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WAR AS AN EMBODIED AND EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE: STORIES OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED WOMEN FROM ABKHAZIA

Abstract

This chapter focuses on the experiences of war and forced displacement in the stories of women internally displaced within Georgia, as a result of the armed conflict at the beginning of 1990s in Abkhazia. Based on the ethnographic research and life-story interviews with internally displaced women, this analysis seeks to understand how the IDPs have experienced the violent event, as well as its aftermath. Being consistent with scholars who reject the mind-body dichotomy and acknowledge embodied subjectivities of individuals affected by wars, this chapter argues that dramatic turning points in the lives of individuals affected by armed conflicts are experienced through emotions and feelings, as well as through bodies and bodily sensations reciprocally and in relation to each other.

Keywords: forced displacement, armed conflict, embodied experiences, emotions, affects, war, gendered experiences, bodies.

Introduction

There have been several waves of forced displacements in Georgia since gaining its independence in 1991. As a result of armed conflicts at the beginning of the 1990s, thousands of ethnic Georgians were forced to leave their homes in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. They started rebuilding their lives from scratch in their new, 'temporary' homes in different locations within the territory of Georgia. Armed conflicts have cost thousands of lives and many families on both sides lost their loved ones to the war. Thousands of combatants, as well as civilians were killed, wounded or went missing during the war. Looting, torture, and pillaging were also documented on both sides (ICRC, 1999; HRW, 1995; Buck et al., 2000).

The total number of IDPs has increased as a result Russian-Georgian war in August 2008, after which the Russian Federation recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Overall, internally

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displaced persons represent about 6 percent of the entire population of Georgia, some of the world's highest numbers of internal displacements relative to the overall population. As for the demographic composition, 55 percent of IDPs are women, 9 percent are children under the age of 18, and 13 percent are persons over 65 years old. (World Bank, 2016)

According to the estimates provided by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, there are approximately 289,000 conflict-induced IDPs in Georgia (IDMC 2018). According to more recent figures provided by the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees of Georgia, there are 286, 811 registered IDPs in Georgia, which represents 90 614 households.[1] 90 percent of IDPs are from Abkhazia, while the remaining 10 percent – from South Ossetia. IDPs have been resettled across the country, though the majority of displaced households reside in Tbilisi, as well as the Samegrelo, Imereti and Shida Karti regions. In general, it is hard to determine the exact number of IDPs, insofar as not all IDPs go through the registration process and, additionally, some IDP households reside outside Georgia (Chankvetadze and Bendeliani, 2021). Ethnically Georgian IDPs are not allowed to return to their homes, except to the Lower and Upper Gali districts, where de facto authorities have allowed some returns, but those who have returned "are subject to precarious situations such as intimidation and threats resulting from ethnic tensions in the region" (World Bank, 2016).

The displaced population is commonly described as part of different "waves" or "caseloads" of displacements. Those originating both from the Abkhazian Autonomous Republic and the Tskhinvali Region-South Ossetia, were displaced at the beginning of the 1990s and have now been living in the forced displacement for almost 30 years. These IDPs are commonly referred to as "old" IDPs, since they comprise the first wave of displacement. The August 2008 war produced another caseload of IDPs, they are described as "new" IDPs (Rekhviashvili, 2015; World Bank, 2016); IDPs continue to live in a situation of protracted displacement, since Abkhazia is not recognized under international law as an independent state, and the conflict remains unresolved.

Although the experience of forced displacement has been the same for both "new" and "old" IDPs, the circumstances, needs and resources have differed depending on the type of accommodation and on the resettlement locations. For example, the Georgian government has managed to provide more durable settlement solution to the new cohort of IDPs forcefully displaced after the 2008 war, which have been placed

in newly constructed rural settlements with the support of international donors. In contrast to the way the government has handled the "new" wave of IDPs, it was unable to provide housing for the displaced population that originated in the 1990s; thus, resettlement was handled in a much more chaotic way. They were allowed to settle in abandoned public buildings, such as in former kindergartens, Soviet-era hotels and sanatoriums, schools, former hospital buildings, etc. These buildings were transformed into living spaces which were seen as temporary living spaces for IDPs; a considerable part of displaced households continue to live in the above-listed spaces, the so-called collective centers, since early the 1990s; Conditions are deteriorating and inadequate for living (Chankvetadze and Bendeliani, 2020; Sartania, 2020; Rekhviashvili, 2012; Buck, 2002; World Bank, 2016). The other part of IDPs managed to find temporary dwelling either in the private sector (in accommodations temporarily provided by their relatives), or in accommodations, either rented or owned. It must pointed out that up until 2007, the focus of the political discourse was more on the return of IDPs, rather than on providing durable solutions in the areas of resettlement, dignified living conditions and local integration. In 2007, a nationwide strategy of resettlement was adopted[2] and the government started handling the issue of IDPs in a more systematic manner. As a result of this change in the political discourse and policy, about 45 percent of the displaced population has been provided with some kind of accommodation through different programs initiated by the government. The remaining 55 percent of displaced households have been caught up in a process of continuous waiting since the early 1990s and continue to live in the harsh living conditions of "collective centers". Different studies have shown that after almost three decades of forced displacement, the internally displaced population remains more disadvantaged and vulnerable to poverty, as compared to the general population in Georgia (Chankvetadze and Bendeliani, 2020; Sartania, 2020; Rekhviashvili, 2015).

My Research: Life Stories and Intimate Ethnography

The following paper is part of my doctoral research project[3] which is based on the in-depth interviews with women displaced from Abkhazia at the beginning of the 1990s. It focuses on women's experiences of forced displacement and its aftermath. The main aim of the research

project is to explore how displaced women reflect on their lives before and during the armed conflict; how they experienced, remember and describe the violent events that took place almost 30 years ago, how they reflect on their lives in the aftermath – in the protracted displacement. This chapter pays particular attention to how the violent events of war and forced displacement create embodied experiences which intertwine with emotional experiences.

