

BOUNDARIES OF DISPLACEMENT: Belonging and Return among Forcibly Displaced Young Georgians from Abkhazia

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BOUNDARIES OF DISPLACEMENT:

**Belonging and Return among Forcibly Displaced Young
Georgians from Abkhazia**

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Table of contents

Abstract	v
Svensk sammanfattning	vii
List of papers	ix
Preface	x
1 Introduction	1
Purpose and research questions.....	4
Disposition	5
2 Background	7
Internal displacement on a global scale	7
Internal displacement in Georgia.....	8
The Soviet heritage	12
3 Belonging, home and return	18
Belonging and migration.....	19
Home and return	22
4 Borders and boundaries	27
The infiniteness of boundary making.....	27
Borders as sites of differentiation	28
Borders, boundaries and the politics of belonging	30
5 Method	33
Data collection methods	35
Analysis	40
Language and translation.....	42
Researching forcibly displaced populations	44
Minna in Georgia	49
6 Summary of articles	51

I Crossing the border – an intergenerational study of belonging and temporary return among IDPs from Abkhazia	51
II Distant belongings: On the maintaining and creation of place attachment among Georgian IDPs from Abkhazia	52
III Risksapes: Strategies and practices along the Georgian-Abkhazian boundary line	54
IV Place matters: Return intentions among forcibly displaced young Georgians from Abkhazia living in Tbilisi and Zugdidi	56
7 Discussion and conclusions	58
Disputed belongings and returns	58
Borders and boundary making.....	60
Belonging and return among IDP youth.....	61
Risksapes and the politics of belonging	64
8 References	66

Abstract

This dissertation explores the implications of borders and boundaries for how forcibly displaced young Georgians from Abkhazia understand issues of belonging and return. My theoretical framework draws from theories on home and belonging as well as theories on border and boundary making, and locates them in geographies of uncertainty – or riskscape – areas characterized by conflict and/or inequality. Empirical data was collected through two sets of interviews in Zugdidi near the border to Abkhazia and a questionnaire survey in Zugdidi and the capital Tbilisi. These data have been analysed through both qualitative and quantitative methods.

The young respondents providing material for this research do not constitute a homogenous group. Some of the respondents have family still living in Abkhazia or even partly grew up in the area; others have never been there. The primary goal of the Georgian government has been that the displaced population should return to their homes, and the government's efforts for local integration has long been insufficient. Since no peace accords have been signed, a lack of security prevents a large-scale return. Notwithstanding increased border controls that have made it difficult to visit former homes, some young people still cross the de facto border. By doing this they contest both the Abkhazian de facto authorities and the border as a symbol of separation and differentiation, while claiming a right to belong in Abkhazia. Property and social relations in Abkhazia contribute to stronger connections and an imperative to return. On the other hand, experience of hardship in contemporary Abkhazia has resulted in some young people not considering return as a viable option. Youth who never visited Abkhazia depend mainly on other peoples' memories and political discourse to create emotional bonds to the area their parents fled and to form their ideas of return. Results from the quantitative survey indicate that youth living in Tbilisi, closer to the political centre, to a higher extent intend to return than their peers in Zugdidi. Meanwhile young people's experiences of everyday life in current dwellings in relative

stability create emotional bonds to their present place of living. These experiences challenge both collective processes and experiences from Abkhazia when it comes to maintaining the desire to return.

This research offers insights into the human consequences of war and conflict. More specifically, this dissertation sheds light on how young IDPs are living in a borderland (in both temporal and spatial terms) characterized by uncertainty – between the past and the future as well as between Georgia and Abkhazia. Practices of exclusion and segregation are constitutive of the borders and boundaries that permeate life experiences of the forcibly displaced youth. Furthermore, these borders and boundaries are situated in riskscape of disputed belongings, which makes this borderland more or less stable for different groups of IDPs. This dissertation contributes to an increased understanding of how political aspirations and personal desire to return preserves instability and uncertainty as long as return is not possible.

Svensk sammanfattning

Denna avhandling undersöker konsekvenserna av gränser och gränsskapande för hur unga georgiska internflyktingar från Abkhazien förstår frågor om tillhörighet och återvändande. Jag utgår från teorier om hem och tillhörighet, liksom teorier om gränser och gränsskapande, och lokaliserar dem till geografier av osäkerhet – “riskscapes” – områden som karaktäriseras av konflikter och/eller ojämlikheter. Det datamaterial som ligger till grund för avhandlingen utgörs av två intervjustudier i Zugdidi nära gränsen till Abkhazien; och en enkätstudie som genomfördes i Zugdidi och i den georgiska huvudstaden Tbilisi. Materialet har analyserats genom användande av både kvalitativa och kvantitativa metoder.

Avhandlingens respondenter utgör inte en homogen grupp. Några respondenter har familj och släktingar som bor i Abkhazien eller har delvis växt upp i området, medan andra aldrig ens varit där. Det primära målet för den georgiska regeringen har varit att internflyktingarna ska återvända till sina hem, och regeringens ansträngningar för integration i lokalsamhället har länge varit otillräckliga. Det saknas fredsavtal och bristen på säkerhet förhindrar återvändande i stor skala. Trots de ökade gränskontroller som gjort det svårt att korsa de facto gränslinjen tar sig en del ungdomar ändå över gränsen. Genom att göra detta bestrider de både de abkhaziska de facto myndigheterna och gränsen som symbol för separation och åtskillnad, medan de hävdar sin rätt att känna tillhörighet till Abkhazien. Att ha ett hus och sociala relationer i Abkhazien bidrar till emotionella band och en starkare uppmaning till att återvända. Å andra sidan kan erfarenheterna av vardagens umbäranden inne i Abkhazien resultera i att unga människor inte ser återvändande som ett tänkbart alternativ. Ungdomar som aldrig varit i Abkhazien är beroende av andra människors minnen och politiska diskurser för att skapa känslomässiga band och tankar om återvändande till det område deras föräldrar har flytt från. Resultat från den kvantitativa undersökningen visar vidare att ungdomar som bor i Tbilisi, närmare Georgiens politiska centrum, i

högre grad anger att de har för avsikt att återvända än deras jämnåriga i Tbilisi. Ungdomars erfarenheter av vardagslivet i sina nuvarande bostäder i relativ stabilitet bidrar emellertid till att skapa känslomässiga band till den aktuella bostadsorten. Dessa erfarenheter utmanar på så vis både de kollektiva processerna och erfarenheter från Abkhazien när det gäller att upprätthålla drömmen om återvändande.

Avhandlingen bidrar med insikter om konsekvenser av krig och konflikter för människors vardagsliv. Mer specifikt belyser jag hur avhandlingens unga respondenter lever i en sorts rumsligt och temporalt gränsland mellan det förflutna och framtiden och mellan Georgien och Abkhazien, och detta gränsland kännetecknas av osäkerhet. Praktiker av isärhållande och segregering är konstituerande för de gränser som genomsyrar internflyktingungdomarnas erfarenheter. Dessa gränser är dessutom situerade i "riskscapes" av ifrågasatta tillhörigheter, som gör gränslandet mer eller mindre stabilt för olika grupper av internflyktingar. Avhandlingen bidrar med en ökad förståelse för hur politiska ambitioner och personliga drömmar om återvändande håller kvar människor i instabilitet och osäkerhet så länge återvändandet inte är möjligt.

List of papers

- I. Lundgren, Minna, (2015). Crossing the border – an intergenerational study on belonging and temporary return among IDPs from Abkhazia, in *Security, Democracy and Development in the Southern Caucasus and the Black Sea Region*, eds. Nodia, Ghia & Stefes, Christoph, Peter Lang Verlag, Bern, 229-247
- II. Lundgren, Minna (2014) Avlägsen tillhörighet: Om skapande och upprätthållande av platstillhörighet bland georgiska internflyktingar från Abkhazien, *Nordisk Østforum*, Volume 28(3), 215-237
- III. Lundgren, Minna (under review), Risksapes: Strategies and practices along the Georgian-Abkhazian boundary line and inside Abkhazia
- IV. Lundgren, Minna (2016) Place matters: Return intentions among forcibly displaced young Georgians from Abkhazia living in Tbilisi and Zugdidi, *Caucasus Survey*, Volume 4(2), 129-148

Preface

The writing of this dissertation has been a journey through time and space. It brought me to people and places I had only dreamt about or did not even know existed. I have not travelled alone: as on any journey, people get on and off at different stations. I would like to thank some of my travel companions for sharing this route with me.

First, I am forever grateful to all of the respondents for answering both the questions I asked and those I did not ask. I have learned a lot about human strength and fragility from your voices, stories and sometimes terrifying testimonies. Some of you told me more than I asked about and thereby imposed a responsibility on me that I hope I can one day fulfil.

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I owe special thanks to my previous supervisor Professor Klas Borell at Jönköping University College (formerly at Mid Sweden University) who encouraged this project, helped me focus and always gave pertinent comments on my texts. He was succeeded by Professors Roine Johansson and Anna Olofsson, to whom I am greatly indebted for helping me further advance this dissertation and for their invaluable support. I am also thankful to Barzoo Eliassi, Ph.D., of Linnæus University, who joined after half of the journey and was always ready to read and to answer my questions.

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I met people along the way at summer schools and conferences across Europe and the former Soviet space. We have shared ideas and dorms, talks and inspiration. To Emma Hakala, Mariliis Hämäläinen, Suvi Holmberg, Zsuzsanna Zsidai, Ashot Margaryan and Adeline Braux, thank you for providing visa support, making days in Astana enjoyable, engaging in conversations at Harvard Book Store, discussions over crepes in Tartu, sharing texts and dissertations or just being on the train. My world has grown thanks to you.

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Frösön and Tbilisi, July 2016

Charlotte	Vad finns på andra sidan gränsen?
Eino (farfar)	Inget
Pirjo (farmor)	Allt

Charlotte	What is there on the other side of the border?
Eino (grandfather)	Nothing
Pirjo (grandmother)	Everything

From 'Satu jävla helvetes maa', a theatre play by Charissa Martinkauppi, 2014

1 Introduction

This dissertation, *Boundaries of Displacement*, focuses on the implications of borders and boundaries for how young internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Georgia understand issues of belonging and return. More than 200,000 people are displaced within Georgia as a result of armed internal conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. As IDPs have not crossed an internationally recognized border, they are not protected by the 1951 UN Convention related to the Status of Refugees. Georgian IDPs are thus the responsibility of the Georgian government – one of the conflicting parties in the war that initially caused their displacement. Attempts to resolve these conflicts have been unsuccessful, and to restore territorial integrity, there is a significant political interest in preserving IDPs' willingness to return to their former homes. Therefore, for many years, the government has failed to integrate the displaced into local communities and ensure that their living conditions are decent.

Most Georgian IDPs originate from Abkhazia, a former autonomous republic within the Georgian Republic that proclaimed independence in the late 1990s after an armed conflict between Abkhazian and Georgian forces in 1992-93 and recurring clashes in subsequent years. By the time of the ceasefire agreement in 1994, most of Abkhazia's over 200,000 ethnic Georgians¹ had left. While approximately 45,000 to

¹ Many of the displaced from Abkhazia also consider themselves as Mingrelians, a mainly linguistic subgroup formally counted as Georgian in official documentation. The Mingrelian language is closely related to Georgian, even though these languages are not mutually intelligible. The Mingrelian language is related to Georgian and is spoken mainly in the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region in Georgia and in the Gali district in Abkhazia (cf. Broers 2004, 2009, Trier 2010). Hereinafter in this dissertation 'Georgians' include Mingrelians if not otherwise mentioned.

60,000 Georgians have returned to the Gali² district in southeastern Abkhazia, an area mainly populated by Mingrelians and Georgians prior to the 1992-93 war. But the overwhelming majority remain displaced within Georgia proper, but some also reside in other parts of the former Soviet Union. The former administrative boundary line between Georgia and Abkhazia has been transformed into a de facto state border³ that is monitored and controlled by both Russian and Abkhazian forces. This de facto border is more than an obstacle for those who wish to return or visit Abkhazia. The border has furthermore become a symbol of the rupture not only between Georgia and Abkhazia but also between the past and the present for the many people who no longer have access to their homes in Abkhazia. In a sense, internal displacement is manifested by the existence of borders and boundaries. Borders are obstacles that prevent people from returning, and these borders are furthermore socially constructed through practices of separation and control (Anderson & O'Dowd 1999, Newman 2003, Popescu 2012). Boundaries are drawn through these practices of differentiation (Wimmer 2008) both between desirables and undesirables at the border and between IDPs and locals at their current domicile, where they are considered to be visitors until they return.

Globally, although the return of forcibly displaced populations depends partially on increasingly restrictive migration and immigration policies (Chimni 2009), it is also considered an important part of the peace process (Black & Gent 2006, Black 2002, Stefansson 2006). Return is thus regarded as a restoration of the 'normal' and accordingly builds on the assumption that immanent links exist between people and places – that every person has a 'natural' sense of

² Georgian and Abkhazian names of places often coincide, with the exception of the final -i. The Georgian term Gali is Gal in Abkhazian. In this dissertation, the Georgian names of places will be used.

