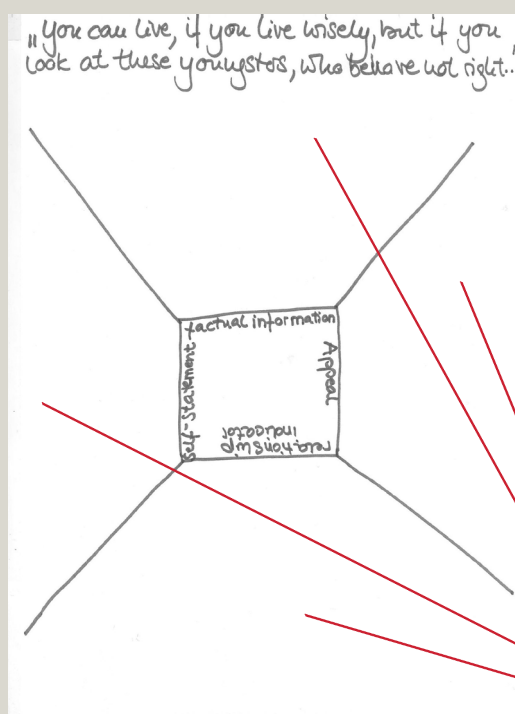
The respondent, an elderly woman, talks about her own life in old-age. She has finished her professional life, now staying at home and taking care of her grandchildren. She underlines that she experiences the losses and pains of the war more and more as time passes. She is very critical about the young generation and demands that young people should be confronted more often with pictures and films about the war. So they become more aware which price was paid for their freedom.

The piece is quite typical for a soviet-style argumentation about the war-experience. The young generation is considered in the debt of older generations and responsible to prove with their lifestyle that the war-effort was not in vain. The respondent shifts the responsibility for her feelings of grief to the younger generations.

Working with this episode, the main goal is to show this discourse and to motivate the group to reflect on the consequences this attitude has for younger generations. To inspire such reflection the four-ear-communication model can be helpful. It can be applied to single sentences from the transcript. To get a broader picture, each working group works on a different sentence.

Working with the episode:

The exercise makes use of the model "four sides of a message" by Friedemann Schulz von Thun. Before the workshop, prepare one flipchart for each working group. Write the sentence you want the group to analyze on the top and draw a square in the middle, indicating which side stands for which "ear". On the outside of the square, leave space for participants to write. Each group is given a different sentence.



The participants are asked to discuss and brainstorm. Which

- Factual information
- Appeal
- Relationship indicator
- Self-statement

they hear in the quoted sentence. They write their findings in the rhomb-shaped fields.

Participants write in these fields

Suggested sentences:

Group 1: “You can live, if you live wisely, but, if you look at these youngsters, who behave not right...”

Group 2: “The most important thing is that our children understand at what price this victory came to their hands.”

Group 3: “And looking at them, at these fighters, we, women, could not stay at home, because our conscience didn’t allow.”

Group 4: “Now our children must fulfil their duty before us and before their fatherland.”

