

BOTH WAR AND PEACE IN THE ‘COUNTRY OF THE SOUL’: THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF ABKHAZIA ON WAR, TRADITION, AND INDEPENDENCE

Guzel Sabirova

UPIanovsk State University

The future of Abkhazia is in our hands. How we position it, how we build it, that's how it will be. Our parents, our grandmothers and grandfathers, are depending on us. ... They're looking to us because how we turn out will be how the country turns out. (Focus group, Sukhum/i)

The self-declared, internationally unrecognised Republic of Abkhazia, or Apsny - ‘the country of the soul’ - as it is called by Abkhazians, exists in a state often defined as ‘neither war nor peace’. The complex social problems generated by its marginal status are almost physically tangible in a region still struggling to overcome the economic, social and psychological consequences of the tragic events of the military conflict of 1992-3.ⁱ The destabilising effect of the conflict has been intensified by the impact of structural problems characteristic of post-Soviet transformation in general: the change in status of regional government; the emergence of new economic relations; the intensification of ethno-cultural conflict; and the clash between ‘traditional’ and ‘western’ values. Despite the fact that de jure the state of Abkhazia does not exist, de facto people not only survive there but manage to organise their daily lives, forge social bonds and attempt to construct a state infrastructure for the unrecognised Republic of Apsny. It is these contradictory moments embedded in the natural landscape, the architecture, the history and the everyday life of Abkhazia that strike the visitor on arrival. Abkhazia is a place of sea and mountains, of seaside town chic alongside traditional mountain village life, of grand colonial-style mansions and ruined buildings, of external political non-recognition amidst fervent internal state-building, of traditional longevity yet high youth mortality, of widespread unemployment but expensive cars on the streets, of deep attachment to the homeland and yet, among some, a longstanding desire to leave.

It is in these difficult social conditions - in a society that, for thirteen years, has resisted its territorial status - that the young people of

Abkhazia attempt to manage the difficult process of their own transition to adulthood. Evidence from expert evaluations commissioned by peace building organisations or other similar structures active in particular regions suggests that the process of growing up in societies that have experienced ethnically rooted war or military conflict has a number of distinguishing characteristics (Sommers 2006). The humanitarian programmes developed on the basis of such documents aim to facilitate the psychological, economic or social rehabilitation of young people who have been drawn into military conflict or who simply find themselves in post-conflict societies. This overall objective means that they tend to gloss over the complexities and contradictions within post-conflict societies as new national, moral and cultural markers are sought. It is these complexities that the sociological research outlined below has sought to uncover and understand.

About the Research

The research upon which this article is based was conducted in March-April 2006ⁱⁱ as a pilot project and first attempt to conceptualise the youth problematic in Abkhazia. The overall aims and objectives of the research were: to understand the dominant tendencies in young people's attitudes including their perception of their place and role in Abkhazian society; to evaluate the level of social engagement of youth and uncover their expectations of state structures; and to develop recommendations for the Committee of Youth Affairs regarding the formulation of a youth policy. In this sense the project might be seen as having adopted an action-research approach.ⁱⁱⁱ

All research on ‘youth’ begins with the problem of defining its parameters. However, ‘youth’ as a social category is not satisfactorily delimited by reference to a specific age bracket; ‘youth’ has been socially constructed differently across time and space (Omelchenko 2004). As a

Caucasian, mountainous republic, Abkhazian society has been characterised by the persistence of traditional generational relations which accord the older generation ('elders') a particularly important place. Being 'young', in contrast, meant lacking experience, being free from family responsibilities and was accorded lower social status than that given to adults. At the same time, 'youth' was associated with hope, biological reproduction, the inheritance of traditions and protection from one's enemies (Krylov 2001). However, modernisation during the Soviet period and the trauma of military conflict and its aftermath, as well as more general processes of globalisation, have changed the understanding of what it means to be 'young' in Abkhazia. Today two central issues dominate Abkhazian society: the construction of war memories, and the reconfiguration of Abkhazian traditions. This article focuses on considering how these two discourses configure the identity of youth in Abkhazia today.

The analysis presented below has been conducted by applying and adapting the notion of 'narrative identity'. Central to this concept is the understanding of identity as biographical, constructed, and rooted in social interaction. 'Narrative identity' here, therefore, is understood as the individual's understanding of themselves constructed in the process of recounting the story of their past, present and future at a specific moment in time, and in the context of a particular social interaction. However, although these accounts are, by definition, constructed, they remain constrained by external circumstances such as the range of possible interpretative models ('ready-made' narratives'), the presumption of structural organisation (Ricoeur 1995) and a certain positioning in relation to socially approved and non-approved moral discourses (Taylor 1989: 25-52).

The analysis presented in this article is based primarily on oral testimonies; the findings of the quantitative research described above are used as contextual information only. Such narrative-based work is made possible by the passage of time; thirteen years on from armed conflict the first shock of trauma has receded and traumatic experience can be articulated. Moreover, such everyday storytelling in post-conflict society reflects movement towards the establishment of new social orders and hierarchies of power. The youth of Abkhazia has a very important place in this new narrative chain and the way in which young people define

themselves in oral self-representational narratives helps reveal the dominant expectations of them on the part of adults.

Constructing the Memory of War

In Abkhazia the peaceful routines of daily life are peppered with visual reminders of the war. In the urban landscape restored or rebuilt houses stand side by side with buildings destroyed by shells and abandoned flats and houses. War-time graffiti remain in public view and one still stumbles across warning notices about ongoing land-mine clearance. Monuments and memorial plaques have been erected on the sites where people were killed in fighting (for example on entry into Sukhum/i), but also in every town and village to honour local volunteers who did not return from war.

Memory of the war is also provided in textual form; books are published recording the memories of those who witnessed the fighting and no Abkhazian celebratory occasion passes without a toast honouring the memory of those who died and the valour of those who fought.^{iv} Histories of the war and the post-war period are popular and focus on themes such as overcoming traumatic experience, explaining the current destruction (something that the population feels particularly painfully), and informing the 'outside' world about the problems Abkhazia faces.

The war, and everything associated with it, is thus part of the everyday lexicon of young people and at least three stances by young people in relation to memories about the military conflict can be discerned. These might be classified as 'victimization', 'heroification' and 'romanticization', and 'patriotization'.

'Victimization'

The fact that young people perceive themselves often as the victims of war is evident from the way young people talk about themselves as a group. These include phrases such as: 'We are psychologically disturbed', 'We never had a normal childhood and are incapable of living a "normal life"', 'We take death for granted', 'We have retained a desire for revenge', 'We are afraid of a new war' and 'We jump when we hear gunshot and the drone of helicopters'. The way in which the war is written into their lives is

central to the differences described between the lives of young people and of their parents' generation.