³ Administrative boundary line, cease-fire line and de facto border are formal descriptions of border phenomena. Later in this dissertation, the concepts border and boundary will have a more theoretical significance.

belonging to a place (Black 2002, Malkki 1992, 1995). Policy aside, return is also an issue that concerns forcibly displaced persons themselves, for whom return is often viewed from a nostalgic standpoint towards a specific place in a former homeland (Al-Rasheed, 1994). However, return migration is not an unproblematic process: many post-conflict areas are characterized by tensions between former conflicting parties with unequal access to power (Black & Gent 2006, Black 2002, Bakke et al. 2009, Dahlman & Tuathail 2005).

Secessionist conflicts such as the one in Abkhazia are most often conducted along ethno-nationalist lines and people who have escaped from conflict appear to be simultaneously belonging and non-belonging in both their place of origin and their place of exile. This contested belonging leads to a spatial vulnerability that can be expressed in terms of a riskscape: a landscape characterized by structural inequalities and uncertainties. A riskscape entails both physical and social elements that interact with peoples' perceptions and actions (Müller-Mahn & Everts 2013). Departing from the situation in Georgia, this dissertation therefore seeks to contribute to knowledge on how local and global conditions in this way produce and reproduce inequalities that affect forcibly displaced populations.

The situation of protracted internal displacement in Georgia can be studied from several angles. On a national level, the government's attempts to restore territorial integrity have been futile. One of their main arguments is that the large numbers of displaced people should return to their homes. In this way, IDPs have become a necessary pawn for the government to uphold demands for control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the role imposed on the IDPs for the resolution of the conflicts needs to be emphasized. At this moment, nearly 24 years have passed since the initial armed conflict broke out, and the continued presence of several hundred thousand displaced people within the country's borders has an important impact on politics, society and local communities. Furthermore, there are issues related to the IDPs themselves – their experiences and understandings of an

existence characterized by protracted displacement and a lack of security that prevent them from returning home. Many of the internally displaced in Georgia either were born in displacement or were very young when they left Abkhazia. Having grown up in other parts of Georgia, they can be expected to maintain different connections than those of their parents both to Abkhazia and to the places where they currently live. This dissertation departs from the young generation's experiences of hardship and the many years that have passed since the escape, both of which affect ideas of belonging and dreams of return to former homes and communities.

Purpose and research questions

The dissertation is largely concerned with the relationship between two places, a former home and a present home, separated by a de facto state border. The overarching purpose of the dissertation is to examine the implications of borders and boundaries for how young Georgian IDPs understand issues of belonging and return.

The following four sets of research questions guide the dissertation:

1. What motivates IDPs to cross the boundary line, and what is the significance of border crossing for how people understand their belonging?
2. How is attachment maintained and, in some cases, created, in relation to a place to which people have limited access for a protracted period of time?
3. What strategies and practices do young people use to cross the border?
4. What factors influence young people's intentions to return to Abkhazia, and do these factors differ depending on where in Georgia young people are living?

Each research question will be addressed in a separate article. The first two articles build on interview material gathered in Zugdidi in

February 2012. Interviews from Zugdidi in May 2014 constitute the basis for the third article. In the fourth article, I analyse the results from a survey conducted in Zugdidi and Tbilisi in December and January 2015.

Disposition

In chapter 2, I locate the situation of internal displacement in Georgia within the post-Soviet context. Chapters 3 and 4 provide theoretical perspectives and insight into previous research. In chapter 3, I focus on research and theories of belonging, home and return. In chapter 4, I outline theories on borders and boundaries and their making. The chapter concludes with a discussion and a theoretical framework in which I integrate theories on belonging and return with theories on borders and boundaries. The methods used for data collection are described in chapter 5 along with a discussion of the methodological and ethical considerations that were an important part of the dissertation. The four articles are summarized in chapter 6. Finally, the 7th and concluding chapter contains a discussion of the results of the dissertation and its contributions to the field of research on forced migration.

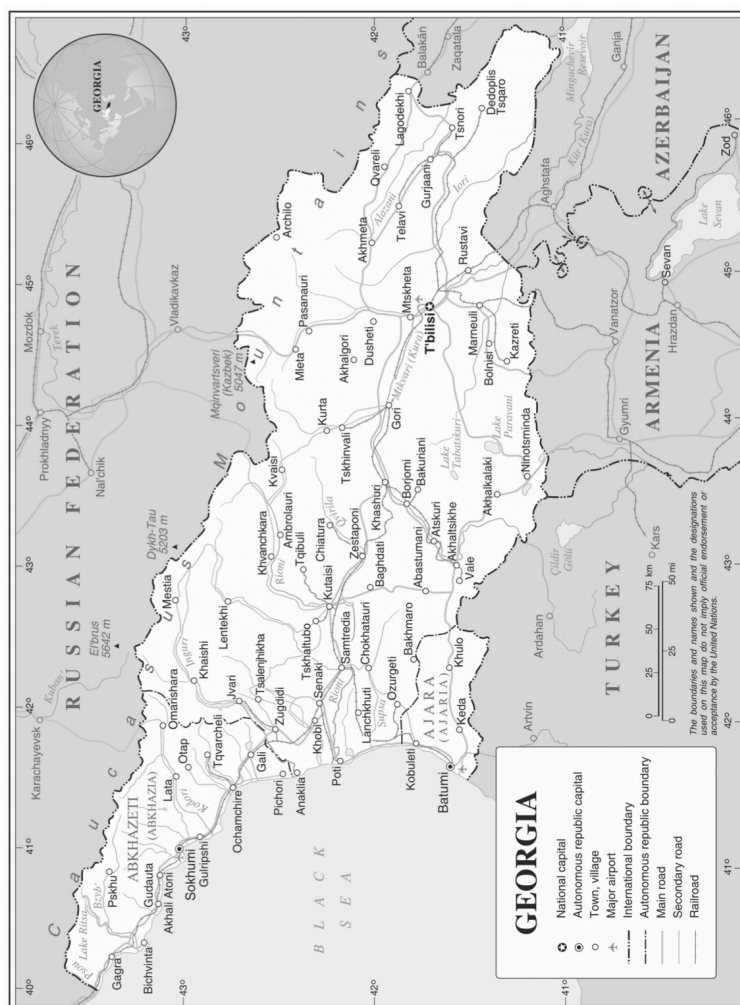


Figure 1: Map of Georgia.
 Source: United Nations Department of Field Support, Geospatial Information Section,
 Map No 3780 Rev.6, September 2015

2 Background

This chapter provides an account of this dissertation's context. I begin by introducing the situation of internal displacement on a global scale. In the subsequent section, I continue with an explanation of the situation of internal displacement in Georgia. Then, I describe the Soviet heritage in the final section to locate the dissertation within the geo-political context where the respondents are living.

Internal displacement on a global scale

When this dissertation project began early in 2011, the number of people worldwide who were displaced within the borders of their country of origin was 27.5 million (UNHCR 2011). Unrest and wars in subsequent years have caused increased numbers of IDPs and refugees. By the end of 2015, the number of IDPs was 40.8 million, and the number of international refugees was 14.4 million (IDMC 2016, UNHCR 2016). In other words, the number of IDPs has increased dramatically, and almost three out of four forcibly displaced persons in the world today are displaced within the borders of their country of residence. This situation is partly a consequence not only of ethnic conflicts and civil wars but also of protectionist policies in relation to refugees and migrants in the Western sphere (Chimni 2009).

IDPs are under the jurisdiction of their country of residence and thus have the same civil rights as other citizens (Brun 2003). Therefore, neither the UN Convention on the Status of Refugees from 1951 nor the UNHCR's Statute of 1950 apply to IDPs. Although IDPs are protected by humanitarian law and conventions on human rights, for many years, there were no comprehensive international guidelines about how and whether the international community should protect IDPs. According to the principle of state sovereignty, issues of internal displacement were considered an internal matter and seldom included in the international agenda.

Nevertheless, an increasing number of ethnic conflicts and genocides in which the role played by the international community has been disputed and in some cases criticized (Cohen & Deng 1998; ICISS 2001) led to the development of the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (UNGPID), which were presented at the UN Commission for Human Rights in 1998. The international conventions that can be applied to IDPs are joined in the Guiding Principles, and the status of those principles has gradually been reinforced (Cohen 2004). In 2005, the UN Commission for Human Rights adopted resolution 2005/46 (E/CN.4/RES/2005/46) on IDPs, a resolution that seeks to further spread and increase the use of the principles (UN Commission on Human Rights 2005). The Guiding Principles are not mandatory, but they highlight the needs and rights of the internally displaced and can be used to pressure governments and warring groups to protect the local population. States are not liberated of responsibility for their citizens: the responsibility of the state is stipulated in the third principle. Further, it is repeated later that the state is responsible for humanitarian assistance (principle 25); the establishment of opportunities for a dignified return (principle 28); and assistance to recover or compensate for lost property (principle 29). Human rights constitute the legal basis for managing the difficult situation of IDPs, and humanitarian law is applicable when displacement occurs in situations of armed conflict (Mooney 2000).

Internal displacement in Georgia

In Georgia, the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the beginning of the 1990s and the war against Russia in August 2008 led to the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. The most recent numbers give that 239,000 people were displaced within Georgia by the end of 2015 (IDMC 2016)⁴ and many of them were forced to

⁴ The Georgian government reports a higher number of IDPs which also includes the at least 45,000 ethnic Georgians who voluntarily returned to the Gali district in southeastern Abkhazia. Most of these people still receive Georgian pensions and monthly IDP allowances. International organizations such as the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) no longer count

leave their homes more than twenty years ago. At least 50,000 are children under the age of 18. The overwhelming majority of the IDPs are Georgians and Mingrelians, but there is also a minority of Abkhazians, Ossetians, Armenians, Russians and members of other ethnic groups (King 2001, Svendsen 2005, IDMC 2009, 2014, UNHCR 2011). Most IDPs originate from Abkhazia, which is now a de facto independent state where the Georgian authorities have no control. Most ethnic Georgians left Abkhazia during the years between the outbreak of the armed conflict in August 1992 and the signing of a ceasefire in 1994. Some returned and then had to leave again after recurrent violence in 1998. However, for the vast majority of the IDPs, it has been more than 20 years since they left their homes; thus, almost all of their children were born as IDPs, and they may never have seen the homes or the regions to which they are supposed to want to return.

The foremost priority for the Georgian regime has been to end displacement by regaining control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The return of the IDPs to their home areas has therefore been prioritized over integration into other parts of the country (Kabachnik et al. 2010). The UN General Assembly, where the Georgian government has repeatedly raised the issue, has also supported the Georgian claim that the displaced people should return to their homes and that they are entitled to do so. This happened most recently in June 2016 in resolution 70/265 (A/RES/70/265).

During the two decades that have passed since independence, the difficult IDP situation has been one of the most noticeable aspects of the Georgian reality. IDPs represent more than 5 per cent of the population, and the situation presents a major, multi-faceted challenge to the country's socio-economic development and stabilization. In the years since their displacement, most IDPs have lived in poverty and vulnerability, often faced difficult living conditions, and lacked regular

these people in the statistics for IDPs in Georgia and instead consider them as returnees (IDMC, 2014).

and adequate sources of income. Additionally, they have been poorly integrated into the local community (Holtzman & Nezam 2004, Salukvadze et al. 2013, Tarkhan-Mouravi 2009). A separate ministry for IDPs, refugees and accommodation was created to ensure that IDPs receive basic education and access to health services. These social services were long offered in forms that implied separation from the regular organization (Mitchneck et al. 2009). Due to these separate services, segregated accommodations, difficulties in finding work (which results in a lack of opportunities to socialize with local residents), and official policies and personal goals of return, many IDPs have long lived isolated from the surrounding community (Mitchneck et al. 2009; Kabachnik et al. 2010). Initially the few families who managed to buy a home risked losing not only their IDP status but also (according to Georgian law) their right to claim their property in Abkhazia and thus the right to return to their home area. These restrictions were abolished in 2003. For ten years after their escape, IDPs additionally lacked real opportunities to exercise their voting rights, because under Georgian law at the time, the right to vote could be exercised only at the place where one was registered (Beau 2003, UNHCR 2009).

Efforts to integrate IDPs into local communities and to improve their standard of living only became part of a state strategy for IDPs in 2007, after pressure from international actors appealing to the UNGPID. The state strategy has two overarching goals: to create conditions for a dignified and safe return and to support decent living conditions and societal participation for IDPs (MRA 2007). An action plan in which the government stated the approach to achieve the goals set forth in the state strategy was created in 2008. Moreover, an amendment was made to the state strategy to include people who were displaced after the Georgian-Russian war in 2008 (Government of the Republic of Georgia, 2008).

The 2007 State Strategy concludes that the objective is to decouple IDP status from specific targeted social interventions so that IDPs have the same rights and opportunities as the rest of the population to apply for means-tested allowances. In other words efforts to support IDPs should not be dissociated from other policies and poverty-reduction strategies. While they had been treated by specialized ministries and humanitarian organizations, support interventions directed at the IDP population should instead be restructured to line ministries and more development-oriented organizations (Holtzman and Nezam 2004, MRA 2007, Salukvadze et al. 2013). With respect to living conditions, the collective centres were eventually to be emptied and IDPs given opportunities for more long-term accommodations under decent conditions in order to enhance their ability to integrate into the local community. The strategy emphasizes, however, that the foremost objective of the state policies towards IDPs is to enable them to return to their homes under dignified and safe conditions. Only as a second objective, opportunities for decent housing and increased social integration should be encouraged while they wait for the opportunity to return (MRA 2007).

