

## **Occupation versus Independence:**

*An analysis of Georgia's and Abkhazia's different understandings of the conflict in Abkhazia and its impact on the intractable nature*



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# Abstract

This study aims to examine how Abkhazia and Georgia respectively understands the conflict of Abkhazia and how these understandings may affect any attempts to resolve the conflict. A qualitative content analysis method has been conducted based on information, statements and reports from Abkhazia's respectively Georgia's government pages, analyzed through the theoretical framework of intractable conflict. The results show implications on that the two sides have substantially different understandings of the conflict. Where Georgia regards it as an interstate conflict between Georgia and Russia where Abkhazia is occupied by Russia, Abkhazia views it as a conflict between them and Georgia, where the role of identity and struggle for independence is presented as important factors for the intractability of the conflict. These differing understandings are furthermore argued to serve as a hindrance to attempts for development and resolution, as Abkhazia disputes any attempts due to the overt focus on the conflict as a Georgia - Russian issue, and thus a dismissal of the suppression of their identity and right to nationhood. This study suggests that although the conflict cannot solely be understood through the Georgian – Abkhazian relationship, putting the Abkhaz perspective in focus and examining the role of identity and different understanding of the conflict, do have some implications for the intractability of the conflict.

*Keywords: Georgia, Abkhazia, intractable conflicts, identity,*

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# 1. Introduction

“Georgia for Georgians” – an ethnocentric slogan branded by the Georgian president in the early 1990’s under the post-soviet transition to the independent Georgian state, where the ethnically different autonomous entities of Abkhazia and South Ossetia were the most challenging heritage from the Soviet period for the creation of the sovereign Georgian state (Max Plack Institute, 2009a). This slogan reveals something interesting that can be crucial to understand the intractable conflicts between the Georgian state and the two breakaway states of Abkhazia and South Ossetia that began in the early 1990’s and remain unsolved today – the role of ethnic identity, and the struggle for independence and nationhood within a multicommunal state.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the independence of the Republic of Georgia the same year, the country witnessed several violent conflicts on the issue of statehood and ethnic identity (Markedonov, 2015:71). The Georgian - Abkhazian war in 1992-3 was one of the most violent conflicts in the region. The war broke out as Abkhazia strived for autonomy and independence, while Georgia fought to preserve the territorial integrity of their newly independent state (Greenberg Research, Inc, 1999). Three decades after the end of the conflict, the issue of Abkhazia is still highly politicized as no lasting solution or progress of the relationship between the two have been found (Vartanyan, 2020). As the antagonistic relationship between the two remains, the conflict have gotten to a stalemate and can thus be understood as having become intractable.

Although the war in Abkhazia in the early 1990’s emphasis on the role of distinct ethnic groups and their struggle for statehood, Russia’s role in the conflict has also often been highlighted as an important factor for the conflict (Perchoc, 2017:5). It seems to be a disconnect within the perception of the conflict. Where Georgia views Abkhazia as a territory occupied by Russia, Abkhazia views themselves as an independent and sovereign state (Krylov, 2001:287; United Nations Security Council [UNSC], 2008). Against the backdrop of the worsening relations between Georgia and Russia in the early 2000’s, and the Georgia-Russo war in South Ossetia in 2008, the conflicts in the breakaway state of Abkhazia have become more attached to the geopolitical nature of the conflict, rather addressing it as the ‘Russian-Georgian problem’, moving away from addressing it as internal conflicts between Abkhazia and Georgia (Klimenko, 2018). The issue of Abkhazia today is often accounted for through the

lens of the tense relationship between Georgia and Russia. However, the historical importance of ethnic identities and the struggle for nationhood and sovereignty should not be overshadowed as factors for the continuation of the conflict. It seems though that Abkhazia as an individual actor to the conflict has been somewhat forgotten within the research field. Thus, an examination of the Abkhazian side in, and their understanding of, the conflict and how this stand in contrast to Georgia will be insightful for a richer understanding of the complex intractable nature of the conflict, as it continues to prevail today three decades later.

## 1.1. Purpose and thesis question

This study sets out to examine how the conflict of 1992-3 and the political issue of Abkhazia today is understood by Abkhazia, respectively Georgia through a qualitative content analysis of government statements and information regarding the issue of Abkhazia. As stated earlier, much of the literature surrounding the conflict of Abkhazia understands the issue through the geopolitical struggle between Georgia and Russia, often disregarding the issue of separate ethnic identity and the struggle for nationhood, that often is explained as the cause for the emergence of the conflict in the first place (Cornell, 2002; Souleimanov, 2013). Furthermore, Abkhazia's role in the conflict is often overshadowed by the interference of Russia. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to try to put the Abkhazia's perspective in focus and the contrast to Georgia's and analyze if it can yield an explanation for the intractable nature of the conflict. This will be done through the theoretical framework of intractable conflict, which provides insight in conflicts that persists for decades with little possibility for resolution because of the fundamental needs and goals of the parties, often linked to identity (Bar-Tal, 2007; Kriesberg, 2010).

The aim of this study is to analyze how the different sides understands and define the conflict, the issue, and the relationship to the other. And in extension, to review if the findings of the different understandings of the conflict can bring any clarity to why the conflict has gotten to a stalemate and how it may have affected any attempts to find a way forward. Therefore, the thesis question driving this paper will be as followed: *How does Abkhazia respectively Georgia understand the conflict, and how does this affect attempts of development and resolution within the conflict?*

## 2. Background

The Abkhaz identity is a distinct ethnic group from the northwest Caucasus who has their own Abkhazian language (Krylov, 2001). Under the Soviet Union, Abkhazia was granted the status of an Autonomous Republic (ASSR), slightly below Georgia, who had the role of a Union Republic in the federal structure of the Soviet Union (Vartanyan, 2020). Abkhazia constitutes of an area of around 8.7000 square kilometers, located in between the Black Sea and the Caucasus Mountains, bordering Russia in the north and Georgia to the southeast (Human Rights Watch, 2011). The population of Abkhazia in the early 1990's was estimated to 525.000, where most of the population; 45,7% were ethnically Georgians and 17,8% were ethnically Abkhazians (Markedonov, 2015:72). Due to the conflict in the territory the populations have changed drastically. Although there is no reliable information on the exact demographic composition of the Abkhazian territory today, one of the more recent census data, as of 2020, estimate the population of Abkhazia to 245.000, whereas 51,3% are of Abkhazian ethnicity (Zirakashvili, 2021).