War is always stressful. If there had been no war, then everything would be different now. What our parents say, how we spent our youth, what we have seen in life that you couldn't have seen - that you will never see even. And what we couldn't see and didn't see. This is all as a result of the war. (Abkhaz, male, 22 years, Tkuarchal)

'Heroification' and 'Romanticization'

The experience of war and the post-war period may also be viewed as an advantage; having lived through the war lends young people a particular maturity, experience and adult quality.

For me Abkhazia is embodied in the faces of Abkhaz men and women. But I would single out those Abkhaz women who, in peacetime, were weak, cosseted and defenceless but who found strength in themselves to defend their homeland. They were not afraid to look a cruel enemy in the eye. (From an essay by an Abkhaz, female, 20 years)

'Patriotization'

The younger generation in Abkhazia has a distinctive patriotic attitude characterised by a high degree of willingness to get involved in events that decide the fate of the country, including, if necessary, sacrificing their own lives.

I see our youth, our generation, as a symbol of the fact that we won, are winning and will win. (From an essay by an Armenian, female, 22 years)

The strength of representation of the war in the narratives of young people is at least partially a consequence of the active way in which adults shape these narratives. The discursive inclusion of the war is important to the adult generation for two reasons. Firstly, this generation shoulders the burden of guilt for the fact that its children had to experience the deprivations of the war and post-war period. Secondly, through reference to the war adults cultivate and maintain the high level of expectation they have of the young, who are required to prove that they are worthy of the memory of those who died and be prepared to defend what has been achieved by their parents and brothers.

Narratives of War: Generational diversity

The events of 1992-3 are a key factor in distinguishing between distinct cohorts within the broader 'youth' population. The greatest connection to the war is felt amongst the oldest age group (25-30 years), who experienced the most profound psychological trauma. Young people of this age may have been involved in military action and/or witnessed hunger and the death of relatives, killings on the street and bombing. For them stories about violence, deprivation or everyday military clashes are part of their own personal experience and biography. The tone in which they recount these stories ranges from the tragic to the humorous but all agree that they talk about such things frequently, whenever a group of friends gets together.

Remembering the war is also a mechanism for building solidarities with elders, who had survived the Great Patriotic War (Second World War). It is a bridge that connects them when, as young people report, 'Before we only knew about war from the tales of our grandfathers'. At the same time memory of war is perceived to be immutable, unforgettable and an experience that will fade out only with the passing of the generation itself.

We, our age group, we remember all of it, those who were younger maybe don't remember. It all happened. Everything that happened, we remember So many people were killed, so many people we were close to.

Everyone, in every family there were losses. And all that has a strong effect on your psyche. ... Maybe some people don't feel it, but personally I think it has a profound affect on your state of mind. (Abkhaz, female, 21 years, Tkuarchal)

Memories of the war among young people now in post-compulsory education also centre on their own experiences. The majority of younger children were evacuated from the battle zones during the war to other towns, mountain villages or even beyond the borders of Abkhazia. Stories of these moves are told among the 19-25 year olds.

In contrast, among the youngest cohort, the war is referred to in the context of describing the present. In their essays, young people wrote, 'We are children of war, children who have known the burden of war and the post-war period, a post-war generation.' And even those who were not directly affected by the war feel involved in the events of war and retell the stories they have heard from others.

We talk about this often. We often remember what happened during the war. Who didn't leave, who stayed, what they experienced, what happened. We always remember. Nobody has forgotten anything. Even though I was only 3 or 4 years old, I remember a lot. [I remember] being in Tkuarchal, how it was bombed, I remember a lot. (Abkhaz, female, 18 years, Sukhum/i)

Narratives of War: Regional Diversity

Of course memories of war differ also depending on where young people had experienced it. Those young people who had been in Sukhum/i had experienced everything from direct bombing to hunger and shooting on the streets. The memories of those from Tkuarchal, however, are the stories of children caught in blockade – of hunger, of meeting and accompanying men at their posts and of playing with the spoils of war. In Gudauta, although there was no military

action, the shooting from Sukhum/i was audible and they collected food and clothes and took in those injured in the fighting. In Gal/i^v people try to avoid talking publicly about that period altogether, although even teenagers generate their own images of what the war was like.

Politics is everywhere. Two girls might be standing, talking about it. During the war they would have been little, they don't know what happened, how it was. Out of these conversations an image is formed of what the war was like. It's all down to politics... Why couldn't Abkhazia win? How could they have won? What did they do in order to win? You start thinking about this question and you sit, and think, this is about your town. (Mingrelian^{vi}, male, 15 years, Gal/i)

The War as Turning Point

Individual storytelling is often divided in Abkhazia into life 'before' the war and life 'after' the war. Before the war Abkhazia is described as a prosperous region – 'a corner of heaven', 'almost Switzerland'. After the war, and during the first two post-war years, the Republic experienced a surge of patriotism and unity. Life after the war, however, is characterised by disunity and indeterminacy. Implicitly or explicitly, therefore, memories and stories of the war are positioned in individual histories as significant. The fact that memories of war are not only memories of violence and humiliation but also of the rise of patriotism, courage and unity of the people, however, means that they form a symbolic and emotional reservoir, essential for the survival of the republic today and for the progression of ideas of independence in the future. The war is thus a collective as well as an individual turning point.^{vii}

One of the stages of nation building, elements of which are in evidence today in Abkhazia, is the formulation of a national idea capable of

consolidating society and transforming people living within the borders of one state into citizens of their own country. The caution of leaders in promoting any such nation-building ideas in the complex situation in which Abkhazia finds itself today is understandable. However, the current generation, growing up against the background of a strained perception of the past and the fostering of patriotic feelings, is desperately in need of a positive image

of a national 'Us' capable of uniting the citizens of Abkhazia, and shared memories of the war plays an important role here. In response to a question about factors that could potentially unite all residents of Abkhazia^{viii}, 44% of ethnic Abkhaz youth and 33% of respondents of all other ethnic groups cited the 'preservation of the memory of the 1992-3 war' (see Table 1)^{ix}.