Although the proportion of separate schools, health care centres and other facilities for community service that specifically serve IDPs has declined in numbers because of the emergence of integrated institutions, many IDPs still live partially separate from the locals (Mitchneck et al. 2009). The government has initiated the closing of collective centres and initiated projects for IDPs to establish in ordinary housing, but these efforts have been difficult without special assistance because many IDPs lack sufficient personal incomes and livelihoods (Goulda 2009). Despite their commendable aspirations, however, almost 40 per cent of IDPs are still living in collective centres, although some of those centres (the figures remain unclear) are treated as private property (Government of the autonomous republic of Abkhazia 2016, Kharashvili et al. 2009, Public Defender of Georgia 2010, Salukvadze et al. 2013). The Georgian government has also been criticized for forced evictions, when people have been evicted without notice or alternative

dwellings. In other cases, IDPs have been offered newly built dwellings in remote areas far away from opportunities to work and obtain a quality education (Kurshitashvili 2012).

It is possible to discern a shift from the previous unidirectional route to restore territorial integrity and create opportunities for IDPs to return home in the 2007 strategy for how the Georgian state should handle the IDP situation. In the 2012-2014 Action Plan this shift becomes even more visible as the objective of the State Strategy is described as 'to promote IDPs' socio-economic integration and improve their living conditions [...] until their return becomes possible' (MRA 2012). However, the experience of refugee situations elsewhere has shown that many refugees and IDPs choose not to return home even if there will be peace and unrest subsides (Holtzman and Nezam 2004). If many IDPs choose to stay in other parts of Georgia, the Georgian government loses one of its most important arguments in the process of peace and control in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Svendsen 2005).

The Soviet heritage

Historical events and contemporary social phenomena are linked to places, and these places are conversely linked with why and how things happen. The Soviet Union no longer exists, but places within the former union remain. These places – countries, regions, towns and villages – are influenced by the practices, cultures and institutional patterns of behaviour within the Soviet system. The roots of the conflicts that forced people to leave their homes can largely be found in historical and political events in the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union was a federal hierarchy of union republics, autonomous republics, autonomous provinces (oblast') and autonomous districts (okrug) with different levels of autonomy. Each geographical unit was expected to represent a national 'homeland' for a titular population (Wheatley 2010). An award of autonomy status was perceived as Moscow's approval of the idea that the titular population

had the 'right' to exist as a nation (Jackson 2004). However, the principle that each ethnic group should have a designated geographical area did not necessarily mean that the titular population was in the majority in that area (Fawn & Cummings 2001, Jackson 2004, Pelkmans 2006, Trier et al. 2010). The classification of people as belonging to one or another national group did not always reflect an underlying social reality. This is especially true for the Caucasus, a region historically characterized by social, cultural and religious intermingling. When nationality was designated the most important aspect of identity, other aspects such as class, clan and geographic belonging lost importance. Nationality was registered in passports and documents, and the titular population was given priority for higher education and higher political and bureaucratic positions (Pelkmans 2006). In this way, Soviet rule defined and consolidated national groups; however, people were expected to adopt a shared Soviet identity (Broers 2009, Matveeva 2002). Although national elites ruled state institutions in their respective 'homelands', non-Russian groups were not particularly encouraged to strive for higher positions in Communist Party structures (the Georgian SSR had a low proportion of representatives in these bodies). In the Georgian Soviet Republic, however, ethnic Georgians had nearly full power over the political structures and the Georgian Communist Party (Broers 2009). One of the reasons for this was that entry into Georgia's higher political structures required Georgian language skills. Minority groups such as Abkhaz and Ossetians primarily learned Russian as a second language; therefore, they participated in Tbilisi's political life only to a small extent (Broers 2009, Wheatley 2010). In Abkhazia, which had the status of an autonomous republic, ethnic Abkhaz were in the minority⁵, but because of affirmative action, people of Abkhaz origin

⁵ Although there is no space to elaborate on Abkhazia's history in this dissertation, it deserves to be mentioned that when Abkhazia was incorporated in Imperial Russia in the 1860s, substantial numbers of Muslim Abkhaz left for the Ottoman Empire, and this allowed in-migration of Greeks, Russians, Armenians, Estonians and Georgians/Mingrelians. A significant in-migration of Georgians/Mingrelians also followed 1939-59 after the incorporation 1931 of Abkhazian SSR into Georgian SSR (when Abkhazia was subsequently downgraded to

held most of the political positions in the Supreme Soviet of the Abkhazian ASSR and the local Communist Party (Broers 2009).

As long as the Soviet Union existed as a strong central power that could act as a mediator and arbitrator between the various hierarchical levels and keep the patchwork of nations together, the system worked (Jackson 2004, Matveeva 2002). In addition to the economic, political and social changes that the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union brought with it, independence entailed that local national elites increased their efforts to strengthen national bonds within the former union republics. Modern states were created around dominant groups within already-defined territories, and minority groups in the newly independent states were expected to follow this development. However, out of fear of losing political, economic, linguistic and cultural status, these groups instead demanded increased autonomy and independence, often with support from Moscow (Cheterian 2009a, Matveeva 2002, Pelkmans 2006, Trier et al. 2010). The low level of integration of Abkhaz and Ossetians in political structures and Georgian society also led to a considerable distance from Georgian culture. When Georgia declared its independence in 1991, Abkhazia and South Ossetia feared that they would lose their autonomy, and Russia was considered the protector and a symbol of security (Broers 2009, Wheatley 2010). In the years immediately following independence, armed conflicts broke out in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia. During this time Georgia was also plagued by a civil war, which was sparked by the coup that removed the country's first president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, from power (Zürcher 2008). The country was in political chaos with open violence, and state institutions had lost the monopoly of violence. The aspirations for increased autonomy and independence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia can be linked partly to the nationalist policies of Gamsakhurdia and partly to the Georgian government's inability to control its external borders,

autonomous republic after being in a treaty relationship with Georgian SSR) (cf. Hewitt 2013, Coppieters 2002, Slider 1985).

which increased opportunities for third parties (Russia) to support Abkhaz and Ossetian forces (Chkoidze 2009, Jackson 2004). Arguing that Georgia supported Chechen separatists who were present on the Georgian side of the border area between the two countries, Russia carried out military operations in Georgian territory. Any attempt to resolve the conflicts was repeatedly hampered by the lack of trust between the parties (Chkoidze 2009, König 2009).

It was extremely difficult to build a Georgian state when war was conducted on three fronts, largely by various paramilitary formations, which often had nationalist aspirations and engaged in a high level of criminal activity. As the country was previously characterized by strong government control, limited opportunities for oppositional politics and difficult social conditions for a large part of the population, only after the 2003 Rose Revolution was it possible to discern a distinct level of stability and change in political structures (Cheterian 2009a, 2009b). Georgia's economic situation has improved significantly since 2003, but the country remains affected both by unresolved ethno-territorial conflicts and by the fact that a significant portion of the population is socially very disadvantaged (Tarkhan-Mouravi 2009). The new leadership under President Saakashvili proclaimed early in 2004 that the first priority was to restore control over the entire internationally recognized territory (Chkoidze 2009, König 2009). After the five-day war with Russia in 2008, Russia recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states, a recognition that had been adopted by only a handful of other states in the world. Continued instability along the administrative borders to Abkhazia and South Ossetia could still lead to a resumption of hostilities. Therefore, Georgia's future development is closely linked to resolving the frozen conflicts and achieving the possibility of uniting the country and restoring territorial integrity (König, 2009). Therefore, the return of the IDPs to their homes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia has become a necessary argument for the Georgian government in its efforts to sustain its demands for control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

In Abkhazia, where the de facto authorities have allowed large parts of the pre war Gali population to return⁶, there is strong resistance to large-scale return of ethnic Georgians to other parts of Abkhazia (Anchabadze 1998, O'Loughlin et al. 2014). According to the last Soviet census in 1989, the population of Abkhazia (525,000 people) comprised (in percentages) Abkhaz (17.8), Georgians (45.7), Armenians (14.6), Russians (14.3), and other groups (7.7). By 2003, the population had been reduced by half and comprised (in percentages) Abkhaz (44.2), Georgians (20.6), Armenians (21.0), Russians (10.9), and other (3.3) (Trier et al. 2010). The most recent census, conducted in early 2011, reports that 240 705 people lived in Abkhazia⁷. Of them, 50.7 per cent were Abkhaz, 17.9 per cent were Georgians, 17.4 per cent were Armenians, 9.2 per cent were Russians and 1.9 per cent were of other nationalities (Apsny Press 2011). Because Georgians accounted for 43 per cent of the population before the war, a large-scale return of ethnic Georgians would make it difficult for the Abkhazian regime to maintain an independent state based on Abkhaz ethnicity. The Abkhazian de facto authorities aim to retain the position of dominant ethnicity through the demographic change that migration has created to their benefit.

Previous research on Georgian IDPs is primarily focused on shelters and living conditions (c.f. Bruckner 2009, Brun 2015, Kabachnik et al.

⁶ As many Mingrelians/Georgian in the Gali district did not take active part in the 1992-93 fighting, their return to Gali has been considered more legitimate, yet still questioned by different actors inside Abkhazia. There has also been an economic imperative to allow the pre-war Gali population to return, since the district is very fertile, and there is a need of agricultural produce in the economically isolated Abkhazia (Clogg 2008, Matsuzato 2011). Furthermore, as in many regions characterized by ethnic conflict, the origins of various groups are often disputed. This applies also to Mingrelians who, depending on whether they are considered to be an ethnic subgroup to Georgians, an independent nationality, or descendants from the Samurzaq'anoans, are more or less tolerated within the Abkhazian community (cf. Broers 2012, Hewitt 1998, Matsuzato 2011, Müller 1998).

⁷ The results of this census have been questioned. Notably the number of Abkhaz is considered to be inflated, whereas the numbers of Armenians and Georgians might be reported as somewhat lower than the actual counts (Hewitt 2013).

2010, Kabachnik et al. 2013, Kozoil 2007, Kurshitashvili 2012, Mitchneck et al. 2009, Salukvadze et al. 2013, Tarkhan-Mouravi 2009, Vivero Pol 1999, Zoidze & Djibuti 2004), the role of IDPs in settling the conflict (Clogg 2008, Tarkhan-Mouravi & Sumbadze 2006) and the adult population. Accordingly, there is a knowledge gap concerning the young generation of IDPs and their experiences of displacement and ideas of return. Similarly, there is a lack of research related not only to the cross-boundary movements that both current and former Gali residents undertake for various reasons, such as trade, economy, taking care of property, visiting graves and family and smuggling, but also to the ways in which increased border control has impeded these movements. Previous studies on these movements (cf. Kukhianidze et al. 2004, Mirimanova & Pentikainen 2011, Weiss 2012) are primarily concerned with trade, smuggling and criminal activities. None of these studies focus on the actual experiences of people who undertake these cross-boundary movements in their everyday lives for other reasons, such as visiting family or taking care of property.

3 Belonging, home and return

To situate this dissertation within the field of forced migration research and to enhance the understanding of the circumstances in which IDPs are living, this chapter integrates theories and previous research on belonging, home and return. Research on IDPs is scant in comparison with not only research on refugees and refugee situations but also the increasing numbers of IDPs worldwide. This dissertation is therefore an important contribution not only to the field of IDP research but also to forced migration research in general. Database searches generate very high numbers of articles focusing on 'refugees', whereas 'IDP' or 'internally displaced person' will not produce even one-tenth as many articles. Although IDPs and refugees share similar experiences, some parts of the scholarship on refugee experiences are also valid in situations of internal displacement.

Nevertheless, research that departs from policy categories has been criticized (Black 2001, Chimni 2009) both because there is a lack of independence in relation to policy makers and organizations and because a unilateral focus on policy categories such as refugees or IDPs may cover only a narrow part of the social worlds where people live (Bakewell 2008). Consequently, research on specific groups of people covered by one or another category that includes aspects of life other than the implications brought by categorisation and policies remains necessary because we can increase knowledge of both particular situations and people's everyday life experiences in exile.

This chapter consists of two sections. The first section introduces research on how forced migrants are reflected as belonging to the places they have left behind. The second section continues to draw on the implications of home and return in relation to place-bound identities.

Belonging and migration

In conjunction with migration, whether voluntary or conflict related, it is foremost national identity in terms of citizenship that determines the premise under which an individual is allowed or forbidden to cross a border and possibly remain on a territory that is controlled by another state. This reality is reflected in the language used to describe people who escape war and conflict. A refugee is someone who escaped from his or her 'natural' and 'original' home by crossing a state border. An IDP, however, is someone who by definition is 'displaced' – that is, at 'the wrong place' within the borders of the state where he or she is living (Brun 2003). In this way, regardless of whether we talk about internal displacement or forced displacement in general, the usage of these words inscribes a normative belonging of forced migrants to a place. In other words, displaced people are considered to belong in the place where they were born or where they have some type of 'natural' connection, and not in their contemporary place of living. The manner in which forced migrants and refugees are attributed a 'natural' affiliation to a place draws on ideas that every human has a territorial belonging and that the forced migrant or refugee represents an abnormality from this order (Black 2002, Brun 2003, Malkki 1992, 1995).