The conflict between Abkhazia and Georgia emerged in the late 20:th century. In the context of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Georgia's declaration of independence in 1991, Abkhazia sought for greater autonomy from Georgia (Human Rights Watch, 2011). The Caucasus region was an integral part of the Soviet Union, divided into 9 different territorial units, in which 40 different ethnic groups lived (Krag & Funch, 1994:13). As the Soviet Union consisted of a plethora of different ethnic and national communities, a central state policy under the period the USSR was to create a common Soviet identity throughout the territory (ibid). Under the period of the rule of the Soviet Union this had been quite successful as the ideology of communism served as a glue binding the society and state together, but during the second half of the 1980's the ideology more and more lost its legitimation and became increasingly more discredited. (Cornell, et al., 2002:46). The ideological vacuum this process created set the scene for the rise of ethnic identity and nationalism, which can be explained as to have replaced communism as the dominant political ideology (Cornell, et al., 2002:46; Souleimanov, 2013:74). This process can be witnessed in both entities, where nationalist feelings among both Georgians and Abkhazians grew under the political turmoil of the dissolution of the Soviet Union (UNSC, 1993:4). In the end of the Soviet Union ethnocentric

feelings and rhetoric had emerged, a clear example being the slogan “Georgia for Georgians” calling for a mono-ethnic state (Max Plack Institute, 2009a).

As the ethnic tension grew between the two groups, so did Abkhazia’s demand for sovereignty as well, which in the extension culminated into violent struggles (UNSC, 1993:4; Klimenko, 2018:7). Major clashes between Georgia and Abkhazia had already been witnessed in 1989, and again in 1991, but tension escalated in late 1992 as the Georgian government, following their independence, chose to annul all legal act of the Soviet period which included the status of Abkhazia as an autonomous state (Krylov, 2001:284). For Abkhazia, who had been an autonomous republic under the Soviet Union, this decision sparked enragement, setting the scene for the conflict which began shortly after (Jasutis, 2018). The struggle for sovereignty between Abkhazia and Georgia grew into a 14 month long violent conflict in 1992-3 between the Georgian government and local paramilitary groups, where Abkhazia fought for greater autonomy or full independence while Georgia fought to preserve the territorial integrity of their newly independent state (Markedonov, 2015:71; Greenberg Reasearch, Inc, 1999). The conflict came to an end when the Abkhazian forces succeeded to push back the Georgian military and gained control over the territory (Cornell et al, 2002:49). The legacy of the war was widespread, with between 10.000-15.000 battle related deaths and 200.000 people forced to flee their homes, most of them ethnically georgians (UCDP, 2024; Greenberg Reasearch, Inc, 1999). After the end of the war Russia had a crucial role within the following peace process given the roal of facilitater in the negotiations and of provider of peace keeping forces (Max Plack Insititute, 2009b). However, since the end of the war in 1992-3, unrest have reoccured in Abkhazia on several occasions, such as in 1998, 2001 and 2008 (Cornell et al , 2002:68; Jasutis, 2018:5).

In 1994, Abkhazia declared themselves sovreign, followed by a referendum in 1999 where the majority of the Abkahz population voted for the creation of an independent and democratic Abkhazian state and the act of State Independence of the Republic of Abkhazia was adopted (Krylov, 2001:287). Abkhazia is today *de facto* independent, however not recognized by the majority of the international community. Since 2008 Russia have recognized the independence of Abkhazia, followed by four other countries (UNSC, 2008). Thus, while not being under the direct control of Georgia, Abkhazia remians *de jure* a part of the Republic of Georgia (Clogg, 2008). Georgia on the other hand views Abkhazia as rightfullt georgian territory and states that the region is under the occupation of Russia (UNSC, 2008). Since the emergence of the violence conflict in 1992-3 the issue of the conflict has not been resolved and the relationship



between Georgia and Abkhazia remain highly conflictual (Vartanyan, 2020; Council of Europe, 2023). Thus today, the conflict of Abkhazia is still a highly political issue, remaining three decades after the end of the war.

### 3. Previous Research

There is a profound body of literature addressing the cause of conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia, which can be divided into two; literature explaining the on-set and emergence of the war in 1992-3; and literature analyzing the continuation of the conflict, in which the role of Russia is the focal point of the analysis. In the literature concerning the cause of conflict in Abkhazia in the 1990's the focus is often pointed towards the role of ethnic identity, social inequality, and identity politics. Svante Cornell (2002) and Emil Souleimanov (2013) both set out to analyze the cause of conflict in the South Caucasus, placing identity as an important catalyst. Souleimanov argues that the most important explanatory factors for the conflict is the ethnic diversity and majority-minority population in Georgia, and the role of ancient hatreds strongly featured in Georgia (Souleimanov, 2013). Cornell (2002) similarly sets out to analyze the cause of ethnic conflict and argues for the role of ethnic identity, group cohesion, grievances based on identity, similarly to Souleimanov (2013), but places most of his emphasis to the emergence of conflict in Abkhazia on the fact of their autonomous status within the Soviet Union (Cornell, 2002). The findings of Cornell's research on the role of previous autonomy status as a driver for conflict is also present in Souleimanov's argument. He writes that the possession of political administrative territorial entities in for example Abkhazia, strengthened the in-group cohesion of the minority which was essential for the development of the violent conflict (Souleimanov, 2013). What can be concluded from previous research on the conflict in 1992-3 is that the role of ethnic identity, identity politics and previous autonomy has played an important role in the cause of conflict.

Whereas much of the literature explaining the conflict on-set and escalation of the Abkhaz war in 1992-3 points to the relationship between Georgia and Abkhazia, another strand of research on the issue rather analyzes the conflict through the Russian-Georgian relationship when trying to explain the nature of the conflict and why it remains. Many researchers highlight Russia's high economic investment in Abkhazia resulting in tight exclusive linkage between the two (Gerrits & Bader, 2016; Artman, 2013; Lynch, 2002). One argument for the continuation of the conflict is that the breakaway states are playing the long game where not losing is seen as winning and Russia's operation in Abkhazia continues to sustain the status-quo of the conflict through their political, economic, and military support (Lynch, 2002; Gerrits & Bader, 2016). Thus, an argument to why the conflict of Abkhazia remains is that the break-

away states are argued to hold out as long as they can, as they believe the status-quo plays in their favor. Russia has been heavily involved in the Abkhaz conflict, non the least through several peacekeeping troops whose purpose have been explained to be about ending violence and ethnic conflict, but also to protect Russian citizens, strengthen the boarder and to secure control over resources (Gerrits & Bader, 2016). However, above that, it is argued that Russia's involvement in Abkhazia is linked to a larger interest; namely to defend their position in the North Caucasus and to exert influence over any future negotiations in Georgia (Gerrits & Bader, 2016; Artman, 2013).