Between 2015 and 2021, I conducted in-depth interviews, participant observation and had follow-up conversations with 20 women overall. All informants in this study are ethnically Georgian, and all were displaced from Abkhazia in 1992-1993 as a result of the armed conflict. The women range in age from fifty-five to seventy years old. I met the research participants for interviews and follow-up conversations either in their own, privately owned apartments or in collective centers.

Since I am a native researcher and belong to the group that I research – I am also an ethnic Georgian displaced as a result of the armed conflict at the beginning of the 1990s, I have close relations with some of the women in my study. I first conducted several interviews with my mother, as well as other women from my close circle of relatives, family friends and former neighbors from Abkhazia (Arjevanidze, 2017; Arjevanidze, 2020).

Feminist research methodologies allow a researcher to access the marginalized voices in the society. It makes women's specific and diverse realities the center of inquiry. During in-depth interviews, feminist researchers ask questions that explore the issues of particular concern to women's lives (Hesse-Biber, 2007). This analysis of collected data is based on life stories and *intimate ethnography*. The life-story approach has been extensively used by feminist scholars as a successful medium for collecting women's stories and the often hidden lived experiences of women, as well as numerous mundane tasks women perform daily, which are examples of women's specific experiences (Brooks and Hesse-Biber, 2007).

Anthropologists Alisse Waterston and Barbara Rylko-Bauer developed *intimate ethnography* to "enter a deeply private and interior place as ethnographers" (p. 405), to create an intimate connection between themselves and their subjects. Like myself, Waterston and Rylko-Bauer also had intimate connections with their informants – Waterston's father and Rylko-Bauer's mother (Waterston and Rylko-Bauer, 2006). This approach enabled me to learn about the respondents' lives from their own perspectives, it deepened my understanding of the way they make

sense of their lives and what they deem important (Arjevanidze, 2017; Arjevanidze, 2020).

In what follows I elaborate on experiences of the war and forced displacement based on the stories of women in my study. I follow the scholars who view the war as an experience that entails both physical and emotional experiences and their manifestations reciprocally, in relation rather than distanced from each other. Furthermore, this chapter investigates how the different stages of displacement were experienced in terms of feelings, perceptions, emotions. I adopt Christine Sylvester's conceptualization of war as a social institution and elaborate on different constitutive elements of war, as they create specific experiences of war. To elaborate on the indefinite period of waiting in the aftermath of war, in protracted displacement, I start by introducing the concept of *liminality* conceptualized by Victor Turner (1967) and further expanded by Vincent Crapansano (2004). Then I offer an overview of studies focusing on emotions, affects, feelings which are intertwined with bodily experiences of war. In the last section I investigate the multifaceted experiences of war based on the analysis of in-depth interviews with women in my study.

The *Liminality* of Protracted Displacement

Life in situations of protracted displacement has become a chronic condition for most displaced persons in Georgia, which can be characterized as an experience of continuous waiting and can be conceptualized as a never-ending *crisis*. According to the social anthropologist Henrik Vigh, crisis understood this way is a kind constant condition of abnormality under which increasingly many people in the world continue to live. He suggests to understand such *crisis* not as a temporary experience of rupture caused by a wide array of traumatic events, but rather as a constant state of affairs in which "the chronically ill, the structurally violated, socially marginalized and poor" continue to live and try to manage their lives (Vigh 2008, p. 7).

The *crisis* viewed as a context rather than a temporary phenomenon can also be described as the condition of the *limbo* in the *aftermath* that never ends. Informants in my study have reflected on their lives in displacement as if being trapped in an unending process of waiting. Under the circumstances of unresolved conflict and prolonged displacement they feel caught up between their lost homes, present "temporary" homes and imagined future homes (Kabachnik et al., 2010, Arjevanidze, 2020).

I draw on conceptualizations of *liminality* by Victor Turner and Vincent Crapansano to describe the process of transition from the "known to the unknown", as well as the condition of the limbo in which the displaced individuals have been caught up for up to three decades by now. I find this concept useful for analyzing the state of uncertainty that the protracted nature of the forced displacement creates.

In his 1967 book *The forest of symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, Turner focuses on the nature and characteristics of the initiation rites, or transition, by focusing on the liminal period in the rites of passage, which he refers to as the "interstructural situation". Turner differentiates between the *state, a condition* and the *process* of the transition and notes that by *state* he refers to "a relatively fixed or stable condition", while "*transition* is a process, a becoming, and in the case of *rites de passage* even a transformation" (p. 94). Turner draws on Van Gennep's conceptualization of the rites of passage, the process that may accompany any change from one state to another, such as "every change of place, state, social position and age" (p. 94). The model developed by Gennep includes three phases: The first phase of separation comprises symbolic behavior separation, which signifies the detachment of the initiate (or the group) from the earlier fixed point in social life; the margin – the ambiguous, "betwixt and between" realm that "has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state", and the passage ends at third phase – the aggregation, when the ritual subject, the "passenger" enters into a new achieved status and "is in a stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations of a clearly defined and 'structural' type" (p. 94).

Turner describes the "initiates" as invisible and "structurally indefinable transitional beings", who in the liminal period of transition are "no longer classified and not yet classified" (p. 96). They symbolically are associated with physical processes that have a negative connotation (such as death, decomposition, catabolism, menstruation); the essential feature of these symbolizations is that the "initiates", or "neophytes", are "neither living nor dead from one aspect, and both living and dead from another… […] the dead, or the un-dead" (p. 97). Despite this condition of ambiguity, paradox, and confusion, Turner at one point states that "liminality may perhaps be regarded as the Nay to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of them all, and, more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise" (p. 97). Turner draws on the concept of pollution developed by Mary Douglas to further explore how the initiates, having occupied this unclear,

contradictory, ambiguous space, and by virtue of not yet being classified or defined, tend to be viewed as (ritually)unclean and polluting; they are "neither here nor there, or maybe even nowhere and are at the very least 'betwixt and between' all the recognized fixed points in the space-time or cultural classification", always and everywhere regarded as "polluting to those who have never been, so to speak, « inoculated » against them […]" (p. 97). Because the transitional beings are "structurally invisible" and regarded as polluting, they are commonly secluded, they need to be hidden "in another place", inasmuch as they have physical, but not the social reality and represent a paradox.