Table 1: What might unite all residents of Abkhazia?
(as a percentage of the total number of respondents)

	Abkhaz	All other ethnic groups
Preservation of the memory of the 1992-3 war	43.7	32.5
'Apsuara' ^x	43.7	8.3
Living on the same territory	37.7	36.9
Strong government	31.3	31.2
Equality of all ethnic groups	28.2	49.7
Abkhaz language	25.8	5
Mutual forgiveness of each other for past hurts by different ethnic groups	14.1	30.6
Orthodoxy	3.8	10.2
Islam	0.03	0.06
Don't know	4.3	7.6
Total no. of respondents	419	157

Memories of the war cement links between individual biographies and the historical process and connect people who lived in Abkhazia in times past and those who live there today. Memories of the war are a powerful mechanism for forming solidarities based on shared experience as well as for differentiating between those who directly participated in military conflict (war veterans), those who found themselves on the home front and those who were 'evacuated'. However, at the same time, there is a danger that the powerful sediment of the discourse of war and tradition may come to fill the space left vacant by the absence of any consciously developed national ideology, encroach into individual areas of social policy,

complicate reform and squeeze out discussion of current social problems.

Preserving traditions and defining 'Abkhazness'

The events of 1992-3 had ethnic roots and aggravated conflict between the Abkhaz and Georgians. Since the war, the ethnic composition in Abkhazia has changed significantly but this has not made the question of what constitutes 'Abkhazness' redundant by reducing it to ethnic background. Youth in Abkhazia remains ethnically diverse including, among others, young people of Abkhaz, Armenian, Mingrelian, Georgian, Russian, and Greek origin. Moreover,

‘tradition’ is increasingly challenging ethnicity as a key marker of ‘Abkhaz-ness.’

Ethnicity remains an important factor in the social structure of Abkhazia, not least in relation to the formation of new hierarchies in which the Abkhaz occupy the leading position. However, today the ethnic factor plays a different role to that of the pre-conflict past. This is due to a number of structural changes that have taken place in Abkhazian society, directly linked to the consequences of the war, including: a significant shift in relations between urban and rural populations^{xi}; the broadening of kin networks beyond the borders of Abkhazia; and the formation of new boundaries of ‘us’ and ‘them’ (the nature of an individual’s participation in military conflict, for example, may be more significant in some instances than ethnic belonging).

Today the term ‘tradition’ is used routinely and interchangeably with terms such as ‘mentality’ or ‘*Apsuara*’. Adults consider one of the fundamental tasks of young people, if they are to prove themselves to be worthy descendants of the ‘elders’ who fought for the independence of Abkhazia,^{xii} to be the preservation of the Abkhaz ethnos, culture and language – broadly speaking the Abkhazian ‘tradition’. Young people reproduce this adult discourse, as was clearly evident in the essays they wrote.

Throughout its long history, Abkhazia has had to struggle for its freedom and independence... And I believe that very soon my small and extraordinarily beautiful country will at last gain juridical independence. Of course my generation in particular will have to invest great efforts to achieve this goal. My generation of course grew up after the post-war period and did not see all the deprivations of war, all the horrors of war, but we have been brought up on the example of heroism of our fathers, brothers, grandfathers, etc. Unfortunately, today the youth of Abkhazia (a small section of them) does not always meet the standards of the Abkhazian code of honour and does not reflect seriously on

the fate of the homeland. Today even in the most difficult situation we must preserve ourselves as a nation, as an ethnic group, our language and culture. Today in Abkhazia almost half the population does not speak their native language. For me this is a minor tragedy. (From the essay of an Abkhaz, female, 16 years)

Concern about the potential loss of the Abkhaz language is not surprising given the competition from both Russian (which provides access to quality higher education) and English (which promises the opportunity to study not only in the Republic or Russia but also in the far abroad). The above respondent’s pessimistic evaluation of the level of commitment to preserving the Abkhaz language, however, was not borne out by the results of the survey, which, on the contrary, suggested that young Abkhaz evaluate their command of their native language relatively highly. Only one in five said they were unable to use it for everyday communication while 73.7% said they could not only speak Abkhaz but also read and write the language. A minority of Abkhaz youth (24.2%) were so committed to the preservation of the language that they would like to see Abkhaz as the only official state language. The majority (almost 70%) of those surveyed, however, favoured the dual language option, whereby both Abkhaz and Russian are recognised as state languages.

Young People and ‘Tradition’: Preserving What ‘Makes Sense’

Young people’s talk about traditions differentiates three types: traditions that are obsolete or moribund (for example, traditions governing relations between daughter-in-laws and father-in-laws); customs and ceremonial traditions (weddings, funerals, bride-stealing, etc.); and traditions that define ethnicity (language, ‘*Apsuara*’).

Traditions considered to be obsolete by young people are often those that underpin the patriarchal regime. Young people, for example, consider traditional constraints upon communication between a daughter-in-law and father-in-law to be wholly unnecessary today. The majority of these traditional rules concern

the behaviour and appearance of women and thus meet the disapproval of young women first and foremost. Active topics of discussion, for example, are traditional dress codes, which prohibit women to wear trousers or short skirts (let alone cropped tops), the strict prohibition of smoking for women and the importance, for women, of preserving their virginity until marriage.

The weight of public opinion is strong and, especially on issues such as abstention from pre-marital sex, may be unquestioned by adults and young people alike.

...I'm used to it, our parents brought us up to think that a girl – a bride-to-be – must leave the house in a white dress. But in her case – she left [the parental home] – lived in [his] family for a year and then they go through a charade of a wedding. But I don't think that is right. I think that a girl should marry in a white dress... (Focus group, girl, college, Sukhum/i)

However, what happens in real life often diverges significantly from that which is postulated in public discourse. Young women, especially those living in urban areas or in coastal villages, dress in line with contemporary fashions, do not follow a single rule on when they enter into sexual relations, and, in some cases, smoke. This situation leads to a logic of double standards.

There are those that observe it, and those who don't. It's just that when we said that it's not acceptable for a woman to smoke here, well that doesn't mean that absolutely nobody smokes. But if they do smoke, young people anyway, they do it secretly... And nobody knows about it except for close (female) friends. It's just considered shameful. (Focus group, students, Sukhum/i)

There are a number of ceremonial traditions that young people consider to be rather artificial. For reasons of economic rationality young people sometimes even disapprove of lavish wedding and funeral ceremonies; in some cases they fall out with their relatives who insist on a grand wedding reception incurring huge debts that have to be paid of by the young people and their parents over a long period of time. Traditions such as bride-stealing and revenge also appear outmoded, although in relation to the latter, opinions differ. In a society which remembers the spilling of blood so recently, revenge has not lost its significance.