German (2006) is also analyzing the Abkhazian conflict trough the perspective of a collision of Georgian and Russian interests. Here it is put forward a doubt if there is truly a genuine interest from the Russian side to facilitate resolution to the conflict, as they often claim. Instead, it is argued that their influence gives some leverage over Tbilisi, and where an instable Georgia is less attractive to the West, which would be beneficial for Russia (German, 2006). As argued by German (2006), the territorial conflicts in Georgia were from the beginning a dispute between Tbilisi and the separatists in the breakaway states. However, the conflict has developed to have become a battleground between Georgian and Russian interests, where Georgia seeks to maintain its territorial integrity in the face of Russia's persistent interference (German, 2006). Due to Russia presence in Abkhazia, the lack of any viable option to Russia can be explained as a factor that is hindering any conflict resolution process (Gerrits & Bader, 2016). Russia's influence is thus, in much literature argued to sustain the conflict of Abkhazia.

Through a review of the existing literature of the conflict of Abkhazia, a pattern is shown. Literature explaining the escalation of the conflict in the early 1990's often points to identity, and issue of ethnic conflict, meanwhile literature on the continuation of the conflict often points to Russia's involvement and interest as a factor of the intractable nature. Where the conflict of Abkhazia is viewed as between Georgia and Russia, and often disregarding the Abkhazian agency. Thus, the examination of Abkhazia's role in the conflict and how their relationship with Georgia may affect the conflict seems lacking. Although the explanatory factors over identity and nationhood have been proven by researcher as important for the emergence of the conflict, it seems to be a gap in the research addressing how these factors may affect the continuation of the conflict long after the end of the war in Abkhazia in 1993. Thereby, there is room to bring the research back to examine the conflict from the lens of internal conflict over nationhood and identity, putting Abkhazia in the focus of the analysis and their view on the conflict, which can be fruitful for a richer understanding of the complex and intractable nature of the conflict.

## 4. Theory

The theoretical framework applied on this study is the theory of intractable conflict, which is a perspective focused on explaining conflicts that can be defined as dead-locked with no clear termination of conflict or possible path to resolution or de-escalation, where the core issue primarily stems from conflicting identities and identity-based grievances pertaining to deprivation of one's identity (Kriesberg, 2010a; Coleman, 2003:6). Intractability is a complex concept that have been studied and defined from various disciplines and perspectives (Shabbir & Fayyaz, 2023:36). One perspective of intractability, which will be used in this paper, is developed by Daniel Bar-Tal (2007) and heavily draws from the social identity theory. The theory of social identity aims to explain how individuals has a fundamental need of belonging to a group, based on for example ethnicity and nationality. The perception of oneself is often understood in relation to the identity group they see themselves belonging to (Tajfel, 2010). In continuation the understanding of the own communal group is often understood in relation to others, where this is argued to lead to a process of classification of groups between one's own group who's seen in a positive light, and other groups, who especially in a conflict is regarded as the enemy (Demmers, 2016). This theory of social identity in the extension become important for the framework of intractable conflicts.

Intractable conflicts in this sense are thus related to the identity of the involved ethnic groups and conflict is seen to erupt when "their goals, intentions and/or actions are perceived as being mutually incompatible", and the core needs and values within the contesting parities are seen as non-negotiable (Bar-Tal, 2007:1431; Coleman, 2003:6). These conflicts are seen to emerge from deep-rooted conflicts about identity issues and grievances. When members of one group are perceived to be denied their identity, security, and political participation on the bases of their group membership at the hands of the other contesting group, conflict can emerge (Coleman, 2003:11-12). This will be especially plausible if there is no other legitimate way to channel those grievances trough political processes (Crocker, 2005:6). Conflicts that include deep-seated grievances pertaining to one's ethnic identity are especially likely to produce intractable conflicts (Crocker, 2005:6; Kriesberg, 2010a). This is especially likely when each side agree that the other is responsible for their experienced grievances, and that is in no sense

a joint responsibility, which will make the conflict more likely to be destructive (Kriesberg, 2010b:191).

Kriesberg (2010a) present some characteristics for these types of conflicts, which Bar-Tal (2007) later builds upon. These characteristics are defined as; *protracted: violent; irresolvable, total* and; *zero-sum*. The *protracted* characteristics defines that intractable conflicts persist for decades which implies that the conflicting parties has had several confrontations which result in an accumulation of hostility and animosity (Bar-Tal, 2007:1432). The beginning of the conflict is often contested and can be pushed back further as the conflict develops, as new grievances and suffering are recalled (Kriesberg, 2010a). The conflict also witnesses several *violent* confrontations over time fluctuating in frequency and intensity and the killed or wounded members of either group has a strong emotional impact on all the members of the group, as they perceive the violence as intentionally inflicted by the other group (Bar-Tal, 2007:1432). The conflicts are *irresolvable* where no peaceful resolution is believed to be possible by the members of the conflicting groups, as neither side can win or are willing to compromise (Bar-Tal, 2007:1432; 2013:36). They are *total* because they revolve around essential and basic goals, needs and values that are perceived to be indispensable for the existence and survival of the social group (Bar-Tal, 2007, p.1433). Groups sharing a common identity can develop fear that other groups are threatening the physical and cultural survival of one's own identity (Kriesberg, 2010a). Because of the totality of the goals and needs the conflict is *zero-sum* in which neither side can compromise or consider concessions as they only focus on their own needs and goals, which they view as essential for their group's existence (Bar-Tal, 2007:1433; Crocker, 2005:7). These conflicts tend to be more difficult to solve as the other side's goal will be rejected more vigorously (Kriesberg, 2010b).

Of importance of the long duration of intractable conflict is that the belief of both sides of the conflict is as such that they believe they have the human and material resources available to continue the conflict (Bar-Tal, 2007:1434). Economic dependency and military and political relationships from external actors will impact state autonomy and independence and thus have effect on the intractability of internal conflicts (Demmers, 2016:88). *International linkages* are therefore argued to play an important role in the continuation of intractable conflicts, as external actors often contribute to sustain the conflict through financial and military assistance aid to one of the conflicting parties (Kriesberg, 2010a).