After describing the above structurally negative characteristics of the liminal phase, Turner turns to some positive features which accompany the negative aspects of liminality, such as "growth, transformation, and the reformulation of old elements in new patterns" (p. 99).[4] The final phase of the rites of passage in Turner's analysis is essential in understanding the change and the transition from one state to another in relation to experiences of forced displacement in my research as well. For Turner, the passivity of initiates, their malleability, is a sign of the process by which they are "endowed with additional powers to cope with their new station in life". These new powers generate the new capacities to successfully deal with the new reality once they enter a new world. This is how the process of transition and transformation can be regarded as a "growth". Turner notes that this is not a mere mechanical process of change (from one state to another), but rather a process that fosters acquisition of knowledge; through passivity and malleability, the transitional being absorbs the powers and acquire the knowledge "which will become active after his social status has been redefined in the aggregation rites", i.e. in the final phase (106-108).

In his book *Imaginative Horizons* (2004), anthropologist Vincent Crapansano further expands the concept of liminality and analyzes the liminal state in relation to the imagination and imaginative possibilities. He is particularly interested in "the dangers crossing the threshold […] the punctuation of the liminal—its internal disjunctions—and how it effects and is affected by the final, defining moment of transition" (p. 60). He notes that Turner is more concerned with *liminality* as the *process and becoming* rather than with the dangers and the risks the crossing entails. He focuses on these moments as they signify the change of the status in participants of the rites; at these defining moments, participants are in suspension, on-hold and trapped in-between: "there is always a moment

in which one is neither on one side nor on the other, neither what one was, nor what one will be" (p. 62). He is particularly interested in the ambiguity and uncertainty, which he views as the most dramatic for the liminal personae with the "*nonstatus*", insofar as they cannot even define these moments - there is no crossing, they are on hold. The change and the moment of transition he further elaborates on, the transition from one experiential register to another, from the *nonstatus* to ambiguous status does occur in an instant, the instant which for Crapansano always contains risk and danger[5] (p. 62). Like Turner, Crapansano does emphasize the dramatic quality of these moments but he goes further to stress end explore the intensity with which these moments have prepared the ground for the "ultimately inarticulatable moment of passage" (p. 63). Furthermore, he is particularly concerned with the anxiety and dread they evoke. In his words, the liminal "suggests imaginative possibilities that are not necessarily available to us in everyday life". The liminal offers us "a view of the world to which we are normally blinded by the usual structures of social and cultural life" (p. 64).

Crapansano seems to agree with Turner that the liminality can be viewed "as a realm of pure possibility", but unlike Turner, he underscores that the liminal may also impose constraints: "The liminal may encourage invention but, if only through negation, it also affirms tradition". He suggests that ambiguity, paradox, contradiction and danger embedded in the moments of crossing, that is always approaching but never actually connecting, emerge as the "source of our unending social and cultural creativity—*or its cessation*—through repetition and the declaration of that repetition as ultimate truth" (p. 64).

If we extend the model of rites of passage, as Van Gennep and others did, from individual life crises to the crises of the communities, which is to say, to any process that accompanies the change of place, state, social position, i.e. the change from one state to another, then the relocation of forcefully displaced communities can also be understood as the process of "crossing a threshold", which, on the one hand includes dangers, risks, dreads and fears, and on the other hand (and probably simultaneously at times), after experiencing these dramatic turning points and bearing a witness to violent events, this transition may have a transformative power, it can be likened to cathartic moments which may signify the start of a new world, with a new status of a "newborn". In my study, the complex experiences (experience understood as a combination of both – physical and emotional) of such dramatic moments entail fear, dread, danger,

shame, suffering, which become intertwined with hope, optimism, courage, resilience, pride, i.e. are experienced simultaneously. Put this way, these dramatic moments may create the condition in which the IDPs are both resilient and vulnerable, tragic and full of hope, insofar as the memory and the pain of loss, the trauma has never disappeared (Arjevanidze, 2020); In the words of Veena Das, this memory and experience of witnessing the violent event, becomes an inseparable part of the everyday; Through "mutual absorption of the violent and the ordinary" it enters the everyday as "a poisonous knowledge" (Das, 2006, p.76). In the following section I will offer a sketch of how scholars in different fields have made efforts to investigate a wide range of emotions, perceptions, affects, feelings as inseparable experiences in such dramatic moments and processes.

Emotions, Feelings, Affects

The interest to study emotions in social sciences has flourished in the last 40 years; these studies have emphasized the role of emotions in social life as crucial to many aspects of society. The scholarship on emotions in sociology has been dealing with questions such as "how do historically and culturally specific norms influence the experience and expression of emotion and to what degree are emotions structured by one's position within groups, organizations, and social hierarchies" (Lively and Weed, 2016, p. 66). There are two main theoretical paradigms – cultural and structural – used by sociologists to study emotions. The sociological definition of emotion assumes that emotions are inherently social. For example, Hochschild compares emotions to senses "that signal what is personally relevant about surrounding social events" (p. 66). According to the sociological approach, the components of emotional experience (such as emotional arousal, cognitive appraisals, expressions, and language) are constrained by both culture and structure (Lively and Weed, 2016).

There has been a tendency in contemporary readings to make a sharp distinction and conceptual division between *emotions* – to refer to cultural and social expressions and *affects*, considered as mainly biological and physiological in nature. The feminist scholars have turned to and explored the concepts of affect and affectivity in a wide range of fields, such as philosophy, history, literature, cinema studies, art history, media, cultural studies, etc. to conceptualize "the subject of feminism as embodied, located and relational" (Koivunen, 2010, p. 8). As pointed

out by film and gender studies scholar Anu Koivunen in her essay *An Affective Turn? Reimagining the Subject of Feminist Theory*, an affective turn "can be viewed as a broad range of criticisms of the linguistic turn and its effects on feminist research"; this turn also "entails refining and complementing constructionist models and reworking the relations of the subjective and the social"(Koivunen, 2010, p. 10).