Revenge – you know, once again, we have to come back to that post-war period. ...Let's say, for example, a mother has lost her three sons, after that they killed her husband, her brother and so on and she may come to hate that nation. You see, although in any nation there are good people and bad people. ...Maybe she still finds a purpose in life, by watching others, but again, at any moment, given the opportunity, personally, I am sure that, if she got her hands on even one person involved in that, she would tear him apart, tear him apart alive, she would separate him limb from limb. Again that's revenge... Time heals. (Focus group, Tkuarchal)

However, other traditions, practices that already exist in society and appear to have some kind of rational basis, evoke a relatively neutral attitude. There is still an interest in traditional ethnic music and dance, for example. The custom of family meetings also remains widely observed; our research suggested that more than 80% of Abkhaz families participate in such family gatherings with some degree of regularity (about 55% gather at least once a year).

The categorisation of traditions as obsolete, ceremonial or ethnicity-defining is, of course, far from absolute and the boundaries between them are not rigid. However, such a differentiation helps explain some of the apparent contradictoriness in young people's perceptions of 'traditions'. Thus, having noted

the skeptical attitude among many young people to observing the rules of the first two categories of tradition, attention now turns to the third category – traditions that are viewed as essential for the self-preservation of the Abkhaz people. These traditions are encapsulated in notions of Abkhazian ‘mentality’ and ‘*Apsuara*’.

Traditions that Shape ‘Abkhaz-ness’: Mentality and *Apsuara*

Mentality and *Apsuara* are what make a person Abkhazian; they embody his/her ‘Abkhaz-ness’. Nevertheless, the term *Apsuara* is difficult to define and operationalise. This is partially because it is less an everyday practice than

rhetorical resource rooted above all in the conviction that ‘We mustn’t lose *Apsuara*’. This is encapsulated succinctly by one of the participants in the focus group in Tkuarchal who explained, ‘We support it [*Apsuara*] but don’t observe it’.

When asked directly about the significance of *Apsuara* to them personally, 98% of young Abkhaz surveyed said that it was undoubtedly important. Analysis of responses to the question why *Apsuara* was important, however, confirmed the suggestion above that *Apsuara* has more symbolic than practical significance; just 4.5% of young Abkhaz who took part in the research considered *Apsuara* to offer a real way of ordering their lives (see Table 2).

Table 2: Why is it important to preserve *Apsuara*?
(as a percentage of the total number of respondents)

	Abkhaz	All other ethnic groups
It is a sacred tradition	34.1	20.8
It is the main moral code	15.8	24.8
It is a distinguishing characteristic of the Abkhaz people	34.9	20.8
It is a force uniting society	7.3	5.0
It is a real way of ordering life	4.5	1.0
Other	0.6	1.0
Don’t know	2.8	22.8
Total no. of respondents	354	101

The research suggested that the most widely understood and shared elements of *Apsuara* are those that conform to general human values: respect for elders, hospitality, and the code of honour and conscience (*Alamys*). This might suggest that *Apsuara* is not the unique preserve of ethnic Abkhaz. However, this remains an open and contentious question. On the one hand, non-Abkhaz who have lived in Abkhazia for a long time are considered to be close to Abkhaz customs.

Those of other nationalities who live here are already close to our customs. They kind of accept our actions... The Russians who live here, they know our customs.
(Abkhaz, female, 18 years, Sukhum/i)

On the other hand, *Apsuara* is seen to be a distinguishing characteristic of the Abkhaz where ‘Abkhaz’ is defined in exclusively ethnic terms and is not extended even to other citizens

of Abkhazia. This ambiguity in interpretation confirms the proposition that there is, as yet, no consensus in society as to whether 'Abkhazian' can be not only a marker of ethnic but also of a civically based national identity.

Young people deal with the tension created by the strong presence of traditional values in a modernised society rather creatively by introducing the notion of the 'modern Abkhazian'. What is meant by this is illustrated in the following excerpt from an essay by one of the participants in the research.

The problem of 'fathers and children' has always existed and still exists today. Our elders don't really understand what we mean when we talk about a 'modern person'. 'Modern' [for them] means having lost *Apsuara*. Maybe I agree with this to some extent; sometimes young people do not behave in accordance with our mentality. But can't you be a mix of everything?! This is what the term democratic, modern person means. I hope that those around me are able to call me a modern Abkhazian, because I try to avoid doing anything that does not correspond to our mentality. (From an essay by an Abkhaz, female, school pupil, 17 years)

The discourse of *Apsuara* that has formed and strengthened among the Abkhazians over the last thirteen years is received positively among non-Abkhaz ethnic groups in the Republic. Our research showed that 75% of non-Abkhaz young people responded positively to the question about the importance of *Apsuara*. However, many found it difficult to explain why and tended to characterise it as sacred tradition, moral code or a distinguishing feature of Abkhazians. Thus, although *Apsuara* has become a discourse that encompasses all residents of Abkhazia, young people of non-Abkhaz nationality may perceive it as a national ideology, a peculiar cultural environment without which Abkhazia cannot exist, or simply a tourist attraction.

Ethnic Minority Youth on 'Abkhaz-ness'

The ethnic identification of young people of non-Abkhaz ethnicity in Abkhazia is similarly complex. It incorporates ethnic traditions, language and legends of their settlement in Abkhazia as well as justifications for their connection to the recent history of Abkhazia and Abkhazian traditions.

Undoubtedly events of the last few years have reconfigured existing ethnic hierarchies. As elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, Russians have lost the social advantages guaranteed to them in the Soviet period and, following the collapse of the USSR, many of them left the Republic. Russians often say that those Russians remaining in Abkhazia today are those who were unable to leave. The following excerpt from an essay illustrates the most critical position:

... I really want to continue my education, but if I'm honest, to get a normal education, well our study here – it's just a sham. ... I don't see my future in an Abkhazian environment, I don't understand these people, their traditions, customs and, of course, their favourite word over the last thirteen years – their 'mentality'. (From the essay of a Russian, female, 20 years)

But this is not the only attitude towards Abkhazia and Abkhazian traditions. Children, who have grown up in mixed marriages but identify as Russians, in particular, see things differently. And for these young people it is important that they are recognised and accepted by the Abkhazian community. This might be the result of their individual biographies but current attitudes in the Republic – where it is advantageous to be Abkhaz and to speak Abkhaz language – are not insignificant. This is evident in the following opinion expressed by one of the participants in the research:

Although I am not an Abkhaz I grew up here and speak Abkhaz as well as I speak Russian. I think I'm fully entitled to call myself

Abkhazian because I was born here in Abkhazia and live with these people, and it's only in my soul, of course, that I recognise that I'm Russian. (From the essay of a Russian, female, 17 years)

The Armenians of Abkhazia are a quite different case. Young Armenians consider Abkhazia to be their homeland. They speak a dialect of Armenian which differs from the Armenian spoken in Armenia; two thirds of those surveyed speak it relatively fluently. However, like the young Russian cited above, young Armenians prefer to see markers of 'Abkhaz-ness' in a broad, rather than narrowly ethnic, sense.