# 5. Research Design

## 5.1. Method

To answer the line of question, this study will consist of a single-N case study to analyze how Georgia and Abkhazia are portraying the history of the conflict, the relationship between the two and their goals and intentions regarding the status of Abkhazia. The *case* is the Abkhaz-Georgian conflict from the 1990's to today. What is being analyzed in this case is the different understandings and definitions of the conflict from the Abkhaz respectively the Georgian side based on text retrieved from each side's government pages. To conduct this analysis this paper will employ the method of qualitative content analysis, which relies on data from text, where the object of observation is the latent content of the text such as meanings, motives and purposes and is presented in the form of narratives and quotations (Halperin & Heath, 2017:353-4). A qualitative content analysis is useful to apply to this case as the method focus on the latent content of meanings and motives it will allow the analysis to clearly focus on each sides understanding of the conflict for a more thick discriptual understanding. The starting point of the content analysis method is that there is a meaning to why the text have been produced , and a meaning behind the words within the text (Krippendorff, 2013:25). Therefor it is a sutiable choice to be able to answer the reaserch question.

Although the study is a case study a comparative research design will also be employed. This is because the study aims to examine the dynamics of the different understandings and definitions of the conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia and how it may play a role in the intractable nature of the conflict. A comparative design can take the many different shapes, and even a single case study can have a comparative design (Halperin & Heath, 2017:153). The comparative research design will enable the illustration of possible differences in the understanding of the conflict and the relationship. Thus, a comparative design will be applied to the qualitative content analysis which will strengthen the findings, as Halperin & Heath (2017:214) argues that good case studies are nearly almost find in a comparative context. This is because the findings of how Abkhazia understand the conflict does not give much of an explanation to the complexity of the conflict unless compared to Georgia's perspective.

Furthermore, it is relevant to critically reflect upon the limitations to the research design. A weakness of the qualitative content analysis method is that these types of study are often limited in terms of generalizability to other contexts (ibid). A similar issue within generalizability can be detected within the chosen theory of intractable conflicts. This is because each case of intractable conflicts is idiosyncratic, meaning that each has its own set of unique dynamic factors responsible for its persistence (Coleman et al, 2007:1455). Which makes generalizability from one case to another difficult; a factor that has been considered throughout the process of this study.

## 5.2. Material

To answer the question for this thesis, the material used are based on information, statements and reports retrieved from both the Georgian and Abkhazian government pages. The choice to use information published by each government found on their home page has been made regarding the chosen method of qualitative content analysis. As the aim of the paper is to examine how each side understand and define the conflict and the status of Abkhazia, it is relevant to use material from the separate governments. This is because statements and information from governments can be seen as the official records of how a state officially views and defines a specific case, thus supporting the validity of the study. However, it is of importance to acknowledge that official sources like such being uses in this study, raises the questions of political biases (Halperin & Heath, 2017:354). Therefore, it is relevant to point out that this material should not be taken as given truths. Although this study aims to examine each side understanding, the potential political biases provide evidence for each sides perception of the conflict and is therefore helpful for this study's analysis. Furthermore, in a content analysis there needs to be a sampling plan to limit the scope of text analyzed (Krippendorff, 2013:114). The chosen material has followed the criteria that it has to have been published by each side's governmental agencies, where the primary focus is concerning the war in, or the status of Abkhazia, or the relationship between Abkhazia and Georgia today, and available in English.

To further be able to contextualize the findings of the analysis the choice has been made to include secondary sources from the international community, addressing the conflict in

Abkhazia, such as statements and reports from the European Union and the United Nations, and qualitative reports from international organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross. These sources are used for a richer understanding of the issue between Georgia and Abkhazia and to put the findings in its context.

### 5.3. Operationalization

This study analyzes how Georgia and Abkhazia understands and retells the conflict, and how this may affect any attempts to resolve the conflict, through the theoretical framework of intractable conflict. A qualitative content analysis has been applied on the chosen material gathered from background information, reports, and public statements by both the Abkhazian and the Georgian governments. To understand the content of the material, what words and phrases are used, and its meanings have been analyzed. Furthermore, just as what they are saying is of important, what is not said or expressed is also relevant for the analysis (Mayring, 2023:314). Therefore, the prevalence of references to the conflict and the role of the other have been examined. As Krippendorf (2013:28) writes, texts do not have on single meaning, but can rather be analyzed from various perspective. Thereby, an operationalization of the chosen theory and how it will be applied on the material is needed, which is presented below.

Based on the chosen theory of intractable conflict, the content of the material has been examined through the concepts of grievances, violence, totality, zero-sum, irresolvable, and international linkages, which is described by Bar-Tal (2007) and Kriesberg (2010) as factors contributing to intractable conflicts. These factors are often closely interlinked with each other (Kriesberg, 2010), and therefore the characteristics of totality and zero-sum will be examined and operationalized together, and so will the characteristics of irresolvable and international linkages be as well. What has been coded from the material is how each side define the cause of conflict, the status of Abkhazia and their goals within the conflict moving forward.

The analysis will be split into three parts. The first section will focus on the emergence of the conflict where the concepts of grievances and violence will be in focus, which is defined as the most prevalent cause for the emergence of ethnic violence (Bar-Tal, 2013; Kriesberg, 2010a). The second section of the analysis will focus on aspects that are sustaining the conflict, which is rarely identical to the reasons for the emergence of conflict (Kriesberg, 2010a). This



section will focus on the total and zero-sum characteristics of conflict, as well as irresolvable and international linkages, which can be argued to be important factors to why the conflict have become difficult to solve. Lastly, the final section of analysis will examine the difficulty to find a resolution to the conflict, based on the characteristics analyzed previously in the analysis.

It is the concepts drawn from the theory of intractable framework that the material will be analyzed from. Therefore, the conceptualization and operationalization of the characteristics used in this analysis will be presented below. The conceptualization of the characteristics applied in this study is based on the literature on Intractable conflicts from Bar-Tal (2007; 2013), Kriesberg (2010), Coleman (2003), and Demmers (2016). The operationalizations of these concepts however have been developed solely for this study to fit the conflict of interest and the material the study is based on.

### *Grievances*

Perceived deprivation on needs such as acceptance, security and political participation based on the identity of the own ethnic group at the hands of the contesting groups are from the theoretical framework of intractable conflict described to be a cause for conflict (Coleman, 2003; Bar-Tal, 2013; Demmers, 2016). In this analysis the concept of identity-based grievances will be applied on the material by examining what identity-based grievances are referred to by respective side, and what is described to have caused the conflict in the first place.