According to Koivunen, the above-mentioned division between the use of either *affect*s or *emotions* could be detected in terms of disciplinary preferences as well; for example, the study of "emotions" has been prevalent in the scholarship of social sciences and the humanities, which has explored cognition and social interpretation of cultures; while the sciences mainly focusing on the study of the brain and the body, have preferred "affect" as a term. Despite this divide, the scholars have not been able to agree on consistent definitions of affect, emotions, feelings and at times these definitions have been contradictory. Some scholars have been able to avoid dichotomous conceptualizations of *either* affect *or* emotion and tend to use both terms interchangeably "to highlight the fluidity of the conceptual boundaries" (p. 11).

In some accounts, both affects and emotions are viewed as two constitutive components of the same phenomenon: "emotion, thus, being a psychological, at least minimally interpretive experience whose physiological aspect is affect, […]or emotion referring to the social expression of affect, and affect in turn is the biological and physiological experience of it" (pp. 10-12). For some scholars the notion of *feeling* entails all experiences that can be categorized as *emotions* and is a useful umbrella term in this sense to describe both affects (as physiological sensations) and emotions (as psychological states). As illustrated by Kouvunen, there is, no conceptual consensus uniting "the turn". This conceptual multitude of the term affect has historical roots, since, according to Koivunen, until the late 19th and 20th centuries, the Latin word *affectus* used to be translated in a number of synonymous ways: as affect, passion, desire and emotion (pp. 10-12).

As regards the field of anthropology, up until recently, anthropological work has not been concerned with the affect. The study of emotions or of feelings considered emotions mainly from a cross-cultural or cultural-relativist perspective, and focused on the culture and the self. In the 1980s and 1990s, the goal was the to study the ways in which emotions were culturally constructed, which was in opposition to the earlier, Western conceptualizations of emotions as either biological or psychological.

Emotions thus became divorced from psychological disciplines and as result of the turn to the outside, emotions were "interpreted in terms of the different cultural contexts through which they were put into discourse" (Navaro-Yashin, 2012, p. 25). For social anthropologist, Yael Navaro-Yashin the key limitation of this approach is "a singular association of the emotions with human beings, 'culture' being construed as a context, base, domain, or background produced by humans" (p. 24). Navaro-Yashin manages to overcome the above described tensions over conceptualizations of affect in her recent work *The Make-Believe Space*: *Affective Geography* in a *Postwar Polity* (2012). Her account of war, displacement and political authoritarianism is based on ethnographic work in an unrecognized state – the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. She introduces the concept and an analytical category of the make-believe that in her words, "challenges the opposition between these two approaches— the social constructionist and the new materialist—conceptualizing the phantasmatic and the tangible in unison by privileging neither one nor the other" (p. 5). Drawing on Spinoza's conceptualization of the notion of "affect (*affectus*)", Navaro-Yashin proposes an anthropological approach that questions the sharp divide between the interiority and exteriority, the subjective and the objective, and studies the affect and subjectivity in tandem; As she further notes, rather than privileging one over the other, her approach suggests to maintain the balance that "merges the inside and the outside, making them indistinguishable". Navaro-Yashin calls this perspective the affect-subjectivity continuum in post-war environment, "one that attends to the embroilment of inner and outer worlds, to their codependence and co-determination" (p. 24).

Embodied Experiences of War and Violence

Apart from sociology and social anthropology, scholars in feminist studies of war, and recently in fields such as international relations, have been increasingly paying attention to the everyday people's experiences of war and violence (Sylvester, 2013; Crawford, 2000; Enloe, 2010). They have emphasized that it is impossible to apprehend the war unless we sufficiently explore the aspects of experiencing the war and the violent event, such as emotions, suffering, pain, bodily physical experiences, as well as social experiences of armed conflicts and generalized violence. The earlier studies in IR excluded these aspects from the traditional

analysis and studies of the war; these issues had been relegated behind the discussions of "high politics", militarization, war strategies, weapons systems and national security interest (Sylvester, 2013). In the recent decade, the definitions of war and peace have been challenged by scholars in the fields exploring the nature of wars and their increasing effects on civilians in war-affected societies. As a result of explorations of meanings, as well as of experiences of war in war-affected individuals, these studies have included bodily and emotional experiences and thus were able to achieve a much broader, fuller picture of the war itself.

I draw on the conceptualization of war as a social institution and "politics of injury" proposed by Christine Sylvester, a scholar in political science and women's studies. Sylvester has contributed to the field of International Relations with her significant work on experiences of war in which she broadens the definitions of war, as well as of the experiences of war. By drawing on key works in feminist theory, in her recent book *War as Experience* (2013) she challenges the traditional theories of war in international relations and explores the multiple, complex ways in which war is experienced emotionally and bodily.

Instead of treating the generalized violence of war only as a "mere" fact, she encourages us to attempt to understand the nature of war itself. As Sylvester puts it, that war is a "politics of injury":

> Everything about war aims to injure people and/or their social surroundings as a way of resolving disagreement or, in some cases, encouraging disagreement if it is profitable to do so. As part of that mission, many will endeavor to protect themselves from injuries by fleeing the war zone, donning protective clothing, hiding, or looking away from war scenes on the television news; […] injury is the content of war not the consequence of it (p. 4).

Her second provision is to study war as a social institution, which she calls the "transhistorical and transcultural social institution of war in its various particularities" (p. 4). She goes on to elaborate on the social institution, as a "a system matrix of war" with a wide range of constitutive elements and components, such as "heroic myths and stories about battles for freedom and tragic losses; memories of war passed from generation to generation; the workings of defense departments and militaries; the production of war accepting or -glorifying masculinities […] video games, TV shows, advertisements, pop songs, and fashion design..."(p. 4). When suggesting to approach the war as a social institution, she puts an

emphasis on the everyday people and their experiences, since they are the participants of wars – wars, as social institutions and as "political injuries"; the everyday people, along with "important" people, are those who affect and are affected by generalized violence; hence, the everyday people play a wide array of roles, not only as combatants, but also "as mourners, protesters, enthusiasts, computer specialists, medical personnel, weapons designers, artists, novelists, journalists, refugees, parents, clergy, child soldiers, and school children – all of them having different connections to the war, and in the meantime rather tacitly supporting the activities of violent politics"(p. 5).