I can call myself an 'Abkhazian' because I don't see this as referring only to my ethnic belonging. Being an 'Abkhazian' means living in Abkhazia, loving this country as your homeland, being the home of your ancestors. [It means] respecting, observing the customs and mentality of the country and accepting them as your own. (Armenian, female, 22 years)

The majority of young people of Armenian nationality who took part in the research think that they should have some knowledge of Abkhaz language and 35% of them would like to speak it fluently. One might hypothesise that this tolerance towards the Abkhaz language is explained by their acceptance that Abkhazia's new statehood will centre on the Abkhaz ethnic group. Indeed, more than half of the young Armenians surveyed thought that Abkhaz should be a state language equal to Russian. However, 30% maintain a cautious position in relation to the prospects of Abkhaz as a state language.

However, relations between the Abkhaz and the Armenians – the two largest ethnic groups in Abkhazia – could become a potential source of tension. It is not something that is talked about openly but, in their essays, interviews and conversations with us, Armenian youth expressed some concern about their future.

Evidence of latent tensions relate to criticisms of the position of the Armenians in the 1992-3 conflict (despite the fact that Armenians suffered as much as anyone else in the war and many even fought on the side of the Abkhazians), and their experiences of discrimination when applying for jobs. Of course the ethnic colouring of these problems may conceal what are, in fact, profoundly social problems shared by all ethnic groups; this is a complex issue that merits focused attention in further research. However, from this alone one can conclude that any ill-considered attempt to encourage patriotism among Abkhazian youth in the absence of a nationalities policy could provoke a serious aggravation of inter-ethnic relations.

The identity of Georgians (including Svans and Mingrelians) now living in Abkhazia, is, for obvious reasons, the most problematic. Even the number of Georgians in Abkhazia remains disputed and their identity complicated by the fact that some of them (or their relatives) fought on the side of Abkhazia in 1992-3. Often today's young people who identify as Georgians are the children of mixed Georgian-Abkhaz families and, although they don't conceal their ethnic belonging, neither do they have any desire to talk about it unnecessarily. This does not mean that they hide their nationality - in tiny Abkhazia everyone knows everything about everyone else – and even when young Georgians (including Mingrelians and Svans) are well integrated into contemporary society, they are not allowed to forget the peculiarity of their situation:

It was the period straight after the war. We had some arguments with our neighbours. I get on with them really well now. But I really had to try hard to get to that point. But I proved to them that I am my own person. If I am asked whether or not I would take up weapons if a war started, I answer that of course I would. They retorted that these are my brothers, they are Georgians. But, I was born here. If someone comes here armed, he will die at my hands. I have reflected on the war a lot. I have always said that the Georgians were wrong. They should have rebelled along with us here. Then

we would have lived a lot better
and everything would have been
different. (Georgian, male, 25
years, Sukhum/i)

The situation in Gal/i region, where the
majority of the population today are Mingrelians,
is tenser. Young people project an image of
themselves as marginal to both Georgia and
Abkhazia. They belong neither here nor there.
Some speak neither Abkhaz nor Georgian.
Moreover, they cannot, or do not want to, define
their nationality:

This is the problem for all
Mingrelians because they say that,
on the one hand, they are
Georgians but on the other, they
are Mingrelians living in
Abkhazia. I can't decide. When
my parents decide [who they are],
then I will too, probably.
(Mingrelian, female, 16 years,
Gal/i)

There are no open ethnic conflicts in
Abkhazia today but this does not mean that all
ethnic tensions have been resolved. The image of
the 'enemy' continues to be associated with
Georgia, Georgians, and anyone who fought on
the Georgian side. The retention of such hostile
attitudes (including anticipation of a new war
with Georgia) is facilitated by the recent memory
of the war, and of those who died, but primarily
by the unresolved problems of territorial status.

The visible tension in Gal/i is of course
peculiar to that region and a product of its
particular situation. The region remains under a
military regime, is subject to curfew and is
reached only by passing through a checkpoint
controlled by peacekeeping forces. It is
impossible to present a complete picture of Gal/i
based on the small number of interviews
conducted in the region. However, these
interviews do provide an insight into the depth of
the prejudice both sides perceive to be mounted
against them. The following two excerpts from
interviews indicate, in the first case, the negative
images of the Abkhaz articulated by Mingrelian-
Georgians and, in the second, the prejudice
encountered by them.

I don't know how many years it
will take. It could have been sorted
by now if only these politicians
could get on with each other. We
could live peacefully with the
Abkhaz, not like they live with us
now. Here in Gal/i there aren't any
pure Abkhaz, only the dregs of the
Abkhaz. They make money,
frighten us. They carry machine
guns. A real Abkhaz knows what a
Georgian is because he has sat
around a table drinking red wine
with him. (Georgian-Mingrelian,
male, 16 years, Gal/i)

I don't deny the fact that I am a
Mingrelian. I didn't take part in
the war. It's just that here
stereotypes have formed that all
Georgians are bad, that all
Mingrelians are bad. But there are
people who understand us...
[People] don't really like us in
Georgia, but they are not fond of
us in Abkhazia either. It's the
same everywhere. (Mingrelian,
female, 16 years, Gal/i)

Although the Mingrelians of Gal/i often
look to migrate to Georgia to resolve these
problems, there is little positive incentive or
support for such a move: the older generation
(the generation of their grandparents) generally
opposes migration; high levels of unemployment
in Georgia mean employment prospects are low;
and further study is prohibited by inadequate
knowledge of the Georgian language. For this
reason one of the participants in the research
indicated their intention to take advantage of the
quotas for Gal/i inhabitants to go to university in
Sukhum/i.^{xiii}

The unresolved status of Abkhazia makes
it harder to move away from images of conflict
and hatred formed during the war towards new
relations more appropriate for peacetime. The
views of young people of non-Abkhaz ethnic
origin about the events of 1992-3 are, of course,
more diverse than that of their Abkhaz peers.
This is because, on the one hand, the conflict is
narrated as ethnic and, in this sense, external to

them and something involving only the Abkhaz and the Georgians. On the other hand, 'non-Abkhaz' young people feel involved because the issue concerns their homeland – Abkhazia. This is evident from their narratives of the war and the post-war period which also contain a tragic element as they recount stories about the improper actions of both the Georgians and the Abkhazians. It follows that young people of non-Abkhaz origin also envisage different solutions to the current situation. Their responses to the question of what could unite people living in Abkhazia (see Table 1) show they rate 'equality of all ethnic groups' highest (49.7%), followed by 'living on the same territory' (36.6%) but see 'preservation of the memory of the 1992-3 war' as less important (32.5%). However, both Abkhaz and non-Abkhaz youth agree on the significance of 'strong government' in uniting all those living in Abkhazia (around 31% of both groups selected this option). This suggests that young people attach significant importance to the role of government in stabilising the situation in Abkhazia even though they are sometimes disappointed by its failure to live up to this role (see essay citation below, p.58).