### *Violence*

Bar-Tal (2013:43) explains how the loss of life and the memory of physical violence has a strong emotional impact on all the members of the group and will serve as a foundation for the development of the conflict. Thus, applying the concept of the importance of memory of violence will be done through examining how each side is describing the violence of the war in 1992-3, and what suffering they bring out.

### *Total nature and Zero-Sum*

In an intractable conflict the goals, needs and values of each group being perceived as indispensable for the survival of their social group (Bar-Tal, 2013:43). Because of the total nature of the needs and goals of each side, the conflict become zero-sum as neither can compromise or consider concessions as there is no way to extract oneself without an unacceptable loss in a value central for the identity (ibid). Operationalizing these concepts will be done through examining what each side describe as their most important goals and values

of the conflict, by primarily looking for how they speak about the status of Abkhazia and if the goals are linked to identity.

*Irresolvable & International linkages*

Finally, intractable conflicts are defined as irresolvable because neither party perceive a possible peaceful resolution of the conflict. Neither side believe the conflict can be resolved peacefully, nor do they believe they can compete with the other side militarily (Bar-Tal, 2013:47). This characteristic will be combined with the role of international linkages, which Kriesberg (2010) explains often play an important role in contributing to sustain the conflict by support and aid to one side of the conflict. This will be operationalized on the material through an examination of how each side describes Russia's role in the conflict and how it affects the conflict.

## 6. Analysis

### 6.1. Emergence of the conflict

This section sets out to examine Abkhazia's and Georgia's separate understandings of the emergence of the conflict in early 1990's, by focusing on the concepts of identity-based grievances and the memory of violence. The findings in this section furthermore become important for the following section of analysis when focusing on why the conflict have become difficult to solve.

#### 6.1.1. Understandings of causes of war

The theory of intractable conflicts argues that the beginning, and cause of a conflict is often highly contested between the conflicting parties, where one side is pointing back to previous grievances that the other side discounts as false (Kriesberg, 2010a). These perceived grievances in continuation become important for the identity of the group, and for their present and future existence (Bar-Tal, 2013). Therefore, looking at what grievances each side points to when remembering and retelling the emergence of the conflict is of importance for the analysis of how each side understand the root causes of conflict and how this play into the role of identity.

The Abkhazian view of the grievances is primarily prescribed to the decisions of the Georgian Government under the period of 1989-1990 that ignored the interstate relationship between Abkhazia and Georgia, which in its essence led to the abolition of the Abkhazian statehood (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Abkhazia [MFARA], 2024a), where Tbilisi recognized the state structures of the Soviet Union as illegal (President of the Republic of Abkhazia [PRA], 2024a). Within the framework of intractable conflicts, grievances stemming from a perceived deprivation of needs such as acceptance of identity is defined as a factor of which conflictual struggles can emerge from (Coleman, 2003:11-12). The Abkhazian

explanation of the struggle from the Georgian Government dismissing what Abkhazia perceived to be their right to independence and autonomy, can be interpreted as a deprivation of the acceptance of their identity, as nationhood and identity are often intertwined (Kriesberg, 2010a). The construction of the Abkhaz identity points to their autonomous status under the USSR period (PRA, 2024a), and can be understood as an ethno-nationalist identity and the grievances put forward in the material are linked to the believed deprivation of their identity.

Whereas grievances pointing to the deprivation of the Abkhaz identity is prevalent throughout the Abkhaz material, it is not seen in the Georgian information on the conflict. Within the Georgian material, grievances and causes of the war are not as frequently recited. More importantly it is not defined to be at the hand of Abkhazia, but rather due to the historical dominance and injustice perpetrated by Russia during the period of the Soviet Union (Government of Georgia [GoG], 2024b). In the government page on Georgia's historical background, only a brief sentence touches on the conflict, which states that additional conflict arouses in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia (GoG, 2024b). The cause of the conflict clearly points to the actions of Russia, stating that "In the process of struggle against the state independence of Georgia, the Russian imperial forces succeeded to form in Abkhazia the separatist public mood and in 1992-3 this separatist public mood inspired the Russia-Georgia war in Abkhazia." (GoG, 2024b). The agency of Abkhazia as an own group is not mentioned at all, rather Abkhazia is only mentioned in relation to Russia's action and intentions.

The discrepancy in the Georgian and Abkhazian understanding of the conflict is not surprising. Each side in a conflict has the need to see themselves in a positive light and reinterpret the history in such way, which often include painting the "other" as the aggressor (Crocker, 2005:7; Demmers, 2016:41-42) Only here, the resentment shown within Georgia is rarely pointed towards Abkhazia, but rather towards Russia. What can be interpreted from the different sides retelling of the beginning of conflict is that both sides' sees themselves as oppressed by a stronger, more dominant party trying to suppress their right to integrity and statehood. For Abkhazia, the perceived deprivation of their identity and right to nationhood is prevalent throughout their retelling of the conflict, whereas the same is not as frequently mentioned within the Georgian side. However, what can be seen and argued for is that throughout the conflict, each side has accumulated different grievances that has been incorporated into each side version of the history, which perpetuate both the conflict and the sense of resentment towards the "other" (Crocker, 2005:7). However, for Abkhazia, it is at the hands of Georgia that they had to suffer under, while Georgia on the other hand points to Russia as the cause of conflict.

## 6.1.2. The memory of violence

Another characteristic of intractable conflicts presented by Bar-Tal (2007) is the involvement of physical violence fluctuating in frequency and intensity over time. The consequence of physical violence is that it has an immense emotional impact on the group members (Bar-Tal, 2013:43). The war in Abkhazia in 1992-3 ended with between 10.000-15.000 battle related deaths and 200.000 people forced to flee their homes, becoming internally displaced people (IDP's) after the end of the war, most of them ethnically Georgians (UCDP, 2024; Greenberg Research, Inc, 1999). What can be drawn from the material from the Abkhazian government pages is that the violence witnessed during the war has left emotional memories of suffering within the Abkhaz community. In one instance they state for example how Georgia carried out a purposeful annihilation and suppression of the non-Georgian population (PRA, 2024a), and in another addressing it as a physical extermination of the peoples inhabiting Abkhazia (MFARA, 2024a). The memory of violence has a crucial effect on society as such experience creates important memory within the group of the human losses and sufferings and serves as a foundation of a culture of conflict. This culture preserves feelings of perceived depiction of cruelty, mistrust, inhumanity, and evilness of the others (Bar-Tal, 2013:43). In addition to how they address Georgia's action as an extermination and annihilation of the Abkhaz population, they also point to a "destruction of the material and spiritual culture of the Abkhaz nation", describing it as a "cultural genocide" where the history and culture of Abkhazia were destroyed (PRA, 2024a; MFARA 2024a). What can be interpreted by the Abkhazian perception is that the violence conducted by the Georgian military during the war is perceived and remembered as an attack on their identity, and the culture and history linked with it and is understood as purposefully enacted by Georgia.