The question relevant for my study is then where is the place of experiences of war in such an analysis? I find her elaboration on how exactly the war is experienced, as well as of her definition of experience, most useful in describing experiences of war and forced displacement of informants in my study. By rejecting the Cartesian mind-body dualism, Sylvester puts a special emphasis on the body as a source and location of emotions. For her, the body is a biopolitical fact of war and central in the analysis of war, insofar as war is experienced through the body, "a unit that has agency to target and injure others in war and is also a target of war's capabilities". Moreover, "the body is also a contested and diverse entity that comes with gender, race, class, generational, cultural, and locational markings that affect and are affected by social experiences" (p. 5). For her, the body is central and therefore, Sylvester's key claim is that the experience of war entails both "physical and emotional connections with war that people live – with their bodies and their minds and as social creatures in specific circumstances" (p. 5). What she specifically means is that "the body can experience war physically – through wounds and attending to wounds, through running, firing, falling, having buildings fall on it, writing about war, filming moments of war, photographing war, feeling hungry or sick during war and so on" (p. 5). She considers it important to place the body in the center of experiencing the war in its differentiated manifestations and not necessarily in relation to, for instance, actual fighting; in addition to bodily experiences, the war is also experienced through emotions, not separately, but simultaneously with bodily experiences. Sylvester denies the mind-body dualism, considering that the mind is not separate from the body.[6] Despite writing about the body and war in "physical" and then "emotional" terms, in isolation and distanced from each other, Sylvester thus proposes to think about the "reciprocities of body and mind, relays, and comminglings" (p. 6).

In a similar vein, when exploring the emotional experiences of war, the scholar in international relations and political science Neta Crawford proposes a definition of emotions that locates emotions in the body, but at the same time she does not deny the embeddedness of the body in social relations; As Crawford puts it, emotions are "the inner states that individuals describe to others as feelings, and those feelings may be associated with biological, cognitive, and behavioral states and changes; […] Feelings are internally experienced, but the meaning attached to those feelings, the behaviors associated with them, and the recognition of emotions in others are cognitively and culturally construed and constructed" (Crawford, 2000, p. 25). In other words, emotions are socially constructed and bodily based, but the way Crawford articulates experiences is inclusive of all the terms used to describe a wide array of experiences (on the spectrum, which differ in intensity- feelings, perceptions, affects and so on). As illustrated above, Sylvester and Crawford, when addressing emotions in relation to war experiences, elaborate on different mental states – feelings, cognition, emotions, perceptions, affect – and tend to use these terms interchangeably.

Since the acts of violent events in armed conflicts are inflicted upon the bodies and can be experienced in a wide range of ways as described by Sylvester, the theoretical attention in feminist scholarship focusing on the connections between gender and conflict has been increasingly concerned with the embodied dimension of conflicts. Contributors to the volume edited by Frerks, König and Ypeij – entitled *Gender and Conflict: Embodiments, Discourses and Symbolic Practices* (2014) – provide nuanced accounts of the dynamic relations between the three conceptual pillars – discourses, embodiments and symbolic practices. By acknowledging the subjectivity and agency of the people affected by acts of violence, and recognizing the embodied nature of subjectivity, authors in this volume pay particular attention to the body and to diverse forms of embodiments. Frerks, König and Ypeij draw on Rosi Braidotti's conceptualization of the body, in which she stresses the materiality of the body as a location for subjectivity. For Braidotti, the body "is not a form of an anatomical destiny, but one's primary location in the world, one's primary situation in reality" (Frerks, König and Ypeij, 2014, p.8. The concept of embodied subjectivity and agency acknowledges that "bodies are abled, shaped and constrained by their social surroundings" (p. 7). Moreover, "people can feel at ease with these social environments or emotionally experience them as unpleasant. These feelings feed their

agency. It is not only the mind, separated from any bodily tastes, emotions and feelings, that determines how people relate to their social environment. Their bodies play a part in this too" (p. 8). Put this way, the concept of embodied subjectivity elaborated by Frerks, König and Ypeij deals with bodily experiences, or the lived experiences of the body ("lived body") as self (p. 8). Similarly, medical anthropologists Scheper-Hughes and Lock consider the mind-body division to be based on a "false dichotomy between cultural sentiments and natural passions" and emphasize the power of emotions and feelings in human life (Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1986, p. 219). As they point out, since "emotions entail both feelings and cognitive orientations, public morality, and cultural ideology, […] they provide an important 'missing link' capable of bridging mind and body, individual, society, and body politic" (p. 219). They perceive the body as a "mindful body" and focus on the role of emotions in the ways the illness and pain are experienced.

Thus, as illustrated above, scholars in different areas of social sciences increasingly allow for incorporating feelings, experiences, affects, emotions and perceptions in social theory. Similarly, to better apprehend informants' own sense of their experiences of war, in my analysis I find it essential to explore the ways informants in my study articulate, describe, reflect on their own emotions and experiences of war and displacement. In other words, drawing on Sylvester's approach to the experiences of war, in this paper I refer to experiences that are concomitantly bodily and emotional, physical and cognitive, reciprocal and in relation to each other. I use the terms emotions and feelings interchangeably to describe all range of perceptions and experiences informants in my study reflect.

Levels of Engagement with the War

Informants in my study have different connections to the war. They have been affected differently, or in the words of Christine Sylvester, they "felt the war touch" at different degrees. Useful for this analysis is the concept of *spectator* to the globalized war, or within the system of "the matrix of war" in which almost anyone can have some kind of relation to the war – either directly or through news reports, books, visual representations, discussions, or through relation to someone who has been affected by the war. Sylvester identifies at least three different levels of engagement with the war which she calls "the spectator degrees of overlapping separation

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from war as an immediate body-injuring set of practices" (Sylvester, 2013, p. 100). The first category of the degree of separation entails those who have been directly affected by war, or "close to war but behind the lines", such as medics, military caterers, relief workers, locals at short distance from war zones, who can hear the war sounds, those who are forced to flee in search for a safer place, family members of combatants. This is the category with the most immediate and direct connection to war zones and armed activities.