Notions such as 'rootless' or 'motherland' are often used to describe and highlight 'natural' belongings to place; these ideas are also fundamental in the ideas of the nation (Malkki 1992, Anderson 1983). In this respect, IDPs as a category become especially interesting because although they are displaced within the borders of the state where they are citizens, they are nevertheless not in the 'right' places. They are separated from other citizens who migrated voluntarily to other parts of the country, in part because IDPs are forcibly displaced by conflict. In addition, national governments such as the government of Georgia might have an interest in separating IDPs from other citizens. IDPs both belong and do not belong; they are simultaneously *insiders* and *outsiders*. In this way, belonging can be used as a discursive resource

(insider/outsider), implying different practices of inclusion or exclusion (cf. Wimmer 2008).

However, belonging, whether belonging to a group or to a place, is closely linked to how people perceive themselves (Vertovec 2001). It is, in other words, an emotional matter related to an individual's emotional investment in a specific place (Pollini 2005) or a person's *experiences* of belonging (Anthias 2006). Furthermore, belonging concerns the relationship between citizenship, identity and the emotional connection to a place (Yuval-Davis et al. 2006). In situations categorized by conflict and migration, the separation of the discursive and emotional aspects of belonging is highly actualized. Especially in nation states, national identity is obviously crucial because the nation state makes an exclusive claim to power over a given territory. In these cases, national identity becomes synonymous with citizenship, entailing membership, rights and duties (Anthias 2006). However, territorial identities are not exclusively national. People's identities and belongings can also be considered hierarchically based on a geographical scale. Belonging can have local and regional connections, and it can be experienced in relation to groups of states or continents (Herb & Kaplan 1999, Hudson 2000). Feeling a sense of belonging to one place does not exclude the sense of belonging to another place (Pollini 2005) or presuppose that multiple territorial belongings are always hierarchical (Herb & Kaplan 1999). The experience of belonging to a place is furthermore associated with the connections between membership and places – in other words, with social inclusion and exclusion and being accepted in a community (Anthias 2006). During the human life cycle, the importance of belonging to different groups and places varies. Sometimes the national and the local represent oppositional interests, and on such occasions, individuals' loyalty to different territorial, ethnic or social units is often tested (Madsen & van Naerssen 2003). Yuval-Davis (2006) suggests that the politics of belonging are situated temporally, spatially and intersectionally. The politics of belonging represent the outcomes of current historical, political, and economic processes. These processes and politics

furthermore affect different states, places and societies differently. Finally, social locations such as ethnicity, gender, class, age, and sexuality influence how people are included or excluded, how they are allowed to belong and to what extent they have access to power.

Forced migrants' experiences appear to be characterized by uncertainties during both escape and exile. Both past and present existences along with future trajectories appear to be located in landscapes of uncertainty, or riskscape, where their belonging to places and communities is questioned. A 'riskscape' represents how individuals or groups of people in their everyday lives make sense of and act in relation to multiple layers of risks and uncertainties in physical landscapes (Müller-Mahn & Everts 2013, Sutherland et al. 2012). The concept of riskscape departs from the idea that risks and uncertainties are intertwined with place and social action (Müller-Mahn & Everts, 2013). They are located phenomena in the sense that all social phenomena must happen somewhere and that this somewhere is a product of social practices (Appadurai 1996, Giddens 1984). People develop strategies and adopt preventive measures to manage riskscape; they change routes, behaviour and practices (Borell 2008, Doevenspeck & Mwanabiningo 2012, November 2008). Riskscape can vary substantially depending on one's viewpoint based on the social practices and the risks to which one is attuned. Therefore, riskscape can be overlapping because they are viewed and acted in relation to different perspectives and by different actors. Moreover, people's practices in relation to 'their' riskscape affect and influence other people's riskscape (Müller-Mahn & Everts 2013). In this way, each situation calls for continuous interpretations of one's surroundings, and wariness and uncertainty become a fundamental part of everyday life (Rabinowitz and Khawalde 2000).

People's agency, however, is linked to their various social positions (including their ethnicity, gender, class, age and citizenship) and thereby to different intersecting structures of power (Appadurai 1990, Gieryn 2000, Giritli-Nygren et al. 2015, Lupton 1999). Forced migrants

are not considered truly 'at home' and actually belonging 'elsewhere' while in exile. Therefore, they face increased exposure or vulnerability in relation to riskscape. In situations of forced displacement or conflicted areas, places therefore easily become characterized as ours or theirs, accessible or inaccessible, and safe or dangerous.

Home and return

Home is an ambiguous term that can encompass several different dimensions. 'Home' can be understood as a place of living in an apartment or a house. However, it can also signify a village, city, region or country (Mallet 2004). Home has always a spatial dimension, but this dimension in itself is not sufficient to describe home as a phenomenon. A home is more than a place when it contains social, cultural and psychological aspects of people's lives (Mallet 2004, Saunders & Williams 1988). Home occupies a central position when social relationships and memories are associated with a place (Black 2002, Mallet 2004, Zetter 1999). In a broad sense, everyday lives and routines are centred on home, which is also a place where people seek normalcy and safety in situations of crisis and unrest (Borell 2008). Those who are forced to flee and leave their homes leave not only the buildings themselves but also the place where those homes are located and many of the social relationships that are associated with the place. The loss of place is central in refugee identity and can represent major adversity in terms of security and economic achievement (Zetter 1999, Stefansson 2006).

A home usually holds both memories of the past and plans and ideas for future improvements to the property. In addition to the loss of place and social relationships, losing a home can entail an experience of losing the future (Black 2002, Stefansson 2006, Zetter 1999). Based on this reasoning, it is possible to distinguish between home as a place, home as an object and home as an activity. Home as a place can simply be interpreted as the geographical place: the village, city or region

where a home is located. Home as an object corresponds to the physical dwelling – a house or an apartment – that is partly the object of peoples' efforts and partly the container that becomes a home through activities in the form of social relationships and daily routines. In simple terms, this model could be presented in a hierarchical form in which home is something that is repeatedly 'performed' in various ways in a house and effectively transforms the dwelling into a home that is located in a specific area (Lundgren 2014). Home can nevertheless be performed outside people's actual homes, as is the case for people in flight who are attempting to create temporary homes in buildings and places other than those that they primarily call 'home'. However, beyond activities that are directly linked to temporary residence, which compared to the original home provides a greater sense of security as long as armed conflict or unrest is ongoing, performing home usually involves other types of actions that strengthen the emotional bonds to a home. Occasional trips and visits to a former home or stories told by older generations about a lost home can strengthen and enhance younger generations' sense of connectedness and belonging to the former home or place (Ahmed 1999, Khalili 2004, Powers 2011). Mitchneck et al. (2009) have shown that IDPs from Abkhazia have denser social networks than local inhabitants. However, those networks primarily comprise other IDPs, who often originate from the same village that they previously fled. In this way, IDPs maintain not only social relationships but also their link to a lost home and a common past, something that can contribute to feelings of safety and security. For those who do not have their own memories and experience of what has been lost (e.g., children born in exile), this kind of collective experience constitutes an important component in the creation of feelings of belonging (Christou & King 2010). From this perspective, we can say that home is created in the relationship between space and activity, but home does not necessarily have to be performed in the place that people call their home.

For displaced populations, the question of returning home is a central issue. However, it also appears important for governments in countries

that have large groups of refugees and IDPs. Since the Cold War ended and the Soviet Union was dissolved, the leading principle of the international community (UN, UNHCR, EU) has been that refugees must return to their homes in their country of origin. Today, the term 'refugee' no longer represents a dissident from Eastern Europe; instead, it represents a person who flees war, oppression and human rights violations (Toft 2007, UNHCR 2004, Black & Koser 1999). The policy of return depends not only on people's individual desire to return but also on an increasingly restrictive asylum and immigration policy (Chimni 2009), especially within the European Union.

The international community additionally maintains that returning people to their homes in war-affected areas is mandatory for sustainable peace. In this way, return is considered a restoration of the 'normal' and an essential part of the peace process. However, because armed conflicts are often rooted in inequalities between different groups and differential access to power, return is rarely unproblematic. Many post-conflict areas are characterized by tensions between ethnic groups and between those who fled and those who stayed behind during the war (Bakke et al. 2009, Black 2002, Black & Gent 2006, Dahlman & Tuathail 2005, Stefansson 2006). The home to which one returns after war can be marked by war experiences and transformed into a symbol of insecurity. In this regard, weakening links between house and home can lead to dreams of starting over in a new home in a new place. Experiences from Bosnia show that return in many cases is temporary; people who regained access to their homes often chose to sell and settle in other parts of the country. Policy on the restoration of individual peoples' homes is an example of how the international community has prioritized the 'little home' before the 'large home', i.e., policies and infrastructure that could have enabled better conditions for the return to a multi-ethnic community (Stefansson 2006).

Regardless of whether people migrated voluntarily or were forced to escape, in most cases, they are expected to maintain emotional ties to their home areas; among groups of migrants, the dream of return can

assume almost mythological forms (Black 2002, Stefansson 2006, Zetter 1994, 1999), which in some cases also applies to groups of people who have never even lived in the area to which they are expected to return. The myth of returning home can serve political, personal and informal purposes. What was left behind and its recreation 'as it was' before the escape is idealized either to strengthen political demands for readmission of regimes' control over breakaway territories or to strengthen bonds within a group or a family (Zetter 1999).

Kabachnik et al. (2010) use Mallets' (2004) notion of 'home as travelling' to describe Georgian IDPs relation to the homes that they left behind. 'Home' belongs both to the past and to the future when people dream about return. Meanwhile, IDPs' current dwellings are not considered homes but instead are symbols of the protracted displacement. Memories from the past and dreams about a future return home are connected both to the past and the future, representing strategies that displaced populations use to manage their difficult situation. Return is not only a symbol for striving after a future in a past home but also a way to restore continuity from a life course perspective. Departing from the temporal concepts of the past, present and future, Zetter (1999) demonstrates how Cypriot IDPs respond to integration and adaptation in relation to return. What is happening in the present affects how people experience continuity throughout the life cycle. This relationship is illustrated through a triangular model in which temporal concepts of the past, present and future are located at the intersections and in which the sides of the triangle correspond to the links between these notions. If one of the sides of the triangle is broken, continuity is lost. The past is physically represented by what has been lost in the form of a former home or homeland, whereas a temporary dwelling materializes the present. The experience of loss of continuity between the past, present and future is common among displaced populations who have lost their homes. For those who strive to return to a former home, the future remains unclear because the idea of return in itself over time can appear increasingly uncertain.

To maintain continuity and recreate the connection between the past and the future, return is made a goal. However, the present, the temporary, does not occur in a vacuum. People adapt to the environment in which they are living. When longer periods of time (or perhaps a lifetime for the younger generation) pass in a temporary dwelling, continuity can instead be perceived in relation to this temporary home. The loss of a past that one has not experienced is not problematic in the same way as the loss for older generations. However, young generations can also adhere to collective narratives about a common lost past, departing from a feeling of belonging in this lost home or homeland and striving to return to re-establish continuity.

Black et al. (2006) distinguish between reactive and proactive dreams of return. The reactive dream is closely linked to how people perceive their current living conditions, whereas the proactive dream is based on the present-day situation in the home area and the actual conditions for return. If current conditions in the place of exile entail severe hardship in everyday life, the past can be idealized to serve as a counter-image to the present (Black 2002, Zetter 1994, 1999). The dream of returning to an idealized home can not only function as a strong unifying force within specific groups of displaced people but also contribute to distinguishing them from the locals. Previous studies show partially differing results for men and women and different age groups with respect to the wish to return to a previous homeland. Return wishes are affected by existing socio-economic conditions, housing and integration efforts in the local community. However, both the experience of home and homeland before the escape and the experience of discrimination during exile can have implications for individuals' willingness to return (Zetter 1999, Black & Gent 2006, Darieva 2011).

4 Borders and boundaries

'Borders' and 'boundaries' are notions that are often used interchangeably. However, they are not synonyms, even though they are often used as such. From a theoretical viewpoint, borders and boundaries are specific phenomena. Departing from Jones' (2009) usage of boundaries as 'any type of division whether it is a semantic divider between categories or a line-on-the-ground political division' (p. 7) and borders as political divisions between territories, this chapter will draw on some of the theoretical perspectives on boundaries, borders and their making and remaking. I will start by conceptualizing the process of boundary making and then move further into a discussion on borders and their functions. The chapter will end with a concluding theoretical discussion.

The infiniteness of boundary making

Boundary work entails classifying, categorizing or creating typification systems. It involves identifying divergences and highlighting differences between diverse social and material phenomena (Gieryn 1983, Lamont & Molnár 2002, Jones 2009). Bourdieu (1991) argues that to determine something – to give something a social definition or an identity – simultaneously entails the creation of sociocultural boundaries. In this way, it is the process of making distinctions – of differentiating people, things or actions from others – that constitute a basis for their identity formation (Barth 1969). Abbott (1995) suggests that boundaries pre-exist what is bounded and therefore the bounded 'stuff' can be comprehended as an entity only after shared differences are linked.

However, whereas boundaries and categories play an essential role in how we understand the world, they should not be considered permanent and fixed. According to Jones (2009), boundary work instead should be termed as an 'inchoate' process (p.7). Boundaries are made and remade over time and through conscious political

movements or individual interactions in everyday life (Wimmer 2008). Even if they appear to be finished, they are constantly remade and renegotiated. Crowley (1999) argues that boundaries have a changing permeability and that because this permeability is shifting, people can find themselves on either side.