In the Georgian description of the historical, events grievances in terms of violence perpetuated by the other side are described rather differently compared to Abkhazia. For example, they describe how mistakes were made by all involved sides which lead to human suffering and destruction (GoG, 2010). However they do point to the impact of violence in relation to the internally displaced people affected by the war, stating that "as a result of that war 80% of population were displaced from Abkhazia" (GoG, 2024b). Indeed, the war left hundred thousand of people displaced from their homes, and in the end of the war more than 200.000 ethnic Georgians had been displaced (Greenberg Research, Inc, 1999). The issue of

IDP's in Georgia has since the war in 1992-3 remained a highly politicized issue (Perchoc, 2017:7; Vartanyan, 2020). Georgia has as well accused the other side of carrying out 'ethnic cleansing' (Jasutis, 2018:4), where a report of the war by the UNSC (1993:4), provides accounts where frequent and severe violations directed at Georgians have been perpetrated by the Abkhazian forces. However, the recollection of violence perpetrated against the Georgian side is limited throughout the analyzed Georgian material. Kriesberg (2010b:191) states that conflict tends to be more destructive when both sides blame the other as responsible for the suffered violence in the conflict. This can be seen within the Abkhazian definition of the violence of war, whereas Georgia within the analyzed material perpetuate a more mutual responsibility for the violence. Such as in the "Georgian State Strategy of Occupied Territories" where a more neutral description of the violence of the war is put forward, pointing out that suffering and misconduct where perpetrated by both sides (GoG, 2010). This stands in clear contrast to the Abkhaz understanding, where the violence perpetrated against them, both physical and cultural, is referenced several times within their historical background on the conflict.

Nonetheless, Both the Georgian and Abkhazian side reflect several cases of violence perpetrated by the other side, addressed as purposeful annihilation or extermination (MFARA, 2024a), or ethnic cleansing (UNSC, 1993). The memory of violence and suffering connected to the own identity at the hands of the other side becomes important for the polarization of the conflict and of the other. The conflict, and the remembered violence can fuel the polarization of identities, where the own group is seen as righteous and victims of the conflict, and where the opponent is seen as the evil aggressor (Coleman, 2003). This can be seen within the Abkhazian understanding which described the conflict in terms of that "Georgia unleashed the war", and "Georgia conducted armed aggression against Abkhazia" (MFARA, 2024a; PRA, 2024a). Thus, portraying Georgia as the perpetrator. Although the construction of the "other" as negative is prevalent in the Abkhazian material, while the Georgian side does not depict Abkhazia as the "other" at all. Georgia rather depicts Russia as the aggressor.

## 6.2. Continuation of the conflict

The following sections examines how and why, based on the role of identities and the experience of grievances and violence, the conflict has become difficult to resolve. To do so the following sections will depart from the characteristics of an intractable conflict that is defines as total and zero-sum, as well as irresolvable and international linkages. Thus, this part focus on the second part of the thesis question which aims to examine how the different understanding of the conflict can be argued to impact attempts to resolve the conflict.

### 6.2.1. The status of Abkhazia

The memory of the perceived grievances at the hand of the other side, and the memory of violence and hardship perpetrated by the other, becomes in the continuation of the conflict an important aspect to understand the difficulties to reach a peaceful solution to the issue (Kriesberg, 2010a). Intractability can be understood as a product of polarized zero-sum notions of identity according to Crocker, (2005), in which conflicts that continue over a long period often led to the accumulation of grievances which become incorporated into each side version of the history. As addressed in previous sections the goals of each side at the emergence of the war in 1992-3 was for Abkhazia to obtain their independence and autonomous state, which had been annulled by the action of the newly formed sovereign Georgian state (MFARA, 2024a). For Georgia on the other hand the goal was to protect the territory of Abkhazia witch they viewed as belonging to their territorial boundaries (GoG, 2010). These contradicting goals and needs are continuing present regarding to how the status of Abkhazia is described within each party today. For Abkhazia the status of their state is described as a “sovereign, democratic, lawful state, historically established according to the right of nation to free self-determination.” (PRA, 2024b). However, the Georgian perception of the status of Abkhazia tells a much different tail. According to the Georgian perception Abkhazia is the legal and integral part of Georgia, and is under occupation of the Russian Federation (GoG, 2024a), and their aim within this issue is to reverse the process of the annexation by Russia and to reintegrate the territories

(GoG, 2010). However, Georgia first declared Abkhazia occupied in a resolution passed in 2008, following Russia's declaration of the independence of Abkhazia (Jasutis, 2018:2).

Abkhazia has several times discredited Georgia's statement on Abkhazia as being occupied by Russia. They disputed this discourse and states how "the thousand-year statehood of Abkhazia is not a subject for discussion" clearly stating that the republic of Abkhazia is only an ally to the Russian Federation which is made clear in their legislation (MFARA, 2024b). Georgia on the other hand states how they will not give up the territory of Abkhazia, and thus continue to strive for the full integration of the territory to the Georgian political sphere (GoG, 2010).

The two definitions of the status of Abkhazia stands in complete contradiction to each other. What causes the intractable nature of the conflict is the perception of that because the groups fear that if they do not fully achieve their goals, they will have difficulty existing or will even disappear as a distinct entity, because the goals and needs are essential and indispensable for the continuing existence of the group's identity (Bar-Tal, 2013:37). This point of view can be regarded within the Abkhazian understanding of the conflict, and how they point to the Georgian use of military means to try to suppress the Abkhaz identity (PRA, 2024a). Neither side are willing to compromise or comply with the other side's goals, because they fear that if they do not achieve their own goals, it will be difficult for them as a group to continue to exist, complying with the other side may for them even mean that they might disappear as a distinct entity (Bar-Tal, 2013:37). This is especially prominent in the content of Abkhazia's declaration of their status and the issue of the conflict while not as applicable for Georgia. For Abkhazia, it can be argued that if Georgia would get their goal of de-occupying the territories in which they state is occupied by Russia, it would mean a threat to the survival of the Abkhaz identity, as it is closely connected to their nationhood. This becomes in the extension reinterpreted in a way that perpetuate both the conflict and the sense of resentment towards the other (Crocker, 2005:7). The total nature of intractable conflict in turn points to the goals, needs and values of each group, which are perceived as indispensable for their survival (Coleman, 2003).