People who have a more distant engagement with the war (e.g. those responsible for the production of war material, war researchers and writers, politicians, war protesters, etc.) have a second degree of separation from the war in Sylvester's classification. And the farthest physically distanced degree involves those spectators who have no connection to the war in their daily lives or activities, except for the moments when they read the news in the media or hear about the wars on television, i.e. have rare moments of exposure to the war content through different media. Sylvester notes that despite being the farthest removed category from war, individuals under this category can still have their own emotional experiences of war. Understood this way, a parallel can be drawn between Cynthia Enloe's description of the militarization of the everyday (Enloe, 2000) and Sylvester's characterization of degrees of engagement with the war.

The concept of *sufferer* is also relevant when describing how the physical bodies can be affected in armed conflicts. The individuals can suffer in wars through injuries, but also through the need to physically flee away from the direct threat of armed conflict, through freezing, starvation or dehydration either when in war zones or in the flight (on the road) when trying to reach a safe shelter. Sylvester describes how these bodily experiences intertwine with emotions and create suffering from "phobias, depression, psychosomatic illnesses, haunting dreads and anxieties, flashbacks, intrusive thoughts and memories" (p. 101). Under different circumstances, a sufferer can simultaneously be a spectator, for example in refugee camps. Besides, it is important to note that even in cases when the bodily, physical suffering might end after armed events, the social suffering persists in the aftermath of wars, in post-conflict situations and prolonged displacement.

Keeping in mind the above classification of levels of engagement with the war, informants in my study belong to the group that has the most immediate connection to and experience of the war, which have

varied at different degrees throughout their experiences of war and forced displacement. In their lifetimes, they have moved from one spectator level to another, they have been spectators and sufferers at the same time and have occupied all the above-described three degrees of separation and engagement with the war, hence the intensity of their experiences of war has fluctuated. Those being caught up during actual fighting in the armed conflict have now been trapped in forced displacement for almost three decades.

In the next section I will introduce stories of three women in my study that had the most immediate connections to the war. By these stories I will attempt to illustrate how the bodily experiences, intertwined with emotions, have created specific experiences of war and forced displacement. In this section, every research participant is given a pseudonym. All participants are ethnically Georgian, displaced from Abkhazia in the beginning of the 1990s.

From Flight to Rebuilding Lives: Stories of Forced Displacement

The Story of Nini

Nini is a 60-year old woman. She is half Abkhazian on her mother's side. She worked as an accountant in the service industry in Sokhumi. Nini had a carefree life and in her words, she was happy there. She was 31 when the fighting began. Her brother, who was 27 years old at the time, took part and was killed in the fighting; she tells me that "he could not do otherwise, he was defending his homeland". She tells me that her brother was awarded the hero medal in his lifetime and his name is included in the memorial of heroes, a monument to honor those who died in the war. Nini remembers that day quite vividly. She tells me that twice a year, on the day of his death and on Memorial Day, she always gets emotional and restless, she still grieves over the loss of her brother and feels pain, this is why in recent years she has stopped visiting the memorial. She blames herself for not being in the same city with him when he died. It was the first time she left her hometown during the war and in those 5 days of absence, she received the news about her brother's death. She returned back immediately to bury him. She returns to that tragic passage of her life in her mind, over and over again, blaming herself for something she can hardly put into words. She lists all the other dates when her close relatives

died in the war: "my grandparents lost their two grandsons in the war. They were both fighting against each other, one on the Georgian side, and another on the Abkhazian side, this is what happened, isn't it horrible?"

Generally, internally displaced ethically Georgians are not allowed to return to their homes, since the conflict is still unresolved, but those from the mixed ethnic background can go back if they want. Having an Abkhazian mother and relatives of Abkhaz background still living in Abkhazia, grants Nini the possibility to travel back and forth and most importantly, to visit her brother's grave. Her mother, who is in her eighties now, has refused to go back to the place where her son was killed, as a sign of a protest. She never returned back. Nini thinks this is the anger towards Abkhazians (while herself being of Abkhazian origin) which she cannot let go, even if it would mean visiting her son's grave. Besides, she refuses to go back unless all ethnically Georgians can also return.

I find it interesting how Nini recollects her first encounter with her home in Abkhazia, where she had spent her life before she was forced to flee:

> I visited my hometown but I saw my house only from distance, it was in 1995. We did not take anything from the house so I knew it was robbed, that no one lived there and everything we owned had been taken away by neighbors. I looked at the house from a distance, I was not able to come closer. It was the day I visited the graves of my brother and relatives who also died during the war. When I saw my house from the road, to be honest, I had no desire to go closer. I could only see the front yard, pieces of broken plates, pieces of clothes scattered everywhere, it was completely wrecked, destroyed. The road leading to the house was so bad that you could not reach the house by car; you could maybe notice one car in an hour that would pass that road. It had become an abandoned place. All is bad, very bad there.., time has stopped as if it is not even the 90s, when we left, it feels as if it is still the 80s.

Nini avoids revisiting the days of flight from her hometown. Nini, together with her relatives had to leave and walk for a few days through the mountains to reach a safe location. She gives a detailed account of how they relocated from one destination to another, on some days freezing in cold weather, on others spending nights either in a car, or outside near the fire they would build in the woods, or in any house that would provide a shelter for that night, sometimes in the tents arranged by IDPs they would encounter on the road.

The fear of hunger and cold is the theme that often reappears in the stories of my informants. Hunger is an important part of the displacement experience for all IDPs who had to take that road. The fear that they would again feel hunger in the future resurfaces in Nini's story when she describes her life in the years of prolonged displacement. One of the achievements she is proud of is her ability to provide for her family, including her elderly parents, so that they would never feel hungry again.