Lamont and Molnár (2002) distinguish between symbolic and social boundaries. Whereas symbolic boundaries are conceptual distinctions made to categorize social phenomena such as people, objects, and practices, social boundaries take on concrete forms that are demonstrated through differential and uneven access to resources and social opportunities for different groups. Symbolic boundaries can be transformed into social boundaries, and consequently, they become constitutive of social action and interaction in different ways (Newman & Paasi 1998). Accordingly, boundaries are not only symbols and expressions of power relations but also social institutions that become 'naturalized' through differential practices.

Wimmer (2008) proposes a taxonomy of how boundaries between ethnic groups are made and remade through actions on different societal levels. Boundaries between groups can be shifted and become either inclusive or exclusive. For example, inclusive practices can be used in expansive nation-building projects to include minority groups in the titular nation. Conversely, exclusive practices, or contraction, can be actualized through differentiation and splitting existing categories or by emphasizing lower levels of differentiation, for example, regional or social belonging.

Borders as sites of differentiation

Borders are boundaries that can be regarded, on the one hand, as lines separating territories and, on the other hand, as places where territories meet (Popescu 2012). From a sociological perspective, it is not borders as lines on a map that are in focus. Instead, and specifically for this dissertation, borders as social practices and social interactions are of

interest. Social practices such as monitoring, building fences, and creating passport controls can make borders more open or closed. Conversely, the dismantling of border controls and agreements on passport unions contribute to opening and (depending on the context) partly dissolving borders. Therefore, borders may be more or less open, and the extent of openness is linked to political processes in the territories that meet at the border (Prelz Oltramonti 2011, Anderson and O'Dowd 1999). Border controls separate and exclude undesirable 'outsiders', increasing control over the territory. In this way, the border has both material and symbolic expressions (Khamaisi 2008, Popescu 2012, Newman 2003). Accordingly, borders are not merely lines in space demarcating specific territories, nor are they specific locations in themselves. Borders are materialized through fences and places of passage and control – places where social interactions and border making occur. In this way, borders represent both demarcation lines and social practices; they are constructed by humans and concurrently construct the humans that they contain (Appadurai 1996, Giddens 1984, Anderson & O'Dowd 1999). Borders are erected and constructed for reasons that give meaning to the places contained within them.

Attempts to establish an independent state depend on the creation and control of borders. Nevertheless, borders result from not only physical demarcations and the establishment of normative or legal regulations but also boundary-making processes – they are social, political, and discursive constructs and outcomes of the production of a territory's identity (Newman & Paasi 1998, Zhurzhenko 2010). Boundaries that are drawn are not limited to the border areas; furthermore, they are expressed through social and cultural practices both in legislation and in narratives about the bounded space (Herb & Kaplan 1999, Newman & Paasi 1998). Territorial borders are thus both material and symbolic outcomes of boundary-making processes. They serve as barriers that protect those labelled 'insiders' from 'outsiders', because borders control who and what can enter a territory (Popescu 2012, Newman 2003, Khamaisi 2008). These strategies of spatial exclusion through which the regime exerts power and upholds its control over the

territory organize human behaviour by regulating movement in space (Creswell 1996, Lupton 1999, Newman 2003, Venkatesh 1997).

In this way, borders have differential permeabilities; people may have different opportunities to cross borders based on citizenship and ethnic affiliation (Doevenspeck & Mwanabiningo 2012, Weiss 2012). Border officers who differentiate between 'desirables' and 'undesirables' work as one filter; the material form in terms of topography and human-raised obstacles works as another (Brunet-Jailly 2005). People who do not fulfil the acceptance criteria use unauthorized roads to cross borders (Doevenspeck & Mwanabiningo 2012, Prelz Oltramonti 2011, Weiss 2012). Thus, border crossings can be regarded as spatially deviant in different locations and social contexts and furthermore as subversive because unauthorized crossings challenge state sovereignty (de Certeau 1984, Rabinowitz & Khawalde 2000). This is particularly true for situations of unresolved conflict in which the border's spatial form or function is disputed. However, one must consider that this kind of deviant border crossing is not illegal by nature; yet it can be considered as such because of state or *de facto* state regulations. Nevertheless, people who cross 'illegally' may consider their behaviour to be licit (Doevenspeck & Mwanabiningo 2012). The legitimization of 'illegal' border crossings stems from people's reasons and motives for crossing. Forced migrants cross borders 'illegally' to escape; smugglers cross to profit from the trading of goods. The permeability of the border depends on the border regime and the individual who wants to cross. Although documents and authorizations allow legal passage, unauthorized border crossings typically involve knowledge of safe roads and social networks along with money and bribes (Doevenspeck & Mwanabiningo 2012, Rabinowitz & Khawalde 2000, Weiss 2012).

Borders, boundaries and the politics of belonging

The presence of borders and boundaries is characteristic of situations of internal displacement. In this dissertation, borders represent both obstacles that prevent people from returning to their homes and social practices of differentiation and control. Boundaries are made not only

through social practices at the border, where 'desirables' are separated from 'undesirables', but also through the assigning of the IDP status that either separates or contracts displaced populations from the local population where they are living (cf. Wimmer 2008). Furthermore, boundaries are connected to the politics of belonging (cf. Anthias 2006), in which people who do not meet the criteria of inclusion are deprived of rights and access to power. Borders and boundaries are thereby associated with the exertion of power, and boundary making contributes to differential rights and affects opportunities for human movement.

By adding a spatial dimension to Zetter's (1999) triangular model of temporal continuity (see chapter 3, page 25), we obtain a useful and comprehensive theoretical model to study the implications of borders and boundaries on the understandings of belonging and return in situations of protracted displacement. The spatial dimension is represented by past, present and future homes, which are located in geographies of uncertainty, or what Müller-Mahn and Everts (2013) call *riskscapes* – that is, in areas characterized by conflict and/or inequality. In such areas, borders are obstacles in terms of both topography and social practices that prevent people from returning to their homes. Borders thus constitute barriers between the past and the future, and in this way, borders interrupt the continuity between time and place. Various boundaries are constructed by categorizing different groups along symbolic terms as belonging to places or homes that are 'here' or 'there', but these boundaries are social/structural, as they become constitutive of differential access to power and resources and thus create vulnerable positions in different levels of uncertainty. Symbolic boundaries between groups of people form the basis for structural disparities in, for example, access to citizenship and power, along with the right to enter a territory. Similarly, IDP status creates difference and exclusion in relation to local populations in the current place of exile.

Furthermore, the lives of internally displaced people appear to be characterized by temporary and conflicting boundaries – on the one hand, through anticipation a return that will end displacement and, on the other hand, through attempts to overcome the temporary and normalize life and home. The temporary condition is unstable, and it causes discomfort and a lack of structure (Moshe 2009); it is pervaded by waiting, a lack of action, and a break between the past and the future (Gasparini 1995). The present resembles a state of limbo in which people find themselves after many years in exile and in which it remains unclear whether return is a possible alternative. Nevertheless, people also have an everyday life ‘at present’, in which they go to school, attend university, marry, have children and bury their dead.

In other words, in this dissertation, boundaries are not only symbolic or structural categorizations of groups of people; they also appear to be temporal, differing between past, present and future periods of time and increasingly uncertain existences. The internally displaced are in double terms neither locals nor guests. They are categorized as a group ‘in between’, separate from the local population, and we are figuratively moving in a constant borderland between Georgia and Abkhazia and between the past and the future.

5 Method

In this dissertation, my aim is to deepen the understanding of the implications of social and spatial boundaries and borders for how young Georgian IDPs understand issues of belonging and return. These young people's voices need to be heard and reflected on in the research process. Therefore, this dissertation is based on three types of empirical material: interviews, questionnaires and field observations. The dissertation consists of four articles, each of which addresses one of the research questions. An overview of the articles can be found in table 1 (page 34). Together with quantitative studies, qualitative studies can provide both broader and deeper insight into the phenomenon that is the focus of this dissertation. Through what is called methodological triangulation, different methods for data collection and analysis are used to study the research questions. Triangulation is used to acquire different types of data that complement each other in order to gain a more complete picture of the object of study (Bazeley 2009, Denscombe 2009).

This chapter presents the procedures used for data collection and the considerations made in connection with the choice of methods for data collection and analysis. These choices are based on assumptions about how knowledge can be produced and about individuals and society, but furthermore also on ethical approach and behaviour in research.

Article	Research question	Material and respondents	Method of analysis
I. Crossing the border – an intergenerational study of belonging and temporary return among IDPs from Abkhazia	What motivates IDPs to cross the boundary line and what is the significance of border crossing for how people understand their belonging?	Interviews (8 individual and 23 group interviews) with 39 youth and 19 adults	Content analysis
II. Avlägsen tillhörighet: Om skapande och upprätthållande av plats tillhörighet bland georgiska internflyktingar från Abkhasien	How is attachment maintained, and in some cases created, in relation to a place to which people have limited access over a protracted period of time?		
III. Risksapes: Strategies and practices along the Georgian-Abkhazian boundary line and inside Abkhazia	What strategies and practices do young people use to cross the border?	In-depth interviews with 5 youth aged 18-23	Phenomenological analysis
IV. Place matters: Return intentions among forcibly displaced young Georgians from Abkhazia living in Tbilisi and Zugdidi	What factors influence young people's intentions to return to Abkhazia, and do these factors differ depending on where in Georgia young people are living?	Questionnaire survey with 131 youth aged 18-25 in Zugdidi (n = 66) and Tbilisi (n = 65).	Descriptive statistics and chi-square test

Table 1: An overview of the methods used for data collection and analysis for each of the articles in this dissertation.

Data collection methods

Interviews

The purpose of an interview is to capture the respondents' ideas, attitudes and understandings of various phenomena. Through the qualitative interview, the researcher seeks to explore, discover and understand the nature or character of an unknown or little-known phenomena and interpret meaningful relationships (Kvale & Brinkmann 2014, Starrin & Renck 1996).

Articles I-II

Many of the Georgian IDP youth and young adults were forced to leave their homes in Abkhazia when they were very young; in some cases, they are born after their parents left Abkhazia. They can therefore be expected to have had experiences different from those of their parents with respect to their sense of belonging to their homes in Abkhazia. In this first round of interviews, the initial plan was to conduct focus groups with youth and their parents. My aim was to capture tensions and differences between different participants' perceptions and experiences of the border region and issues related to return. However, gathering more than two participants at a time for the interviews turned out to be difficult. Even in these cases, there were not always discussions that would permit clear differences in opinion to be ascertained. The pragmatic approach instead involved carrying out both individual and group interviews interchangeably. In this way it was possible to gradually develop and supplement the interview questions. The individual interviews often resulted in more detailed stories that inspired questions for group interviews. Conversely, comments and discussions during the group interviews led to the development of new queries for subsequent individual interviews.

In addition to background questions, the respondents were invited to discuss issues concerning their ideas and understandings of home and homeland, their experiences of living in the border area and of crossing

the boundary line, and their thoughts and plans for temporary visits and a permanent return to Abkhazia.

The interviews were carried out in Zugdidi and two nearby villages in February 2012. Through a local NGO working with IDP issues, I established contacts with people living in different collective centres. At each centre, these contacts introduced me on-site to potential respondents – families with teenagers and young adults. After each interview, I asked the respondents whether they knew any young adults or families who lived nearby to whom they could introduce me. This type of non-probability sampling led, *inter alia*, to the inclusion of only a very small number of adult men in the study. Some respondents indicated that their husbands or fathers were deceased; they had either died during the war, in armed clashes after the war, or from illness and disease, which was reported to have resulted from hardship and difficult living conditions. Some respondents indicated that their husbands or fathers worked in other parts of the country or that they were attempting to find employment in other parts of the city.

I carried out 31 interviews in ten collective centres and three private dwellings. Of the 58 respondents, 39 were young adults between 18 and 25 years of age and 19 were adults over 30 years of age. They were interviewed either individually (8 interviews) or in groups (23 interviews) of varying size that consisted of either young people (siblings or friends) or youth and adults (parents or other relatives). In most cases (26 of 31), the interviews were conducted in a respondent's home. One woman was interviewed in her workplace, and three interviews were conducted in a communal room in a collective centre. Two young sisters explained that they found their home to be of such a low standard that they did not want to invite any guests. Because they wanted to participate in the study, they arranged to use a room in a neighbour's dwelling.

Each interview lasted an average of 1 hour and 7 minutes. The shortest interview was 35 minutes, and the longest was almost 2 hours. Because

interpretation was used to varying degrees (see the section on language and translation below), this also had an impact on the duration of the interviews.

Article III

The third article is also based on qualitative data. I use material from interviews conducted in Zugdidi in May 2014. Five respondents (four women and one man) who were 19-23 years of age were interviewed individually. The same NGO that helped me establish contacts in 2012 served in this study as a liaison with young people who often moved across the administrative boundary line. The young people were contacted on their mobile phones with the help of an interpreter and were briefed on the purpose of the study and asked whether they were interested in participating. We decided to meet at a place of each respondent's choice, which meant, for example, a bench in a park, in someone's home or at a cultural centre.

During the interviews, I asked questions about the respondents' experiences of crossing the boundary line to reach Abkhazia, their perceptions of living conditions inside Abkhazia, and the differences and similarities involved in living on either side of the boundary line. The interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes.