## 6.2.2. Russia's role in the conflict

An additional factor explained within the framework of intractable conflicts describe international linkages as a factor contributing to sustaining the conflict through aiding and supporting one side of the conflict (Kriesberg, 2010a). As described through out the analysis, Georgia perceives the conflict as a battle between Georgia and Russia, for example naming the war in Abkhazia as the Georgian-Russian war (GoG, 2024b). This view however, stands in complete contradiction to how Abkhazia view the role of Russia. For them Russia is an ally, and their aid to the Abkhaz state is described as a turning point for the people of Abkhazia giving them the opportunity for peaceful development and acting as a guarantee of the preservation of Abkhazia's independent statehood (MFARA, 2024b; PRA, 2024b). For Abkhazia, the close relationship to Russia has been important for the security of Abkhazia from Georgia. However from the Georgian perception, the continuation of the conflict is because of the Russian appropriation and occupation of the territory of Abkhazia, and the numerous Russian military units that are controlling the political situation (GoG, 2024b). Russia's role in the conflict can not be overshadowed, for example Russia's high economic investment in Abkhazia's state budget, as well as stationed Russian military troops in Abkhazia and thus, there is a tight exclusive linkage between Abkhazia and Russia (Gerrits & Bader, 2016; Lynch 2002). This can be argued to have a clear effect on the asymmetry of the conflict. Abkhazia on its own, in comparison to Georgia have less financial, military and political capabilities. However with the support of Russia, this dominant asymmetry changes. The concept of which side is the more dominant in terms of military, economic and political capabilities is also a matter of psychology argues Bar-Tal (2013), where both sides perceive themselves as being the weaker party. This can further on be linked to the concept of irresolvable nature, explained as a factor contributing to the intractability if the conflict points to that neither party believe there can be a peaceful resolution to the conflict, nor do they believe they have the capacities to compete with the other (Bar-Tal, 2013:47). Therefore, Russia's role in the conflict is of importance although the two sides view the extent of this influence in different ways. Russia's support of Abkhazia through economic and political support can be argued to Georgia's belief in their capacity to prevail in the conflict.

### 6.3. Difficulties to solving the conflict

The factors of violence, grievances, totality, zero-sum and international linkages, which have been applied in this analysis, is described by Kriesberg (2010) and Bar-Tal (2007, 2013) to contribute to the intractability of the conflict. The previous sections have examined how Abkhazia, respectively Georgia perceived the cause of the war in 1992-3 and the needs and goals of each side within the conflict. In continuation, the different perception of the needs and goals of the war creates a challenge for fostering resolution to the conflict. The view between the two parties differs tremendously. Where Abkhazia portrays the conflict in terms of Georgia trying to suppress the Abkhaz identity and their right to their sovereign state, Georgia rarely even brings up the Abkhaz agency and their needs and goals. Reviewing the conflict from this relationship, what is seen is that two goals stand in complete contradiction with each other. Georgia's goal and intention for the status of Abkhazia can be argued to threaten the continued existence for the Abkhas identity.

This can be exemplified in recent attempts for fostering development in Abkhazia. In 2018 the Government of Georgia adopted the new peace initiative of "A step to a better future", the proposal aims to improve the humanitarian and socio-economic conditions of the people living in the breakaway states of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by facilitating trade, education, and mobility (A Step to a Better Future, 2018; European External Action Service [EEAS], 2018). Furthermore in the Georgian "State Strategy on Occupied Territories" it is described that their strategy will provide guarantees for the security of the multicultural and multiethnic georgian society, and how implementing this strategy requires engagement with populations that have different perceptions of the conflict (GoG, 2010). The EU supports this initiative and further emphasise their support for Georgias sovereignty and territorial integrity and state how the proposal is in line with the policy's of the EU's engagement with the breakaway regions of Georgia (EEAS, 2018).

On the other hand, the Abkhazian government was quick to verbalize their disapproval of the proposal aswell as of the EU's support for it (MFARA, 2018). They state how "The adoption of yet another odious resolution by the Council of Europe is only disappointing and regrettable" and that the proposal is "extremely biased and politicized" (MFARA, 2018). The resolution is described by Abkhazia as an attempt to impose a Georgian-Russian context to the

conflict, which they argue is an absolutely unacceptable interpretation of the events. Thus they want to remind the Council of Europe that: “the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict has deep historical preconditions, the apogee of which was the armed aggression of Georgia against Abkhazia in 1992-3, aimed at total annihilation of the Abkhazian people.” (MFARA, 2018). What Abkhazia is arguing for is that in the attempted policies adopted for fostering development in the breakaway state is forgetting the suffering of the Abkhaz people at the hand of the Georgian military aggression. As examined throughout the paper it can be argued that the different perceptions of the conflict hinder resolution or development to the conflict. Where Georgia aims to attempt for development and resolution, Abkhazia understands as overstepping their sovereignty, arguing their understanding of the conflict as between Georgia and Russia, forgets the cause of conflict, which was Georgia’s armed aggression of Abkhazia and their attempt of annihilation of their population (MFARA, 2018). Abkhazias goals can thus be seen as zero-sum, and losing their statehood to Georgia can be seen as a clear threat to the existence of their identity. The support from Russia can be furthered regarded as a factor that is aiding the Abkhaz policy and their possibility to stand up against Georgia. Attempts to conflict resolution from the Georgian side that does not take Abkhazias understanding of the conflict in to consideration, and only regards it as a Russian issue, will thus have trouble to yield progress.