Examples of solidarity and compassion are recurring aspects in stories shared by informants. Nini recalls the solidarity from the recipient community in the village she settled in after the displacement, she tells me that the solidarity and help from total strangers was enormous, for which she always feels grateful:

> When we first settled in Akhaltsikhe, we didn't know anyone there. Each day we would hear someone knocking at the door, complete strangers, bringing products, throughout the winter. They were holding boxes full of products – fruits, potatoes, canned food, everything… this is how we survived the winter. When the spring came, I had already started growing my own tomatoes, potatoes… so that we would never feel hungry again.

Re-starting a meaningful life while being confronted with the painful experiences of the past is one of the central issues each of them had to face. Moving from one place to another required them to reorganize their lives and adapt to an unfamiliar new world. In this sense, Sara Ahmed's elaboration on the process of disorientation or reorientation in terms of migrant bodies is useful to describe what it meant for IDPs to get used to previously unfamiliar space: "[…] it is more that we only notice the arrival of those who appear 'out of space'. Those who are 'in place' also must arrive; they must get 'here'. The disorientation of the sense of home, as the 'out of space' or 'out of line' effects of unsettling arrivals […]. The orientation might be described as the lived experience of facing at least two directions: toward a home that has been lost, and to a place that is not yet home" (Ahmed, 2006, pp. 9-10).

In the similar vein, there is always a sense of disorientation and alienation in informants' stories in relation to their present homes: "I cannot get used to the idea that this is my home. This home still feels like a temporary dwelling. If there was a possibility of return, I would leave everything here and return. I think all IDPs think like me" – says Nini. Even if she treats her home as a temporary one, and despite having difficulties

accepting her present home as her own, there is the feeling of contentment and pride when she revisits each step of turning that space into her new home. The pride also comes from her ability to work and the resilience that helped her achieve a certain degree of security and sustainability.

The Story of Ana

Ana is a 70-year old woman from Sokhumi. She didn't leave the city and had been a witness to the continuous shelling of the city during the war. She was the only woman among the men in her neighborhood that stayed during the war. Ana tells me that she refused to leave, and as she often stresses, that she did so because she was fearless. Others would hide out in the underground bunkers during bombings, but she would not. She would cross herself and wait it out. She has shared with me how she helped bury her neighbors' dead bodies left lying in the streets.

> I remember we heard that our neighbor had been killed and no one was there to take care of the dead body. Only later did his relative, a woman, show up and asked me to help her bury him. Together we carried the dead body to the backyard, dug out a hole in the ground as deep as we could, not very deep though, he was a huge man and we could hardly carry his body on the sheet, we dropped the body a few times while carrying him, it was hard … but no one was there, how could we leave this body unattended[7] there? So, we dug out the ground, wrapped the body in the sheet and buried him.

She recalls several such burials in which she herself participated. But one such image she still sees vividly in front of her eyes, the image of dead bodies of young men being eaten by the pigs in the street. She tells me that from that day on, she has lost the ability to cry, as if her tears have dried up. The trauma of that day is always with her, and in front of her eyes: "I have never cried at funerals since that day. I have seen with my own eyes how the bodies of killed, young soldiers were being eaten by pigs… I think no one cries at the funerals anymore. We have gone through and endured so much suffering, that we do not have tears anymore" (Ana, 70).

This passage from her war experience and her act of witnessing the violent event has entered Ana's life, to use the words of Veena Das, as a kind of embodied "poisonous knowledge", that cannot easily be erased (Das, 2000).

This is how Ana recalls the flight from the city and the route she had to take to reach a safe place:

> The road was horrible. We were walking, it was snowing, and raining, we were freezing; during the nights we would build a fire to warm up and then spend the nights in tents. When we were hungry, we would heat up the big stone found on the road, and bake the bread with the flour that we bought in one village. This bread was all we would eat during those days of walking… there were a lot of dead bodies on the road. I would turn them around to make sure it was not someone I knew. Once, I remember me and my sister getting lost on that road, it was getting darker …we started screaming loudly for help, we were scared, we screamed for quite a while… we were afraid that we would be eaten by the beasts during the night, and were considering climbing up the tree and spending that night in the tree. But fortunately, we saw a fire from the distance and heard someone calling us, so we moved in the direction of that fire.

Ana reflects on how she and her family started rebuilding their lives after displacement with a feeling of contentment and pride. She revisits the days when at the initial stage of displacement, she had to spend nights in an abandoned, tiny photo-booth, at the central station until someone let her live in his empty apartment. In her words, after so much suffering, experiencing hunger, freezing in the cold weather and homelessness during displacement, through her hard work and resilience, she has managed to start "from the empty floor" to rebuild her life. She tells me she is proud to be a displaced person and she is not ashamed of her status as an IDP. She shows me around her current home with the sense of dignity, pride and contentment.

Like Nini's story, Ana's story is also full of examples of solidarity and compassion from people of different ethnicities, Armenians, Azerbaijanis and Kurds. Ana shares with me that from the time she managed to get back on her feet, she was able to help others who were in need.

The Story of Nino

Nino's story is filled with pain, both physical and emotional. During the war she refused to leave her husband alone. She was separated from her children, for their safety, who stayed with relatives in another city. The family reunited and separated several times during the war. Nino's husband had occupied high positions before the war started and they had

a carefree, secure, happy life. After displacement he was unable to find a job, but Nino could and she became a breadwinner for her family. Nino was engaged in different jobs to help her family survive:

> When I first started working in a small kiosk to sell different products, they used to pay me 3 Lari. I worked from early in the morning till late at night. I would eat at home in the morning and then, I would spend an entire day without any food, I was hungry and thirsty until I would get back home after 9 at night. I had to pay 20 Tetri for the plain bun, but I could not afford it, it had to be taken from my pay – 3 Lari that my family needed next day. I had to leave 3 Lari next morning at home for expenses. The metro was free for IDPs, I didn't have to pay for the transport. It meant that I would bring 3 Lari without spending any Tetri from it. Sometimes a woman I worked with would tell me to eat one bun from the shelf and to lie, saying it got wasted… and I did it once or twice.