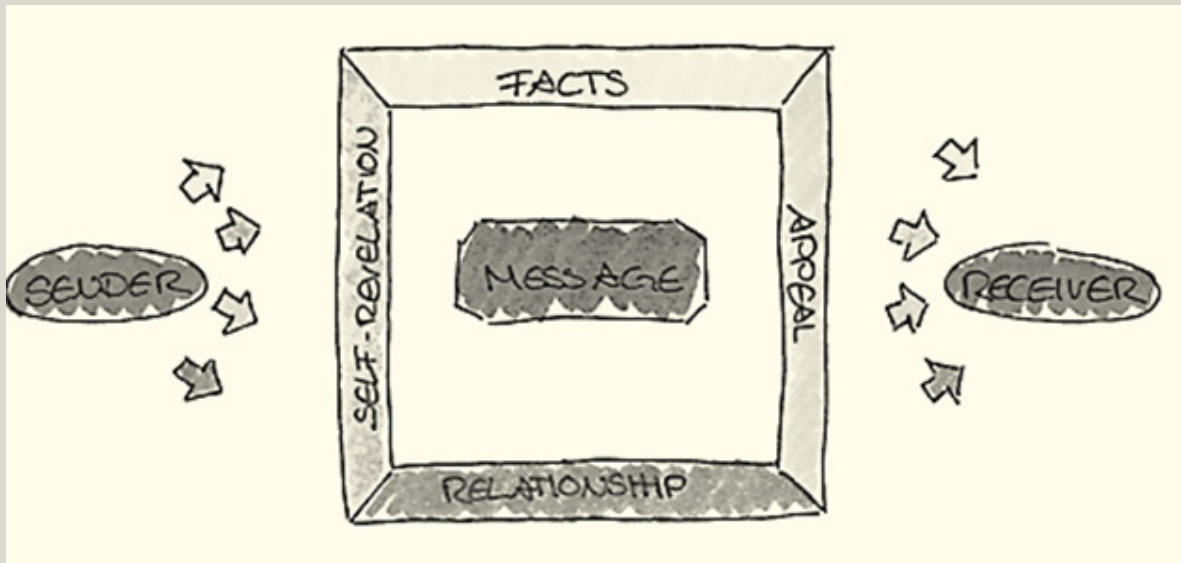
Group 5: “But today they must have a different attitude towards life, so that we do not feel the pain for those we lost at that moment.”

During the workshop:

- The episode is played to the group. Afterwards, a short feedback round is conducted.
- After feedback: give the group an input on the four-ear-communication model (see box above)
- Form working groups of 3-5 persons. Hand out a prepared flipchart to each group. And explain the task as shown above.
- After the group has come together again, each working group presents their findings. The flipcharts are hung up next to each other.
- After the presentations ask the group: What do you see when you compare the results? Collect and paraphrase the group’s impressions.
- Guide the discussion with the following questions: How does the speaker perceive the relationship between the generations? What do you think, how do the younger generations feel if confronted with the speaker’s attitude? What does this attitude mean for young people in Abkhazia who want to get in touch with Georgians? With which “ear” should they hear the messages?

(Andrea Zemskov-Zuege)

Figure 2: Four sides of a message by Friedemann Schulz von Thun



In communication, each message that is pronounced contains four kinds of information:

1. Factual information (which I am informing about) – top,
2. A self-statement (what I show of myself) –left,
3. A relationship indicator (what I think of you and how I relate to you) – bottom ,
4. An appeal (what I want you to do) –right.

It depends on both, the speaker and the listener, how a message is perceived. With his/her four beaks, the speaker can emphasize one side more than another. Also the listener can hear one side more than others.

Example:

Two persons sit in a car, standing at a traffic light. The passenger says: it's green.

Factual information:	The traffic light is green
Self-statement:	I am in a hurry
Relationship indicator:	You need me to tell you how to drive
Appeal:	I want you to drive now.

Depending on with which ear the driver hears, he/she can react differently. For example say “I can see it's green” or “Are you in a hurry?” or “Don't always tell me how to drive”, or “OK I'm going”.

<https://www.schulz-von-thun.de/die-modelle/das-kommunikationsquadrat>.

For the English translation, see: http://cnas.euba.sk/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Reading-29_10_2014.pdf

Voices of our Facilitators



“What I like most is the focus on people themselves. In this process a person and his or her feelings, desires and difficulties are more important than geo-politics.”

Shota Shvelidze, Tbilisi, Georgia

What is your personal motivation to do this work?

Every week, people who have been seriously hurt by these conflicts are sitting together. I can see how it touches them, their souls and minds. They start to ask questions to others and themselves: What happened? Why did it happen? Where can be a way out? It is a long process, but I see progress and shifts in people. I feel that we are ready for changes and progress. With this methodology we create a space where people can come and work “with their conflicts”. It is really not easy to find a place where ordinary Georgians can listen to the Abkhaz and Ossetian stories, to see what ordinary people from the other side really think.