All of the respondents were university students who had spent all or most of their childhood in Abkhazia and thus had the experience of living on both sides of the boundary line and of regular commuting between Gali and Zugdidi.

Quantitative survey

The fourth article in the dissertation departs from a quantitative survey distributed in Tbilisi and Zugdidi in January and February 2015. More than 70 per cent of Georgian IDPs from Abkhazia live in either Tbilisi or Zugdidi and the surrounding areas (MRA 2014). According to an official at the Abkhazian Government in exile, accurate data on IDPs'

home addresses are unreliable⁸. Because of the unreliability of the registry data, a random sample was not possible. Therefore, I used a convenience sample, which means that the survey was distributed to the available respondents (see the later section on sampling) who complied with the selection criteria and were offered the opportunity to participate in the study.

The target population consisted of young men and women between 15 and 25 years of age living in Tbilisi and Zugdidi. The respondents live in various types of accommodations and engage in various daily pursuits. Whereas the vast majority of IDPs living in Georgia fled Abkhazia during the war in 1992-93, some returned and then fled again after the recurrent violence in 1998, only to return anew and continue to live in Abkhazia. Thus, some respondents were born in Abkhazia, and others, in Georgia proper. Some had graduated from the eleven-year elementary school in Abkhazia, whereas others left the area as toddlers. A few respondents had parents or other relatives living in Abkhazia and had returned regularly, whereas others might never have set foot in the area where their parents once lived.

As the capital of Georgia, Tbilisi offers more opportunities for employment and forms of housing⁹, whereas people living in Zugdidi have better opportunities to frequently visit Abkhazia. Accordingly, the current place of residence is an important background variable.

⁸ Personal communication (January, 2015) with an official working at the Government of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia in exile in Tbilisi (the administration recognized by the Georgian national government as the only legal government of Abkhazia). The official stated that the data on where the IDPs are living are very inaccurate. People are registered in one place and live, work, or study in another (typically Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Batumi, or Zugdidi). This, he said, was especially true of the young and people of working age who are registered in rural areas.

⁹ Most of the collective centres in Tbilisi have been privatized, and there are more opportunities to rent housing there.

The questionnaire was distributed through local NGOs and universities in Tbilisi and Zugdidi. Contact persons – teachers and NGO workers – were informed about the study’s purpose and the target group. The key criteria required of all respondents were as follows:

- a) They were between 18 and 25 years old
- b) They were born in Abkhazia or had least one parent who left Abkhazia in connection with the war in 1992-93
- c) They had IDP status
- d) They were registered in Tbilisi, Zugdidi or in any place adjacent to these areas

University teachers and NGO workers asked students or young people who were involved in any of the organization’s activities whether they would be interested in participating in the study. Those who agreed were invited to complete the survey online or on paper. Both versions had identical questions asked in the same order. The online version was password protected to reduce the risk of a single respondent answering several times, which would distort the results. Individual logins and passwords were required to answer the questionnaire. Ninety-five paper questionnaires and 120 online questionnaires were distributed. Sixty-one respondents answered the paper questionnaire, and 77 answered the online version, for a total response rate of 64.2 per cent. Seven respondents answered the survey even though they admitted (in the questionnaire) that they were registered elsewhere. These questionnaires were removed, resulting in 131 respondents overall. The average and median age was 21.7 and 22, respectively. Two-thirds of the respondents were women, and the rest were men.

The questionnaire was structured around a number of thematic blocks: background questions, questions about the current situation (housing, family finances and social relationships), questions about Abkhazia (visits, memories, property, security, reasons for return), and questions about belonging. Numerous survey questions regarding current living conditions, housing, social networks and socioeconomic situations were inspired by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)

survey 'Migrants Experience of Racism and Xenophobia in Ireland' (McGinnity et al. 2006). Questions on identity and belonging were inspired by the 2013 ISSP survey 'National Identity III'. The response alternatives were either dichotomous (i.e., affirmative or negative) or on a four-point scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' or 'very likely' to 'not at all likely', for example. Considering the low number of respondents, the response options were recoded into dummies to avoid cases with few or no answers for a certain response alternative. Based on the survey questions, 24 variables were chosen as the most important for studying return intentions among IDP youth.

The survey questions were partially designed based on the results of two focus groups with IDP youth conducted in Tbilisi and Zugdidi in May 2014. The focus group sessions revealed that Zugdidi youth had more experience of Abkhazia: some were born there, others had graduated from school there, and some of them commuted on a weekly basis back and forth across the boundary line to their homes in Gali. Only a few of the Tbilisi focus group participants had experience in Abkhazia, and most declared that they did not intend to return. These results indicated that young people's current place of residence – Zugdidi near the de facto border of Abkhazia or the capital city of Tbilisi – was an important background factor for studying young people's experiences of Abkhazia and their return intentions.

Analysis

In this dissertation, I depart from a phenomenological and social constructionist approach in that I intend to capture both the respondents' 'life worlds' and their positions within a broader social context. With this focus, I aim to explore the respondents' personal experiences and the ways in which they relate to the surrounding social environment. The overall context is an important starting point – it is where the respondents live and where interesting phenomena for this dissertation occur. A phenomenological approach attaches importance to the lived experience and peoples' 'life worlds' as the primary source

of human knowledge, where a 'life world' is everyday life 'as a direct experience independent of and before any explanations' (Kvale & Brinkmann 2014, p. 46). Accordingly, people's experiences constitute the basis for more abstract studies of social worlds. A phenomenological approach implies respect for actual statements and the contextualization of descriptions. To contextualize means both to assume the respondents' subjective perspectives and to go beyond their interpretations. By alternating between the interview material and theoretical concepts and by making continuous reflections on the area of study, a researcher can also contextualize respondents' statements in relation to the institutional conditions that are part of their life worlds (Gilje & Grimen 1992, Kvale & Brinkmann 2014, Thornquist 2003). The interpretation of the interviews balances ensuring proximity to the respondents' own interpretations of their lived experiences and distancing and surpassing these interpretations; what we call the double hermeneutic circle (Dahlgren 1996).

Article I-II: Content analysis

Although the data analysis actually began during the interviews (Fangen 2005, Kvale & Brinkmann 2014), a more systematic analysis of the material was performed on transcribed interviews and field notes. Qualitative content analysis is used to systematically describe the meaning of qualitative data. By gradually reducing the amount of data, the analysis focuses on meaningful units that help answer the research questions (Watt Boolsen 2007, Schreier 2014).

In the first article, I primarily took an inductive approach, meaning that the coding was primarily guided by the study's overarching research question; i.e., IDPs' motives to cross the boundary line and the significance of these border movements for how people understand their belonging. The transcribed material was further divided into three main themes: motives, border movements and belonging. The material was then interpreted by classifying the content in relation to the overall themes. The second article followed the same procedure, but the

overall themes were connected to theories of belonging and continuity, notions that in forced migration research are linked to various conceptions of home.

Article III: Phenomenological analysis

A phenomenological analysis is carried out in three steps: naïve reading, structural analysis and comprehensive understanding (Lindseth & Norberg 2004). After transcribing the interviews, I conducted several 'naïve' readings of the material in its entirety (Kleiman 2004). A naïve reading is a way to reach an overall understanding of the content of the material. During that perusal, I took notes about the impressions that the material provided and that captured the most important aspects of the respondents' perceptions of the border area. The written material was then further coded to provide structure to the overall thematic categories. Some codes were found in several different themes. These themes guided the structure of the written analysis reported in article III.

Article IV: Descriptive statistics and chi-square analysis

The survey responses were analysed in several stages using the statistical software SPSS. Descriptive statistics in cross tables were used to discern patterns in the material. These patterns were later analysed through a chi-square analysis that is used to measure the differences between the observed and expected frequencies and to determine whether there is a significant association between the two variables.

Language and translation

Interviews

During all interviews in studies I-III, Russian or Georgian was used. Most of the adults and many of the young respondents spoke Russian, which was the lingua franca both in Abkhazia before the war (this is still the case) and in other parts of the former Soviet Union. Although I speak Russian, my knowledge of Georgian is limited; therefore, I used

a local interpreter to converse with respondents in Georgian¹⁰. The respondents were free to choose whether they wanted to speak Georgian (with English/Russian interpretation) or Russian. Several respondents alternated between different languages during the interviews.

The material was first transcribed into English. In connection with the writing of the second article in the dissertation, which is published in Swedish, I listened through the recorded interview material once again to ensure that the translations of quotes from the interviews were correct. This way of working with multiple languages entails a risk that important nuances of what is said is lost or distorted (Temple & Edwards 2002). To minimize these problems, I had extensive pre-interview discussions with the interpreter about the key concepts of the study. In those discussions, we talked about language use, the translation of specific concepts, the design of the interviews and research ethics. My discussions with the interpreter furthermore resulted in interview questions that were properly designed for the respondents who would answer them. Therefore, the interpreter's local knowledge and experiences contributed to framing the translated questions in such a way that they were understandable and relevant in relation to the local context. I also emphasized the need for the translations to correspond to the respondents' statements to the greatest extent possible.

When I transcribed the interviews, I had continuous discussions with people who had very good knowledge of both Russian and Georgian of the best possible English interpretations and translations for different idiomatic expressions.

¹⁰ I used the same interpreter for the interviews used in articles I-III – a person with an IDP background in Abkhazia and academic degrees in languages (Georgian and English) and pedagogics

Survey

The survey questions were formulated in English and then translated into Georgian by a translator with an academic degree in English. After the translation, the questionnaire was reviewed by three academics who were native Georgian speakers and who had good knowledge of English.

Researching forcibly displaced populations

Ethics in research involves both *research ethics* and *researcher ethics*. The former relates to how research participants, interview respondents and other informants are treated and how their dignity and integrity are safeguarded. Researcher ethics, however, concerns the researcher's craftsmanship – that of scholarly integrity, data management, publication ethics, and so forth. (Hermerén 2011). Although the handling of data and other procedures in this dissertation are reported in other parts of this methods chapter, I still want to emphasize that research ethics and researcher ethics are closely interlinked. Inappropriate handling of, for example, interview material could be harmful to respondents' interests. Both the respondents and research quality are safeguarded through ethical informed-consent procedures. A respondent who has received thorough information about the study and what participation entails and has then agreed to participate is likely to provide more detailed answers and participate more actively in the interview than reluctant and uninformed respondents. Similarly, it is possible to discuss respondents' confidentiality, the storage and presentation of interview data, and measures to protect participants from the risk of identification. An interviewee who feels confident that the researcher is working to the maximum extent possible to protect participant confidentiality may communicate more openly and reveal sensitive information (Kalman & Lövgren 2012).

Informed consent and voluntary participation

Before the first interviews, I had lengthy discussions with the interpreter about the information that I wanted to convey to the

respondents before they were asked whether they wanted to participate in the study. It was important for this information to be both understandable and adequate in scope. Two issues were of particular importance in this context: to inform the respondents of their anonymous participation and to communicate whether the interviews would be recorded. In several cases in which young people and their parents were interviewed together, I addressed all of the parties present and asked each of them about participation so that nobody made decisions on behalf of somebody else. In connection with the initial information, I also introduced myself and stated where I come from and where I work. I also briefly provided some personal information to give the respondents an idea of the person who is asking them questions. My aim in this regard was to create a more horizontal conversation, where it is possible to decline participation or express sensitive opinions.

The manner in which the interview is carried out is also important for informed consent. All of the respondents were informed about recording, told how the recorded and transcribed material would be stored, and asked to agree to recording. Three respondents who participated in a group interview objected to recording. During that interview, I took notes by hand and reconstructed those notes later that day in the form of a dialogue.

Confidentiality

To protect the integrity and confidentiality of the respondents and minimize the risk of recognition, no personal data have been transcribed. However, data on individual participants' approximate age and sex are published in articles I-III because of their treatment of opinions and beliefs associated to age and/or gender. In these cases, the respondents' ages have been somewhat adjusted or roughly described to protect anonymity. In every case involving a risk of the respondent's identity being revealed, the data have been deleted or modified without distorting or changing the respondent's statements.

Nevertheless, the recruitment procedure complicates the question of confidentiality. In many cases, respondents have been recommended or recruited by people who know them, such as teachers, NGO workers, friends and neighbours. In this way, some respondents have been recruited through people upon whom they depend. Therefore, potential respondents have been informed that because of the recruitment procedure, their participation cannot be fully confidential. In connection with the group interviews, I have recommended that the participants not reveal the contents of the discussions outside the interview setting. I also made an effort to describe the respondents' statements with respect for their integrity; therefore, it should not be possible for somebody who did not take part in the interview to identify the participants.

Ethics and motives for research

One of the most important ethical concerns is to motivate research on forcibly displaced populations. Refugees and IDPs should not be treated merely as research objects. The principle of doing 'no harm' must be taken to a higher level when it comes to displaced persons. Even if the results will not benefit the respondents, research should be beneficial to the general refugee or IDP population (Jacobsen & Landau 2003). The researcher is confronted by numerous challenges while doing interviews and fieldwork in conflict or post-conflict environments.