Now, being relatively well off and supported by her children, who received high education and are all employed, she recalls the past years with pain and tears in her eyes. During those years Nino was engaged in different jobs after displacement as a baker, a kitchen-maid, a salesperson, a nurse, she had continuous migraines and other chronic illnesses, but she worked 7 days a week, sometimes without any days-off for almost 10 years, because the survival of her family largely depended on the money she earned. Her health condition deteriorated, the chronic pain got worse with time because of all the years of hard, physical work, but Nino tells me that she does not regret any moment of it. She is proud of her resilience and of supporting her family during the years they needed it most.

When reflecting on the years of hardship she recalls that despite her husband's numerous attempts he was unable to find a paid job. Earlier he had a highly paid job and held high positions, but during the first years of displacement he became financially dependent on his wife. Nino recalls this passage with compassion towards her husband: "He would not join his friends and neighbors who would invite him over for drinks, he did not feel comfortable not being able to treat them back as well." She recalls that earlier, he would always wear expensive clothes for his job. When they had to leave, Nino somehow managed to take his clothes from home, but he refused to wear them for almost 18 years because, he thought, considering the hardship everyone around them was experiencing, it was a shame to wear those expensive clothes, it would seem inadequate and

out of the place; only after he started earning his own money and they finally got back on their feet, he started wearing his old clothes.

Nino recalls the moments when she used to hide from her neighbors while working in a kiosk as a salesperson. For her, in contrast to her previous affluent life, being engaged in such lowly jobs was associated with the sense of shame.

In my earlier work I elaborated on displaced women's ability to improvise and come up with different survival tactics that helped them adapt to new circumstances much better, as compared to men. I have described how the process of developing these tactics was accompanied by complex emotions and feelings such as guilt, regret, anger, uneasiness, humiliation, fear, pride (Arjevanidze 2020). Overall, the stigma and the shame informants in my study often refer to was associated either with their social status of displaced persons, or with the changed status in the society. I consider that the pride women in this study frequently emphasize in relation to their accomplishments, hard work and resilience, can be read in the context, and in contrast to the stigma and shame they have experienced because of being IDPs, i.e. destitute and in constant need of help from someone.

Conclusion

Drawing on scholars who reject the mind-body dichotomy and acknowledge embodied subjectivities of individuals being affected by acts of violence, I argue that individuals feel different social environments through a wide range of bodily sensations, emotions and feelings, which determine how they relate to their social environments; their experiences of war entail both, physical and emotional connections with the war. Thus, in this paper I argue that the war is an embodied experience, which involves emotions and the bodily experiences reciprocally. War and its aftermath, the forced displacement, are experienced through the body that is a diverse entity, which comes with gender, race, class, cultural, and locational markings. Following Christine Sylvester, I conceptualize war as a social institution with a multitude of constitutive components, different layers of engagement, as well as separation to the war.

Based on the stories of forced displacement of internally displaced women from Abkhazia, I have attempted to illustrate how informants in my study articulate, describe, reflect on their emotions and experiences

of war and displacement. Women in my study had the most immediate and direct connection to war zones and armed activities. Their family members were combatants who died during the fighting, they were caught up either in war zones, or at a short distance from acts of violence, they witnessed the bombing, the shelling of their hometowns, they buried the bodies of dead soldiers themselves. They had to flee in search for a safe place, their physical bodies affected through freezing, starvation and dehydration. Their bodily, physical suffering, as well as social suffering has persisted in the aftermath of the war, in situations of prolonged displacement. Moreover, the stories of IDPs in my study that have experienced dramatic turning points in their lives and witnessed violent acts, are filled with complex feelings, emotions, perceptions such as fear, dread, danger, shame, suffering, intertwined with hope, optimism, courage, resilience, and pride. These dramatic moments in their lives have created the condition in which they are both tragic and full of hope, resilient and vulnerable, insofar as the memory and the pain of loss, the trauma has never disappeared.

In order to fully grasp the experiences of war, as well as situations of prolonged displacements, I find it important to investigate such aspects of experiencing the violent event, as emotions, suffering, pain, bodily physical experiences, as well as social experiences of armed conflicts and generalized violence.

NOTES

1   The Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees of Georgia.
        Statistics of IDPs http://mra.gov.ge/geo/static/55
2   State Strategy of Internal Displacement, 2007.
        http://mra.gov.ge/res/docs/2013111918201884212.pdf
3   Part of the research was funded by the Swedish Institute (SI) Scholarship Programme for Ph.D. studies (2016-2017) and the ASCN scholarship Programme (2016); the following paper is the outcome of a research within a *Pontica Magna* Fellowship at the New Europe College (October 2020-February 2021).
4   Turner notes that when the liminal beings are not concealed, they are often disguised in masks and costumes. He points out that what distinguishes the initiates from others is that they have *nothing*: "They have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing, rank, kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally from their fellows. Their condition is indeed the very prototype of sacred poverty" (pp. 98-99). He suggests that "this coincidence of opposite processes and notions in a single representation characterizes the peculiar unity of the liminal; that which is neither this nor that, and yet is both" (p. 99). One more positive aspect of the liminal phase pointed out by Turner is that there are no hierarchies, distinctions or gradations among the transitional beings – they all are equal.
5   Crapansano further notes that these moments of transitions on the one hand, are brief, their state of liminality is short-lived, but "often embedded in a protracted liminality in which the final transition is, as it were, rehearsed in a series of mini-transitions. […] they are characterized by multiple repetitions in various registers. These repetitions of-mini transitions turn the moments of dramatic crossings into extended passages of liminality" (p. 63).
6   seen as the interpreter of feelings or the 'sensing center of affect, those psychological and physiological intensities (affects) that become emotions when they are given socially conditioned meaning'. Sylvester states that social determinist tendency in the study of emotions is not wrong, but can be reductionist. For her, the role of the body is essential as a source or even realistic locus of emotions. She emphasizes that the body is the unit that senses, feels and thinks about its surroundings. The body is not out of the picture when it comes to diverse emotional activities, including war activities. (Sylvester 2013).
7   She uses the Georgian word "უპატრონო"/romanized as "upatrono"; English translation would be "without the owner", i.e. was left without the possibility to be taken care of from anyone in that moment.

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