Independence and Citizenship

The current situation of indeterminacy and non-recognition lends itself to reflection on the future of the Republic. At the moment the general mood might be described as one of 'expectation'. The present is filled with various kinds of 'ifs' and 'whens', which are, above all, connected to the status of the Republic ('if there's no war', 'when we are independent', 'when the issue of status is resolved' etc). A whole host of questions related to everyday life as well as plans for the future oscillate around the resolution of the question of Abkhazia's status. The resolution of this question is seen to be crucial to fulfilling expectations, and hopes, for an improvement in the current economic and political situation. For young people these problems are particularly pertinent, even though during the years of uncertainty they have developed strategies of adapting to the situation. Young people's narratives suggest there are two key issues: how the situation is resolved (will Abkhazia be independent or be part of another state?); and when.

The question of time is not insignificant for young people. The majority of Abkhaz youth

live in hope of 'getting independence' for Abkhazia and their most optimistic forecast is that the problem will be resolved within a couple of years:

Today we are in a situation when in a year, in two years, it is perfectly possible that our independence will be recognised, that our politicians, our public figures will make it into the international community, with the help of Russian politicians, of course. They will achieve this because we have the right to independence and, how to put it, historically, well, historically, if you look at... If our independence is recognised then we have nothing to fear because then we will have global support. And then nothing can allow us to be enslaved or seized. (Abkhaz, male, 29 years, Sukhum/i)

However, respondents do not rule out the more pessimistic scenario of living in long term expectation of independence and this is reflected in their somewhat ambiguous answers to the direct question in the survey about how they imagined the future of Abkhazia. Almost a quarter of Abkhaz respondents wanted to see Abkhazia become part of the Russian Federation^{xiv}. Doubts about whether it was worth insisting on the independence of Abkhazia also resonated during discussion in the focus groups. Such attitudes are most likely to be articulated by the middle age cohort of youth (22-25 years), among those who have no opportunity to leave Abkhazia and among those who have already started families. However, the overwhelming majority of young Abkhaz (74%) are in favour of independence. Abkhazia staying part of Georgia is not considered to be an option at all by young people in Abkhazia. The opinion of young people of non-Abkhaz nationalities was divided almost equally: 40.8% see Abkhazia as independent in the future; 48.4% envisage it within the Russian Federation.

Although Gal/i region was not captured in the quantitative survey, interview materials suggest that the question of future political status is interpreted there rather differently.

It is not important who it [Gal/i] is under. The main thing is that here there is kindness, justice and love. ... I don't know. [The future would be better] With the Georgians, probably. I managed to feel the kindness of the Georgians when they controlled this land. But I can't say anything about the Abkhaz really – [I don't know] which is better. (Georgian-Mingrelian, male, 16 years, Gal/i)

From this one might conclude that notwithstanding certain preferences, it is less important how the question of status is resolved than that it *is* resolved; young people are governed less by ideological or ethnic and more by practical considerations. The best government is simply the one that can sort things out most rapidly and make the region prosperous and successful again.

The Republic of Abkhazia means also the current government – the President and other government structures. Although the image of the President in general appears positive (indeed the first President of Abkhazia, Vladislav Ardzinba, was spontaneously used as an example of a 'real Abkhaz' in a number of anonymous essays written by respondents on this question), all other government institutions are talked about negatively. One young man used our invitation to write an essay to address the government directly:

I don't like that fact that we, that is the Abkhazian population, given what we suffered thirteen years ago, given that we survived all this by joining hands, standing as one, we can't accept it! How many have died just in the current year? Many! And what are our police, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Administration of Internal Affairs and others, doing about it?... On behalf of all young people, I beg you to consider not only order on the streets but order also in our internal institutions!

(from an essay by an Abkhaz, male, 16 years)

Its indeterminate political status, and absence of an internationally recognised Abkhazian passport, is not preventing Abkhazia from developing its own state institutions, symbols and national identity; to its population it is a state. If you ask young people 'Of which country are you a citizen?' in the majority of cases, the answer will be 'Abkhazia'.^{xv}

So what does it mean to be a citizen of Abkhazia? In the opinion of young people citizenship is rooted, above all, in the fact of being born in Abkhazia, in belonging to this territory. If an individual lives in Abkhazia, if their ancestors lived in Abkhazia, they are entitled to call themselves a citizen of Abkhazia.

A citizen of Abkhazia – well, for example, I ... well I was born here, grew up here, graduated from school here, studied here when they called us refugees. ... And when we returned I worked here at my parents'. I am the sixth generation that has been born and brought up in this district... And citizenship, well, for me it is connected precisely to this place of birth. (Mingrelian, female, 30 years, Gal/i)

Being a citizen of Abkhazia means: connecting your fate with Abkhazia; getting involved in resolving its problems; having your own opinions; and being ready to defend that position.

Patriotism is deeply lodged in our youth. Even if war was to break out, nobody would flee, well maybe some would save themselves, but here we are ready to risk our necks for freedom. (Focus group, Sukhum/i)

Of course, the question of citizenship becomes a rather different one when one actually

tries to move outside Abkhazia. Abkhazian passports are valid only within the Republic. They thus play an important symbolic role – tangible evidence of the aspiration to an independent future for Abkhazia – but to travel beyond its borders an internationally recognised passport (Russian, or Georgian in Gal/i region) is required.