Tell us a situation or incident that characterizes our work.

The process of listening to these biographical stories, discussing, thinking, sharing and analyzing is very valuable to me personally. It is not only a job. It is much more. If I had to choose one moment, I would definitely say that was when I listened to the interview of an Abkhaz painter who had fought in the war. He speaks about fate and what the war did to his mind and soul. How it affected his life and thinking afterwards. He asks himself “have I coped with this?” Then he comes to the conclusion that he hasn’t. After listening to this interview I have been asking myself: Are people strong or weak in their essence? A man’s life can be so weak and vulnerable and he withstands and fights against surrounding problems. Human beings are always fighting within themselves. They try to adapt to the environment, society, its rules, nature, etc. The relation between the inner and outer world of a person interests me. We can find many such interactions in our interviews and learn from this, individually and as a group.



“I am a guide. With the help of this project I give people the opportunity to find out more about reality and understand what happened.”

Monika Torua, Gal/i, Abkhazia

What is the need in Abkhaz society for the work we have been doing?

People can find out what really happened. They often do not understand that people on the other side of the conflict divide are exactly in the same situation. On both sides, people see only extremes – this is typical for the Caucasus. People are radical, they do not take the time to think and analyze. Therefore they cannot see that things could be different. The Berghof History Dialogue Process is the only place in our

society where people can look at the war from different perspectives. This is the merit of this project, to provide such a space, where it is possible to switch perspectives.

What is your personal motivation to do this work?

In my family, nobody really talks a lot about the war. I had some information, but, growing up in Russia I was not interested in it. But when we returned to Abkhazia, I saw the consequences of the war. I felt completely lost, like a little chicken lost in a foreign yard. I did not recognize the place at all. I had many questions but a complete lack of information, so I could not analyze what was going on. When I started working in this project. I learned and understood very much. It became easier for me to follow the events that happened then and to understand why things are the way they are.

What were main challenges in this work?

There is a lot of fear in our society. It was not easy to create a safe atmosphere. People were afraid to give interviews; we had to fight for their trust. Another difficulty was to overcome stereotypes. In the workshops, we encouraged participants not to hold on to their prejudice, but to look at what happens now and here. This was difficult but also very interesting. One person can understand that something needs to change, but society often holds on to its “reflexes”.

“The value of this project lies in listening again and again, discussing that the war is a tragedy - any conflict situation must be solved in a nonviolent way.”

Julietta Leyba, Gagra, Abkhazia



What was your role in our project and which task did you fulfil?

I worked as a facilitator. I conducted workshops among school children in Gagra.

Please tell us a story or situation that characterizes the work we are doing.

Young people do not know much about what happened before and after the war, but they want to know and it is better for them to hear about it from eyewitnesses and ordinary people. Interviews help young people to better understand events that took place before they were born. In listening to and discussing interviews, the listeners come to the conclusion that we need to protect peace. The most instructive moments were philosophical discussions, for example an episode by a war veteran who regretted the tragedy that happened and that the links between people have been destroyed. He is not angry, he does not hold a stone in his soul, on the opposite, and his interview radiates the love for peace.

For the children, it was also very interesting to listen to the interview of a young Georgian who was their age, when the war started, and also a young woman from Tkvarchal who was separated from her family at 13 and had to live through hard times. Listening to the interviews and discussing them helps to understand better what happened and how important it is to carefully guard peace.

What is the need in society for this work?

It is important to hear about history from ordinary people. These people are not publicly known, nobody writes about them, you don't see them on television. But it's them who “make” history. The use of the project is that we also listen to Georgian interviews. Here we learn how they talk about war and peace after 25 years. We have to come to conclusions: It is never possible to build peace with war.

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