## 7. Discussion

The aim of this study has been to examine how Abkhazia and Georgia respectively understands the conflict and the role of the other side, and how this understanding may affect any attempts to resolve the conflict. Some of the key findings from the analysis is that Georgia and Abkhazia have much different understanding of the conflict, both of the cause of war in 1992-3, the continuation of the conflict over Abkhazia's status, and Russia's role in the conflict. From the Abkhazian side there is throughout references to grievances of deprivation of one's identity, and right to nationhood. What can be extracted from the analysis is that the role of identity and the perceived deprivation of it is much more prominent in the Abkhazian understanding of the conflict, while Georgian understanding tells a much different story of the conflict. Abkhazia as their opponent is rarely mentioned, instead it is Russia who through out the analyzed material is appointed the role of the enemy, and it is their occupation of Abkhazia that is explained to be the cause of the continuation of the conflict. Interestingly to point to regarding the chosen theoretical framework, is that the characteristics that defines an intractable conflict are prevalent within the Abkhazian understanding of the conflict. Such as the importance of identity and the portrayal of the other as the evil aggressor, and the total and zero-sum aspects of the goals. Noticeably, how Abkhazia understand the conflict is in line with how the theory describes intractable conflict. The same characteristics however, are not as well applied within the Georgian material analyzed in this study.

However, what can be argued from the analysis, is that a factor contributing to the difficulty in attempts to resolve the conflict is partly due to this complete difference in understanding of the core issue of the conflict. As Georgia views Abkhazia as occupied by Russia, their attempts to resolve the conflict will be done through such understanding. For Abkhazia, this overshadows their right to sovereignty which is for them the most important goal and need. This becomes clear in how Abkhazia responded to the Georgian initiative of "A Step for a Better Future", which they called extremely biased and an attempt to put a Russian – Georgian context to the conflict and thus disregarding the Georgian aggression and annihilation of Abkhazia and its people (MFARA, 2018). Georgia often disregards the Abkhazian agency completely when discussing possible resolution and development in the territory. Thus what can be argued based on the findings of this study is that Georgian attempts for fostering better

relationship with and development in Abkhazia is not well enough balanced towards the will of Abkhazia, and therefore will struggle to succeed.

What is interesting is that earlier research points to the importance of identity within Georgia, and how ethnocentrism dominated the political sphere in early 1990's. Although Georgia first declared Abkhazia as occupied by Russia in 2008 (Jasutis, 2018), the Georgian understanding of the causes of the war in 1992-3 as seen through the analyzed material points to Russia as the aggressor, where ethnic identities are rarely mentioned. Although the role of ethnic identity and perceived deprivation of acceptance of identity connected to statehood and sovereignty is argued for in the previous research as important aspects for the emergence of violent conflict in Abkhazia (Cornell, 2002; Souleimanov 2013). Thus, it can be argued to have been a shift in the Georgian understanding of the conflict.

Although this study highlights the relevance of taking the Georgian – Abkhazian relationship in regards when understanding the intractableness of the conflict, Russia's role in the conflict cannot be disregarded. As argued within previous research, Russia's influence in Abkhazia has affected the continuation of the conflict (Lynch, 2002), through economic and military aid, political support, Russia's presence has indisputably helped Abkhazia sustain their position in the conflict (Lynch, 2002; Gerrits & Bader, 2016). Russia's interest in the region is argued to have a bigger interest than just to support Abkhazia's struggle to independence, namely Russia's influence in Abkhazia, and furthermore in Georgia gives them leverage over them, and where an unstable Georgia is beneficial for Russia (German, 2006). Thus, Russia's role cannot be completely disregarded in understanding the intractability of the conflict.

Despite this, implications of the analysis partly shows that there is a point in reading the conflict over Abkhazia from the relationship between Georgia – Abkhazia, departing from the dominant concept of the conflict as a struggle between Georgia and Russia. As the two parties' have, as concluded, different understandings of the conflict and the core issue of its continuation, their future goals stand as well in complete contradiction, which will hinder attempts of resolving the conflict. A reason that can be argued for why, is that Georgian attempts for resolution and development is perceived by Abkhazia to disregard their identity and right to independence, which is the primary goal for Abkhazia and thus their goal can be defined as zero-sum. Any attempts of development and resolution not including the Abkhazian perspective, will struggle to reach a development in their relationship as it will continuously be disputed by the Abkhazian government. Thus, what can be concluded is that reviewing the conflict where the Abkhazian perspective is in greater focus, can be argued to play a role for

the conflict, however it cannot be accounted for to explain the entire reason why the conflict prevails today, three decades later.

Tracing back to the discussion on limitations within this study it is of importance to reflect upon the generalizability of the study. As both the chosen method and literature have implication on the generalizability, and the operationalization of the theory have been developed for this specific study, the findings is limited in terms of generalizability, and is thus rather context specific to the case of Abkhazia. However, the purpose of this study has been to provide a more in depth understanding of the intractability of the conflict and to shed light to the relevance of regarding the Abkhazian understanding of, and role in, the conflict. However, the scope of material analyzed for this study has been limited, due to the limitation of time and of the scope of the text, as well as the limited available material in english. Therefor a study where a larger extent of material regarding, especially Abkhazia's understanding and agency in the conflict would be beneficial for a richer understanding of the complexity if the conflict. As this study aimed at examining both how the the two sides understands and defines the conflict, aswell as analyzing how this separate understanding can affect attempts to resolve the conflict, the limitation of scope have caused the analysis to be on a more surface level, especially in regards to the attempts of resolving the conflict. Therefore, future research could be conducted on a deeper level on Abkhazias role and perception of the different attempts to development and resolution conflict. Nonetheless more extensive research placing Abkhazia in focus is recommended.

## 8. Conclusion

To conclude, this study puts the Abkhazian perspective in focus by analyzing the Abkhazian understanding of the conflict and its contrast to Georgia, and in the extension how this may affect attempts for development and resolution between the two. Based on the theoretical framework on intractable conflict this study offers some insight in to how the role of identity and the Georgian – Abkhazian relationship can be argued to impact the intractability of the conflict. Thus, shedding light on that there is relevance in regarding the conflict not only through the lens of the Georgian – Russian relations. The findings are two folds. On one hand the analysis provides support for how the role of identity and the deprivation of the group's identity trough the suppression of the Abkhazian state's sovereignty serves as important factors for the continuation of the conflict for Abkhazia trough the total and zero-sum nature of especially Abkhazia's goals. On the other hand, Georgia's understanding of the conflict trough Russia's presence in, and later occupation of, the territory of Abkhazia cannot be disregarded when analyzing why the conflict prevails. These contradicting understandings of the conflict can in the extensions however be argued to act as an obstacle for resolution and development as Abkhazia refuses to acknowledge attempts that does not addresses their right to statehood and identity, which Georgia, who views Abkhazia as occupied, will in turn not agree upon. This study does not mean to disregard the influence of Russia in the conflict, rather it aims to bring light to the complexity of the conflict and how a more thorough understanding of each side can be fruitful for future research and for future development between Georgia and Abkhazia.

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