I have a Russian passport with which I can travel abroad, but there is no Abkhazian one yet. When I receive our passport I will probably be proud that I am, like, a citizen. It signifies our statehood and is the most important document. Citizenship of Abkhazia without a passport – what's that all about? (Abkhaz, male, 24 year, Sukhum/i)

In and of itself this is not a problem, as long as there are no formal obstacles to the issuing of the document, and some young people enter adult life with three passports. When asked what passport he would have, one 16-year old from Gal/i answered: 'Both. With an Abkhazian passport you can't enter Georgia, with a Georgian [passport], you can't get in here. So you have to have both to live.'

The question of military service poses young people similar problems:

I will definitely serve in the army. Only I don't know whether in the Georgian or the Abkhazian... I have five years before the army still. If anything changes then I'll serve in the Georgian army but if nothing changes then in the Abkhazian. (Georgian-Mingrelian, male, 16 years, Gal/i)

The question of military service is one indicator of young people's attitude to the state and the degree of loyalty they have to its institutions. In Russia military service has ceased to be prestigious in recent times. In Abkhazia, and especially among Abkhaz, however,

responses to the question of whether they will serve in the army are unambiguous:

During the war I drummed it into my head that... when the time comes to defend the fatherland, even for a year, then I will defend it because I saw my older brothers, relatives and friends die. Why, even in peacetime, shouldn't I sacrifice a year, or a year and a half, after university, [to] pay my dues to the fatherland. (Abkhaz, male, 27 years, Gudauta)

Young people are forced to think about, and plan for, their future in the context of ongoing uncertainty about the political future of Abkhazia. Undoubtedly some are, rather sceptically, playing a waiting game. Others, the majority of whom are young people of non-Abkhaz nationalities, are critically oriented to the idea of sovereignty altogether. However, it is apparent that most young people already think about the Republic in which they live as an independent state in which the absence of individual attributes of a state is only a temporary circumstance.

Conclusion

The responsibility imposed on young people for the future of Abkhazia results in a high degree of patriotism and readiness to participate in key events. These attitudes among young people are also sustained by policies of remembering the war, since memories of the war involve not only stories of violence and destruction but also the memory of unity and patriotic resurgence. Young people are assigned a particular place here; those who take the baton must also accept responsibility for the future of Abkhazia, for securing its independence at any price.

The discourse of the preservation of tradition, *Apsuara* and language is fostered by adults but finds resonance among young people not least because it is directly connected to the memory of the war and the struggle for independence. In effect it takes the place of a national idea. Although discourses of ethno-cultural tradition and war essentially evoke the past, they serve to carve out a time and place for

the present by connecting past and present through, for example, oral narratives that link the heroism of participants in the last war with the gallantry of the armed defence of the fatherland extolled in popular epic literature. The preservation of ethno-cultural tradition – language and *Apsuara* – is portrayed as a direct continuation of the achievements of those who died in the last conflict. Indeed, since it is the chaos of war that is blamed for the destruction of established moral frameworks, the revival of tradition in the search for new values appears to be a logical next step in rebuilding Abkhazian society.

Conforming to the expectations of adults, young Abkhazians declare a determination to preserve those traditions – language and *Apsuara* – that are essential to the definition of Abkhaz ethnicity. In essays describing their generation, young people sometimes complain that they are losing those traditions and forgetting their language. This negative comparison with the older generation induces a kind of guilt complex.

Although young people already think about Abkhazia as a state, as yet there are no generally accepted and shared ideas which might become ‘national’. In the absence of such, our research suggests, Abkhaz youth project ethnic ideals as shared, national ideas; this is perceived cautiously by young people of non-Abkhaz nationality. ‘Achieving independence’ is important to Abkhazian youth; to let go of this would be to betray the memory of those who died. For the majority of young people, however, ‘independence’ is more an expectation than an action plan. The danger inherent in this is that if waiting for independence results in the postponement of life plans, then it may increase levels of dissatisfaction already tangible not only among young people of non-Abkhaz nationalities. Already today it is evident that the patriotic views of young people contrast significantly with the relatively high level of dissatisfaction with current government structures.

Without any real change in society, and in the absence of evidence that adults themselves are prepared to invest in pursuing the values of *Apsuara* (including in the public sphere), support for the authority of today’s ‘elders’ cannot be guaranteed. Moreover, although patriotism (whether spontaneous or cultivated) among youth holds great potential for driving forward

social transformation, it may also foster nationalistic attitudes, especially among unemployed youth who have few educational or migration prospects.

The formation of a new statehood presupposes the strengthening of the identity of the nation-forming people – the Abkhaz. The common experience of the war has shaped new solidarities uniting people of different nationalities. However, relations between those who fought on opposite sides in the most recent conflict are not without their tensions and there remains a generalised image of the enemy as ‘Georgians’ or, rather, ‘Georgia’. The memory of who took up what position during the events of 1992-3 remains as significant today as before and sometimes influences interethnic attitudes. The basic perception that the enemy lies across the border still exists despite the development and maintenance of individual, personal or social contacts with those currently living in Georgia.

Abkhaz youth develops its identity largely around the idea of language and tradition, which are strengthened through remembering the war of 1992-3. Young people of other nationalities view this relatively empathetically although they are not prepared to fully adopt these identity markers. *Apsuara* or Abkhaz language, in their opinion, are insufficient to unite residents of Abkhazia and, in contrast, they emphasise the equality of all ethnic groups and the mutual forgiveness of past hurts as unifying factors.

Thus, youth of different nationalities in Abkhazia exist in a globalised space caught between discourses of the preservation of local traditions and modernisation and between confronting memories of war and the struggle for the right to a peaceful future. These tensions come together in a creative way to shape a new image among young people of the ‘modern Abkhazian’ who, while retaining strong ties to Abkhazian culture and history, consciously seeks to establish a stable everyday life in which education (including higher education), employment, the ability to support a family and to access decent healthcare, feature strongly.

Notes

¹ The capital city of Abkhazia is referred to in Georgian as Sukhumi but in Abkhazia as

Sukhum. The name of the region of Gal/i is similarly disputed.

² The Republic of Abkhazia, formerly the Abkhazian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, lies in the north-western Caucasus. It is washed by the Black Sea and has 210km of coastline. Its territory covers 8,600 square kilometres of which 64% is mountainous although, to the South, hills and lowland predominate. More than 55% of the Republic is forested (with oak, beech, hornbeam, chestnut, fir and spruce), while the coast enjoys subtropical vegetation. The political situation in the Republic means there are no accurate demographic statistics; UNDP (1998) estimated the population in 1998 at between 180,000 and 220,000 although Georgian sources often cite a figure between 150-200,000 where as Abkhaz sources tend to cite figures approaching 300,000. More than half the population live in urban areas. The recognised state languages of the Republic are Abkhaz and Russian and the currency used is the Russian rouble. The Republic has seven district administrations, seven towns and five urban settlements. The capital is the city of Sukhum/i. In the *perestroika* period historically rooted conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia, that had been compounded during the Soviet period, intensified and led to armed conflict in 1992-3 (Cornell 2001). The main issue of contention was the political status of Abkhazia (Coppeters 2005). Despite declaring independence in 1999 Abkhazia remains unrecognised and according to international law remains *de jure* part of Georgia. As a result of the conflict, more than 200,000 (approximate estimation) Georgians fled Abkhazia to Georgia and the population of Abkhazia was halved although some of those who fled, especially Mingrelians from the Gal/i region, have since returned.