The main argument for research on refugees and IDPs is that it can increase the theoretical understanding of the world and the lived experiences of people from these groups. Increased knowledge about displacement can be used to affect governments, international humanitarian groups and policy organizations to alleviate suffering and prevent human disasters. Therefore, research that serves social justice can and should be one of the aims of research into human suffering. However, doing research on forcibly displaced populations

also requires a balance between academic standards and humanitarian ideals. Research is to be examined and discussed not only by academics but also by political and humanitarian actors. Therefore, good scholarship is demanded if research is to have any ability to have a real impact on policies that affect forcibly displaced populations. In this regard, good scholarship includes being aware of the need for clarity in methodology and concerns more than simply the methods used (Mertus 2009). Researchers need to be transparent about how fieldwork was conducted, how many respondents there are, how the respondents were invited to participate in the study, and how translation issues were addressed. Unclear methodologies risk not only decreasing the impact on alleviating suffering but also (and more importantly) creating distrust both within and towards the academic field (cf. Hermerén 2011, Kalman & Lövgren 2012).

Research on displaced populations is often conducted in politically sensitive environments. Therefore, researchers must have thorough knowledge about the political situation and local culture to be able to protect the security of the participants. The choice of local collaborators such as research assistants or translators is important. Those collaborators' political or social affiliations could threaten the respondents' security. Sensitive information that is revealed during interviews can be used against respondents. This risk concerns information about not only political views but also, for example, individuals' experiences, as it could lead to increased stigmatization if it is revealed. An estimate of risk to participants must also be made with respect to the choice of data-collection methods (Hemming 2009).

Researching displaced populations often entails that the researcher belongs to a socially privileged group relative to the respondents. This can imply that the researcher is perceived as authoritarian, which can create an imbalance in power relations between the researcher and the respondents. The researcher has scientific competence and is defining the interview situation and it is the researcher's project and knowledge that governs the conversation (Brinkmann & Kvale 2005). The

difference between the informants and myself is inevitable. Our different ethnic backgrounds is not the only factor that could affect the structure of power relations. The fact that I am a woman has opened doors to homes where it is not obvious that men are admitted. However, sharing some aspects of being a woman with other women is insufficient to override other power relations based on, for example, class, ethnicity and age (Cotterill 1992). All of the respondents who were parents were older than me; in Georgia, age contributes to increased social status. One respondent had experience working in the Abkhazian state administration before the war. Several of the adult respondents were trained engineers and teachers, both of which are respected professions, whereas a doctoral student is a 'student' within the Georgian educational system. In other words ethics and power relations in interview situations are complex. Education, gender and age are examples of categorizations that can decrease or increase power relations in interview contexts.

The use of a local interpreter can increase the risk that respondents fear that sensitive information communicated during the interviews could be revealed in other forums. However, my experience is that cooperation with this person contributed to increased confidence during the interview. Because many of the interviews were conducted fully or partially in Russian, I became well aware that the local interpreter's presence was beneficial to my study. The interpreter's local knowledge of institutions and organizations that provided legal and social assistance to IDPs was in many cases invaluable. In several cases, the respondents learned where they could be informed about activities that could help improve their living conditions. During one interview, a woman was notably affected when we talked about her former home, and we could refer her to an NGO that could provide her with psychological support concerning her wartime experiences.

In addition to procedures to protect respondents' privacy and confidentiality and informed consent, it is important to discuss how information revealed during the interviews is cited and published. We

must distinguish between micro- and macro-ethical considerations (Brinkmann & Kvale 2005). Whereas micro-ethical considerations are related to the interview and issues of consent, confidentiality, and so forth, macro-ethics relates to the study's implications in relation to the surrounding community. The principle of doing no harm is connected not only to the interview situation but also to the question of whether the information revealed in publications could have negative consequences for both the respondents and larger audiences. I write about occasional visits to Abkhazia and so-called 'illegal ways' to cross the border in three of four articles in this dissertation. What are the possible implications of publishing this material? Could it entail stricter border controls? What if this makes it more difficult to cross the border? Could this disclosure cause economic harm to families who take care of property and harvest in Abkhazia while making a living by selling their produce in Zugdidi? There are a few other studies (Mirimanova & Pentikainen 2011, Tarkhan-Mouravi 2009, Weiss 2012) and NGO reports (Human Rights Watch 2011a, 2011b, UNHCR, 2009) that relate to various perspectives on these cross-border movements. The Abkhazian de facto government has also long been aware of this type of border crossing. Since 2008, there has also been an increased Russian military presence along the border. During the 2012 interviews, some informants indicated that Russian and Abkhazian troops turned their backs and let people cross. Because I do not disclose any information about the means, times or roads that the respondents use to cross the border, I believe that it is possible to write about these movements without compromising informant security.

Minna in Georgia

During the writing of this dissertation, I spent six longer periods in Georgia and travelled twice to Abkhazia for fieldwork. During four of these trips, I stayed with IDP families. In this way, I have gained further insight into the course of events in the borderland and the social conditions in the area. In addition to repeated visits to collective centres, I spent every morning during the field work period in February 2012 in one of a few NGOs in Zugdidi that were involved in various ways in

improving IDPs' living conditions. I have also visited social service offices, NGOs that are devoted to human rights issues, the Ministry of IDP refugees and accommodations (MRA), and so forth. During the fieldtrips to Abkhazia, I met with returnees and with several NGOs that in various ways seek improved living conditions inside Abkhazia. I did this to gain additional information that can complement and support the interviews in terms of understanding the context and the conditions that characterize and influence everyday life experiences in the region.

To increase my own understanding of the context to the greatest extent possible, I have read, in addition to the material cited in this dissertation, a non-negligible amount of documents and newspaper articles. These documents include protocols, resolutions and reports from various UN agencies and other international and national NGOs.

6 Summary of articles

I Crossing the border – an intergenerational study of belonging and temporary return among IDPs from Abkhazia

The first article is published in the anthology *Security, Democracy and Development in the Caucasus and the Black Sea Region* and focuses on IDPs' cross-border activities to reach into Abkhazia from Georgia proper. The aim of the article is to examine the motives for these temporary visits and the implications for how they understand issues regarding belonging. The study is based on 8 individual interviews and 23 group interviews with 39 young people 18-25 years of age and 19 adults over 30 who are parents or relatives to the young participants. All of the participants live either in Zugdidi or in surrounding villages.

The respondents' trips across the border are categorized according to frequency, i.e., how often they occurred. In this way, it was possible to discern a pattern in which those who crossed the border more frequently, sometimes as often as every week, had a home in Abkhazia that appeared as an important point of departure from their everyday lives. In many cases, those who crossed less often or who had never visited Abkhazia after the escape did not have access to a home or house in Abkhazia. Their homes either had been destroyed during the war, had been taken over by other people, or were located in northern parts of Abkhazia that are very difficult to reach for Georgians. A lack of a home or relatives and a lack of security were stated as reasons not to return for a visit.

The main motive for temporary returns to Abkhazia was a sense of belonging that was either rooted in personal experiences or, in some cases, in stories and activities in the respondents' temporary homes in Zugdidi. Belonging to Abkhazia is linked to a desire to maintain continuity – to continue to belong in Abkhazia. However, this

continuity is maintained not only through temporary return trips but also through political discourses, educational establishments and the IDP status in itself that has become a marker of non-belonging in other parts of Georgia. Nevertheless, continuity is a pursuit not only of those who cross the boundary regularly but also of some respondents who seldom or never return to visit. However many young people who rarely or never visited Abkhazia demonstrated a stronger wish to continue living in their current homes. Nonetheless, several of them still claimed a belonging in Abkhazia.

Although this article's primary focus is the younger generation, the generational perspective shows that young people and their parents have different experiences and therefore different perceptions of belonging to Abkhazia. Furthermore, this perspective also highlights the possibility of generational tensions about belonging and questions related to returning to Abkhazia.

II Distant belongings: On the maintaining and creation of place attachment among Georgian IDPs from Abkhazia

The second article is published in Swedish (*Avlägsen tillhörighet: Om skapande och upprätthållande av platstillhörighet bland georgiska internflyktingar från Abkhasien*) in *Nordisk Østforum* and focuses on how Georgian IDP youth and their parents understand their belonging and how they act to create and maintain continuity in their sense of belonging to a physical location over a protracted period of time when that place is usually inaccessible. The article builds on material from interviews in Zugdidi in 2012. Previous studies on belonging and continuity are primarily focused on adult IDPs who were born and grew up in Abkhazia and left the area after reaching adulthood. It is therefore important for both research and policy to include and focus on the experiences of young IDPs who lived all or most of their lives outside Abkhazia.

A lack of continuity in relation to a home is characteristic of displaced populations. IDPs' relations to their past and the lost homes that symbolize the past differ between generations. Both the older respondents and many of the younger respondents tend to strongly endeavour to re-establish continuity between the past, present and future. To them, return is a factual goal that also includes the recreation of homes that were destroyed during the war and the subsequent troubled years. Some respondents maintain continuity in life through temporary visits to Abkhazia, where they take care of property and harvest, visit graves and meet with friends and family. In this way, they exercise parallel homemaking activities on both sides of the border both in their former homes and in their present/temporary homes. Others must rely on collective processes in the temporary location. Through memories and family stories, home is exercised at a distance, claiming places that one cannot inhabit physically. The former home is often idealized when living conditions in a temporary home are harsh. Some of the respondents from the younger generation clearly emphasize that despite their feelings of belonging in Abkhazia, they prefer to maintain continuity between the present and the future over returning to Abkhazia. Accordingly, they endeavour to continue their lives in the temporary home, which consequently becomes a more permanent home. Everyday life and social relations, along with the many years that have passed since the initial displacement, are major contributing factors.

The existence of actual homes that have not been taken over by others and that make it possible for some groups of IDPs to temporarily visit makes the dream of return more realistic. However, the time that has passed since the escape protracts the temporal distance from this former home. The young generation grows up with a connection to Abkhazia that is primarily based on other peoples' memories, political discourses on return and regaining control over lost territories. Simultaneously, younger people create new bonds and social relations in the temporary location on a daily basis. Some young people grow up

in houses that their families come to own, that offer improved living conditions and that become fixed points in their existence. In this way, homemaking activities directed towards the current living place challenge other types of homemaking, such as memories, storytelling and temporary visits, when it comes to creating connections to home and place.

III Risksapes: Strategies and practices along the Georgian-Abkhazian boundary line

The purpose of the third article¹¹ is to examine the strategies and practices used by young Georgians attempting to cross the de facto border and reach Abkhazia. Russian and Abkhazian troops monitor the border and the only official checkpoint is controlled by the Russian FSB (Федеральная служба безопасности Российской Федерации, Federal Security Service). To cross the border, it is necessary to have valid documents and entrance permits, which many Georgians living outside Abkhazia lack. In this study, I conducted five in-depth qualitative interviews with youth 18-23 years of age in Zugdidi in May 2014. All of the respondents were living and studying in Zugdidi while their parents lived in the Gali district in southeastern Abkhazia.

The border as a spatial phenomenon and social practice serves to distinguish among people who need to cross it. Those who possess Abkhazian passports can cross at the official checkpoint, whereas those who lack valid documents are forced to use other routes. To cross the border at places other than the checkpoint is considered 'illegal' by Abkhazian authorities and violators are sanctioned with detentions and fines. To avoid the risk of being caught, people develop strategies and change their behaviours. The border area can therefore be considered a 'risksape' – an area where risks are embedded in the physical

¹¹ Article under review.

landscape. Multiple riskscapes can be overlapping and represent how people act and navigate according to risks in their daily lives.

Young Georgians use different strategies to reach Abkhazia. Whereas one of the respondents possessed an Abkhazian passport and could cross at the checkpoint, others mentioned crossing at other places, creeping and running with all senses sharpened. Because the border guards are mobile, knowing in advance where it is 'safe' to cross is very difficult. The use of well-known routes increases the sense of security because any deviation from the 'normal' can more easily be observed. Other respondents constantly use different routes to avoid being caught.

The opportunities to cross have changed because of the increased border control, which consequently entails that riskscapes are shifting over time. Young Georgians experience different riskscapes based on their gender and their legal position vis-à-vis the Abkhazian de facto authorities. Young men who are caught at the border risk being sent to serve in the Abkhazian army, whereas young women risk bride kidnapping. Nevertheless, these young people continue to cross the border, and by doing so, they continue to claim belonging in Abkhazia and contest the Abkhazian authorities and the border as a symbol of separation and differentiation.

The consequences of war and conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia are not exclusively political in nature. The administrative boundary line that has been transformed into a monitored de facto border has had a major impact on human mobility and social interactions in the area. Overall, riskscapes are intertwined with not only ethnicity but also with age and legal status. In conflict areas such as Abkhazia, an unequal distribution of power among various groups constitutes fertile ground for the construction of various riskscapes among people who live and move in the region.

IV Place matters: Return intentions among forcibly displaced young Georgians from Abkhazia living in Tbilisi and Zugdidi

In the fourth article, published in *Caucasus Survey*, I use data from a quantitative survey to study intention to return among IDP youth living in Tbilisi and Zugdidi.

The target group was adolescents and young adults 18-25 years of age from Abkhazia holding IDP status in Georgia. The study was conducted at two locations: in Zugdidi, close to the Georgian-Abkhazian border, and in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi. Tbilisi offers more diversity in terms of opportunities for work, education and housing, whereas Zugdidi has proximity to Abkhazia, which entails chances to visit and gain personal experience of Abkhazia.

In all, 42.5 per cent of the 131 respondents answered that they fully or partially agreed with the statement that they intended to return to Abkhazia within five years. The respondents' return intentions were further analysed in relation to factors connected to the past, present and future, using a chi-square test.