³ The research was conducted by a group of researchers from the Scientific Research Centre 'Region', Ul'ianovsk State University – Elena Omelchenko, Ol'ga Dobroshtan, Evgeniia Lukianova, Guzel Sabirova, Elena Starkova, Andrei Livanov, and Natal'ia Goncharova as part of the RIME project (funded by the EC, Ref: B7-701 2002 RX 154). The research employed both quantitative and qualitative methods, including a survey of the youth population (based on a sample of 580 people aged 14-30); in-depth thematic interviews (fifteen in total conducted in Sukhum/i, Gudauta, Gul'ripsh, Ldza and Gal/i);

focus groups (five in total conducted with students of colleges and higher educational institutions in Sukhum/i); and anonymous essays written by students of schools, colleges and higher educational institutions answering three questions set by the interviewer (ninety in total from schools, colleges and higher educational institutions in Sukhum/i). These sites of research were selected in order to include Abkhazia's main towns as well as a number of rural districts although the choice was constrained partially by issues of access. The survey sample was generated on the basis of sex, age and place of residence and young people were surveyed in schools, colleges, universities and, in the case of the older cohort, at home. This sampling method has distinct limitations and was necessitated by the particular circumstances of working in Abkhazia, where, for example, the large number of flats and blocks of flats left in ruins or uninhabited made it difficult to use the random route method. An additional problem was the lack of reliable, official socio-demographic data upon which to base the quota calculations. The quotas were calculated, therefore, on the basis of local expert estimates of the population's composition. A particularly contested, and politically important, question relates to the proportion of ethnic Abkhaz in the total population of Abkhazia. Because of the lack of expert agreement on this question, it was decided not to include ethnicity as a quota variable in the construction of the sample and, as a result, there is a relatively low number of non-Abkhaz in our sample. Thus, in presenting analysed data, a single figure combining responses for all 'non-Abkhaz' ethnic groups is presented alongside the data for ethnic Abkhaz youth.

⁴ The group despatched to Abkhazia simultaneously conducted a month-long training programme for local activists. The programme introduced them to the fundamental principles of planning, conducting and analysing sociological research using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Participants in the training were able to both observe and participate in various stages of the research.

⁵ Toasting plays an important role in Abkhazian society; it is, in effect, a kind of table-prayer. When Abkhazians get together around the table the third toast is traditionally dedicated to those who have died.

⁶ Gal/i is the eastern region of Abkhazia and to this day remains the most problematic. It is

protected by CIS peacekeeping forces and UN representatives. Lower Gal/i remains outside the control of the Abkhazian authorities. The population of the region is predominantly Mingrelians who, in the Soviet period, were not differentiated officially from Georgians.

⁷ The majority of Georgians living in Abkhazia prior to the war belonged to a sub-ethnic group called Mingrelians, though most Mingrelians consider themselves to be Georgian. Many do, however, speak Mingrelian, a language related to but distinct from Georgian, see Olson et al (Ed) 1994: 471-4.

⁸ For more on the conceptualisation of war memories at the state, collective and individual level, see Ashplant, Dawson & Roper (Eds) 2000.

⁹ In drawing up the list of possible answers to the question about the potential consolidating factors in Abkhazian society, we sought to include formal state-building symbols (such as 'living on the same territory', 'strong government'), as well as ideas circulating widely at the time (such as 'preserving the memory of the war', '*Apsuara*') and some critical ideas (such as 'ethnic equality' and 'forgiveness of past hurts'). This is, of course, not an exhaustive list of potentially unifying factors, but is the full list used in this particular research.

¹⁰ The second, and equally salient, factor cited by young people was tradition (*Apsuara*).

¹¹ '*Apsuara*' might be defined as a body of inherited cultural knowledge including an ethical system, a code of laws of national identification and norms of traditional Abkhazian culture that incorporate wider Caucasian and world values.

¹² One of the main reasons why the issue of 'tradition' is so widely discussed in contemporary Abkhazia is the significant shift in the balance of power from the urban to the rural population in the post-war period. Rapid modernisation and detraditionalisation during the Soviet period had led to significant social and cultural differentiation in Abkhazia between the prosperous, tourist-oriented, Black sea coast regions - where the new national intelligentsia was concentrated - and the partially 'modernised', but still largely traditional, patriarchal mountain settlements. In the period after the conflict, however, the population of the formerly rich seaside districts turned back to agriculture – the cultivation of citrus fruits and

nuts – in the wake of the collapse of the tourist business. In the post-war period, connections between the towns and villages have strengthened further as residents from rural mountainous areas have occupied empty houses in the towns whilst urban residents have a renewed connection to rural areas as a result of the experience of evacuation or dependency on the villages for food.

¹³ 'Elders' is a collective term that implies not only parents, older brothers and grandfathers but also ancestors who, in some earlier epoch, fought for the preservation of the tiny Abkhazian nation and its traditions, or who died in pursuit of this cause.

¹⁴ It should be noted that this is the exception rather than the rule.

¹⁵ The importance of Russia in shaping horizons for the future for young people in Abkhazia should not be underestimated. Many of their hopes for the future are associated with Russia: their prospects for study and work, not to mention that a Russian passport provides the opportunity to travel abroad. However, attitudes are more complex than this suggests. While welcoming the development of relations with Russia – the invitations extended to young people in Abkhazia to attend youth rallies and events in Russia for example – there is also an awareness of the dangers of becoming small change in Russia's pocket while young people who do travel to Russia sometimes experience for themselves the anti-Caucasian sentiments of some Russians. For further discussion of the role of Russia see: Baev 1998 and Kolsto 2006.

¹⁶ The exception to the rule, again, is Gal/i where this question is not so straightforward:

I don't feel a citizen of Abkhazia
nor a citizen of Georgia. I am in
between. I can't answer.
(Georgian-Mingrelian, male, 16
years, Gal/i)

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