The analysis showed that there were significant correlations between factors in the past (birth and property in Abkhazia), factors in the present (socioeconomic status, social networking and identity) and intention to return. The analysis further showed that there were significant differences between the respondents from the two places. Respondents from Tbilisi responded to a greater extent than the Zugdidi respondents that they intended to return; therefore, separate chi-square analyses of the two locations were conducted. The results revealed significant differences regarding the factors associated with the intention to return between the respondents in Tbilisi and the respondents in Zugdidi. Among the respondents from Tbilisi, 80 per cent of those who indicated that they intended to return within five

years were born in Abkhazia. By contrast, there was no significant association between place of birth and the intention to return among the Zugdidi respondents. Current living conditions also influence return intentions, particularly among the Zugdidi respondents: there was a significant association between living in a collective centre and having an intention to return versus living in any other kind of dwelling and not having an intention to return. Zugdidi respondents who intended to return also socialized to a greater extent with other IDPs from Abkhazia than did those who did not intend to return. Moreover, there was a significant association between having return intentions and claiming a right to live in Abkhazia among both Tbilisi and Zugdidi respondents.

In summary, there are significant associations between particular variables and the intention to return among both respondents from Tbilisi and Zugdidi; however, there are also differences between those groups. We can thus conclude that current location and living conditions affect young IDPs' intentions to return to Abkhazia.

7 Discussion and conclusions

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the implications of borders and boundaries on how young Georgians displaced from Abkhazia understand issues regarding belonging and return. In the four articles described above, I have illustrated how young IDPs in both spatial and temporal meanings to different degrees find themselves in a borderland between the past and the future and between Georgia and Abkhazia.

Recalling my modified model of Zetter's (2009) proposed triangle of temporal continuity in which the temporal concepts of the past, present and future are linked to past, present and future homes in areas characterized by uncertainty, I argue that multiple boundaries and borders characterize and permeate the life experiences of young IDPs. I furthermore suggest that these boundaries and borders are situated in riskscape of disputed belongings that make this temporal and spatial borderland between past, present and future more or less stable for different groups of IDPs. This statement will be discussed in the following sections.

Disputed belongings and returns

The question of return to Abkhazia is connected to both emotional aspects of belonging and the actual material conditions of return. The emotional aspect of belonging concerns a sense of feeling at home (Yuval-Davis 2006) and thus the experience of belonging and of being included and accepted within a community or a group (Anthias 2006). The experience of belonging is thus connected to discursive aspects of belonging (Wimmer 2008). One example of how the discursive belonging of Georgian IDPs are constructed concerns the Georgian government's goal of increased integration of IDPs into local communities while waiting for return, as a part of the State Strategy for Internally Displaced Persons (MRA 2007). IDPs are allowed to temporarily belong provided that they are waiting for return. The long-

term practices of separate educational and health care establishments that have now been abolished as a part of the local integration plan provides another example. By maintaining separate establishments, IDPs from Abkhazia were expected to go on with their lives as if they were actually in Abkhazia while waiting to return there. This approach would make it easier to transition back to life in Abkhazia. These discursive practices are part of the boundary work that Crowley (1999) argues differentiates between different groups of insiders and outsiders and further connects to the language used about IDPs as being 'in the wrong place', or abnormalities in relation to the 'natural order' (Brun 2003, Malkki 1992, 1995). The

The discursive constructions of belonging are important components of excluding practices that influence the experiences of belonging; we can see that these practices have different outcomes among different groups of IDPs. On the one hand, closeness to the political centre and an increased exposure to claims of territorial integrity and the right to return have shown to increase willingness to return among young IDPs living in Tbilisi. On the other hand, experiences of living in Abkhazia or repeatedly making temporary visits in the area where they are subject to practices of discrimination and exclusion makes young IDPs in the Zugdidi area less prone to return, as shown in article IV in this dissertation - *Place matters: Return intentions among forcibly displaced young Georgians from Abkhazia living in Tbilisi and Zugdidi*. This connects to Yuval-Davis' (2006) idea that politics of belonging are temporally, spatially and intersectionally situated. The politics of belonging are differently shaped depending on the temporal and spatial context; in addition, they affect both how people are allowed to belong and how people are allowed to move in space. The shifts in politics from the prior unilateral goal of return to local integration (and the closing of collective centres) while waiting for return have led to further experiences of displacement and rootlessness as one respondents state in the first article in the dissertation *Crossing the Border – An Intergenerational Study of Belonging and Temporary Return among IDPs from Abkhazia*: 'I was born in Abkhazia. Then we moved here, to this place. I

got used to living here. And now they say that we must move to Poti. Therefore I don't know where my home is'. Changing politics in other words affect the experiences of belonging (cf. Anthias 2006). Another tangible example of how the politics of belonging affect the young people who are the focus of this dissertation is perhaps the border between Georgia and Abkhazia, which I will discuss in the following section.

Borders and boundary making

The border at the Inguri River bounds a territory and symbolizes the disputed but factual end and beginning of spaces of power and control (cf. Popescu 2012) of the Georgian government and the Abkhazian de facto authorities, respectively. This border delimits the area in which one actor (the Abkhazian government) is claiming the right to exert power and thus also marks the limits of power of another actor (the Georgian government). The de facto border along the Inguri River is perhaps the most tangible representation of a spatial border in the lives of Georgian IDPs.

Social practices at the border, such as passport control, monitoring, and the erection of fences, serve to differentiate between different groups of people: insiders (those who, according to the Abkhazian government, rightfully belong) and outsiders (those who do not belong (cf. Khamaisi 2008, Newman 2003, Popescu 2012)). In this way, the border becomes both a physical and social obstacle that must be bypassed by Georgians who wish to enter Abkhazia. Fences, military troops and checkpoints are physical representations of the borders that people need to cross; however, these tangible objects also represent the social processes of differentiation that are taking place at the border and that are part of the boundary between those who belong and who do not belong.

On the one hand, as shown in article III, *Riskscape: Strategies and practices along the Georgian-Abkhazian boundary line and inside Abkhazia*,

an Abkhazian passport is, in a way, both a symbol of citizenship and an officially sanctioned belonging. On the other hand, given the history of war and conflict, the issuance of passports to Georgians who reside inside Abkhazia is highly contested by some political actors in Abkhazia because Georgians still embody the enemy and consequently do not belong in Abkhazia. This creates boundaries of exclusion between Georgians living in Abkhazia and other Abkhazian citizens. Furthermore this disputed citizenship illustrates discrepancies between identity and citizenship in which Georgians with Abkhazian passports are simultaneously members and non-members; thus, they are deprived of certain rights and endowed with others (cf. Anthias 2006).

In Georgia proper, however, government policies directed towards regaining control over Abkhazia and returning the IDPs to their homes is a manifestation of how boundaries are shifting, how politics of belonging are changing over time and on different spatial levels (cf. Wimmer 2008, Yuval-Davis 2006) and how Georgian IDPs are simultaneously discursively constructed as both belonging and non-belonging. One example is how Georgian IDPs from Abkhazia were Georgian citizens but deprived of their voting rights in practice until 2003 (Mooney & Jarrah 2005, UNHCR 2009). Another example is that Georgian authorities do little, if anything, to prevent Georgian citizens from crossing the de facto border despite the risk entailed by crossing cross and residing inside Abkhazia. Whereas IDPs are considered to be citizens of the nation state, their actual belonging is considered to be on the other side of the disputed de facto border – in Abkhazia (albeit with territorial integrity restored). In this way, Georgian IDPs are temporary guests; discourses and social practices both in Abkhazia and in Georgia proper contribute to the creation of IDPs as a group with an unstable and vulnerable insider/outsider status on either side of the border.

Belonging and return among IDP youth

The emotional dimension of belonging is connected to people's personal experiences of belonging in former homes and communities in

Abkhazia (cf. Anthias 2006). The past becomes a bounded time unit related to life in Abkhazia such as it was before war and escape (cf. Zetter 1999). In other words, boundaries between the past and the present, along with the de facto border between Abkhazia and Georgia, create a situation in which identities are connected to how closely attached one is to the historical home and the present home. For many adult IDPs, there is no past other than the past in Abkhazia, and the existence and function of the de facto border as a barrier between Georgia and Abkhazia categorizes the present and separates people from their homes. Furthermore, the border constitutes a barrier between the past and the future.

However, as I have shown in articles I, II and IV, many young IDPs are not passively waiting for a return that remains uncertain. Many of them have no past of their own in Abkhazia, and most have lived most or all of their lives in other parts of Georgia. In this way, the question of young people's return to a place where they have never been becomes problematic in itself, and it could be reformulated as if they are willing to relocate to a place where their parents formerly lived. However, young people have everyday lives in Georgia proper that include not only routine activities such as engaging in work and study and socializing with friends and neighbours but also important life events such as weddings and childbirths. In comparison with adult IDPs whose social networks primarily consist of other IDPs (Mitchneck et al. 2009), young IDPs are nowadays included in educational establishments and workplaces that are not exclusive to IDPs. In this way, everyday activities constitute a basis for creating experiences of belonging to the present place. Work, education and social activities in the temporary home create a distance from the past in terms of both time and place (cf. Zetter 1999). While a majority of the young respondents in the quantitative survey in article IV declare themselves as Georgian or Mingrelian from Abkhazia, not all of them intend to return. These respondents maintain emotional continuity in terms of belonging to Abkhazia, but envisage their futures elsewhere. Therefore, many young IDPs experience no break between the past and

the present on a personal level, and their futures do not appear uncertain. This phenomenon might entail the creation of new boundaries between an older generation rooted in the past and a younger generation that primarily adheres to a belonging related to the present and a situation that has become less temporary and more permanent.

Nevertheless, several of the young respondents in articles I, II and IV in the dissertation do share their parents' dreams of return. Some of these respondents have their own experiences from Abkhazia because their families still have access to property, mainly in the Gali district. A non-negligible number of these young IDPs visit Abkhazia on a more or less regular basis to care for property and visit relatives. By doing so, they create and secure not only tangible, practical, and emotional connections to Abkhazia but also reasons for return. Their homes in Abkhazia are associated with both memories and everyday life experiences (cf. Black 2002, Mallet 2004, Zetter 1999). A house in Abkhazia means that there will effectively be a place to live on the day of a possible return, and taking care of that house also maintains both emotional bonds and the hope that the dream of return will eventually come true. At first glance, it appears as though these young people are closer to restoring continuity in their lives in terms of connections between the past, present and future than their peers without these experiences. However, the connection is solely between the past and the present both in terms of time and place, because the current state of relations between Georgia and Abkhazia does not suggest that an official return is forthcoming.

The experiences from Abkhazia also make young people aware of the relative hardships of life in present-day Abkhazia. Additionally – and importantly – property in Abkhazia that needs to be maintained keeps people more bounded to Abkhazia, to the past and to an uncertain future because of the very unsure question of return. People invest emotions, time and resources into these properties (cf. Pollini 2005,

Stefansson 2006). The imperative to return thus preserves instability and uncertainty. I therefore argue that the more people connect to Abkhazia through visits, property or maintaining dreams of return, the more uncertain their present and their future, because at present, permanent return is not a viable option for most people and because their future life trajectories remain unclear. Conversely, people who neither own or maintain property nor strive to return experience more distance from the past in both spatial and temporal terms. Furthermore, their present is both more certain and more linked to a possibly less precarious future. This calls into question the desire to re-establish spatial continuity since the striving for continuity preserves instability and uncertainty as long as return is not possible and thus appears to be more of a problem than a solution in situations of protracted displacement.

Risksapes and the politics of belonging

At the core of IDPs' existence is the international border that creates institutionalized differences between groups of people. Boundaries are created between IDPs and refugees despite the fact that they might be escaping from the same conflict and that they might share similar experiences of exclusion and hardship during exile. Additional boundaries are created between IDPs and local populations both in terms of discursive practices of belonging and non-belonging and in terms of practices of separation and exclusion (cf. Wimmer 2008, Anthias 2006). I therefore argue that the politics of belonging is interlinked with risk and uncertainty in the sense that social boundaries and political borders constitute different layers of risksapes for different groups of IDPs (cf. Müller-Mahn & Everts 2013).

The affective dimensions of belonging to Abkhazia make some people want to cross the *de facto* border. By crossing the border to reach Abkhazia, people are navigating the risksapes of an area in which their presence as Georgians is contested. To manage these risksapes, people adapt their everyday practices: they for example change routes,

cross the de facto border less often, or refrain from crossing at all (cf. Borell 2008, Doevenspeck & Mwanabiningo 2012, November 2008). However, it is not only the border area that can be considered a riskscape. Distinctive social boundaries separating IDPs and locals in Georgia proper also constitute a basis for riskscapes. Discursive practices of belonging such as political statements of the displaced population's return constitute a basis for differential treatment and segregation, thus allowing the unfolding of new layers of riskscapes in everyday life experiences in displacement and exile (cf. Müller-Mahn & Everts 2013, Yuval-Davis 2006). This moreover entails that alterations in policy related to IDPs and the nature of the relations between Georgian authorities and the Abkhazian de facto government can cause these geographies of risk and uncertainty to change over both time and space. Young IDPs are not a homogenous group and how they manage these riskscapes in between stability and temporality, between belonging and return, depend on their social positions and geographic locations, and furthermore on their experiences of and aspirations towards Abkhazia.

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