H i C N Households in Conflict Network

In and Out of the Unit:
Social Ties and Insurgent Cohesion in Civil War

Anastasia Shesterinina[*]

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Abstract: Studies of cohesion focus on pre-war networks of insurgency organizers and war-time socialization processes, but do not account for cohesion in civil wars involving spontaneous mobilization, where leaders lack sufficient integration in communities for mobilization and socialization of fighters. This paper shifts attention from insurgency organizers to fighters and disaggregates the concept into horizontal cohesion, or the risks taken by fighters for one another, and vertical cohesion linking fighters to local and central commanders, or the risks taken as part of the unit. While quotidian and local ties bond fighters to one another and local commanders in the small group context, units might fight to protect their own members rather than contribute to the broader struggle. This commitment to the insurgency depends on how fighters understand the benefits of victory and costs of loss in the war. The argument is supported by fieldwork-based analysis of the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-1993 and has implications for cases of spontaneous mobilization characterizing the post-Soviet space and, more recently, the Arab Uprisings. It suggests that most mobilization takes place in a social setting, but insurgent organizations are not the only setting for collective decisions to join the fighting and develop cohesion among fighter groups.

Keywords: Civil war; cohesion; mobilization; social ties

[*] Lecturer, Department of Politics, University of Sheffield. Elmfield Building, Northumberland Road, Sheffield S10 2TU, UK
E-mail address: a.shesterinina at sheffield.ac.uk, telephone number: (0)114 222 1665

Introduction

How do insurgent organizations persist in the conditions of power asymmetry against state forces? The literature on civil war has identified a number of internal and external factors associated with sustaining rebellion. Studies have analyzed internal pre-war sources of insurgent survival and success, including pre-existing social networks (Petersen 2001; Parkinson 2013; Staniland 2014) and development of skills related to preceding state repression (Finkel 2015), and endogenous, in-conflict processes (Kalyvas 2006) of military socialization (Wood 2008), participation in violence as part of the group (Cohen 2013), and transformation of identities in the course of civil war (Wood 2003; Fujii 2009). The importance of external patron support (Weinstein 2007) and foreign fighter participation (Malet 2013) has as well been demonstrated. The effects of these factors on sustaining rebellion have been linked to structural integrity of and cohesion in insurgent organizations (Kenny 2010) and contrasted with organizational fragmentation (Bakke et al. 2012; Christia 2012; Cunningham et al. 2012), lack of discipline (Johnston 2008), and desertion (McLauchlin 2015).

However, the sources of cohesion are still poorly understood. If pre-war capacity generates cohesion, how do we account for cohesion in armed struggles involving spontaneous mobilization, beyond that organized by insurgent leaders, and in groups that shift in their socio-structural basis in the war, including with external support? If cohesion is related to in-conflict processes, how do we explain cohesion in the context of limited time and resources for fighter socialization and in groups whose war-time losses should breed disorganization? These conditions have marked the wars that grew out of mobilization during the fall of the Soviet Union (Beissinger 2002) and, more recently, the Arab Uprisings (Baczko et al. 2016), but are not fully accounted for in the civil war literature.

I argue that the common focus on insurgent leader ties to each other and local communities (Staniland 2014) and quotidian ties linking participants in the rebellion (Parkinson 2013) overlooks fighter ties to local commanders critical for what I call Type I, or small group cohesion. Yet, small groups, a focus of military studies of cohesion (Shils and Janowitz 1948), may fight to protect their own members, rather than contribute to the broader struggle. This commitment to the insurgency, or Type II cohesion, depends on how fighters understand the benefits of victory and costs of loss in the war based on their collective experiences of conflict and violence. Without an understanding of the salience of success, fighters have little basis to risk their lives beyond the small group survival, in attainment of top-level command. This argument shifts the focus to the fighter and disaggregates the concept

of cohesion, as its sources among fighters and between fighters and commanders in the small group context differ from those of fighter commitment to the broader struggle.

I develop this argument by analyzing the formation of the Abkhaz army over the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-1993. Fragmented but well-armed, the troops of the Georgian State Council surrounded Abkhazia at the beginning of the war. The armed and unarmed groups that formed in response on the Abkhaz side were based on three forms of social ties: quotidian, micro-level family and friendship ties; ties to local, meso-level leaders, such as city, town, and village administration authorities, members of the pre-war organizations of the Abkhaz social movement, and respected neighborhood figures, especially the elders; and ties with formal, macro-level Abkhaz institutions, above all the Special Regiment of the Internal Forces (SRIF), which was established by the Abkhaz government as the Soviet armed structures collapsed in the early 1990s and recruited reservists and regular soldiers for military service prior to the war.

While the initial mobilization on the Abkhaz side followed these micro-, meso-, and macro-level ties, small groups that emerged as a result joined efforts to resist the Georgian advance toward key cities—Sukhum/i in the east and Gagra in the west. As these cities and most of Abkhazia fell to the Georgian side, further organization of the Abkhaz force was led from the Gudauta headquarters in the Abkhaz-controlled territory. Defined by strong local community ties, the initial small groups formed the basis of military units in the emergent Abkhaz army. This socio-structural basis bonded fighters to one another and their local commanders, while pre-war experiences of Georgianization and war-time violence shaped the understanding of the salience of Abkhaz success and detrimental consequences to the Abkhaz group if the Abkhaz were to lose the war. These elements sustained insurgent Abkhaz cohesion, despite fighter movement between units and failed military operations, as fighters risked their lives for one another, their local commanders, and the battles understood as particularly important for the broader struggle—the indicators of cohesion introduced in this study.

The study of the emergence and transformation of the Abkhaz force is based on immersive fieldwork conducted over 2010-2013 in Abkhazia, Georgia, and Russia. I draw on 180 interviews with participants and non-participants in the Abkhaz war effort and extensive secondary materials, which allow me to trace the social network basis of the Abkhaz army. This analysis suggests that understanding how fighters see themselves in relation to other members of their fighter unit and the broader armed struggle is central to the explanation of cohesion and related insurgent survival and success in the context of fighting against stronger state forces. It shows that while external support adds to the military resources, it is the internal structure of armed groups that sustains rebellion.

The following sections, first, outline the puzzle of Abkhaz victory in the Georgian-Abkhaz war and my research design. I then turn to the effects of social ties and collective understandings of the war on cohesion in armed groups and look closely at the case of the emergent Abkhaz army. I conclude with implications of this analysis for studies of insurgent survival and success.

The Puzzle of Insurgent Survival and Success

On August 14, 1992, the nascent army of Georgia's State Council, the National Guard, and the paramilitary Mkhedrioni (*horsemen*) entered Abkhazia from its administrative border along the Ingur/i River and advanced toward the capital, Sukhum/i. The troops were equipped with tanks and artillery and supported from air: "helicopters were shooting at the building of the High Council [in Sukhum/i] from various directions, aiming at the flag" (Interview 118, Sukhumi, Fall 2011). The next day, the Georgian marines landed in Gantiadi/Tsandrypsh in Abkhazia's west.[1] Joined by the locals, they took control of Abkhazia's border with Russia and moved to the regional center, Gagra.

The Georgian side was a collection of regular and irregular units and local supporters rather than an effective army (Darchiashvili 2003; Driscoll 2015). But given its preponderance of force—the armaments Georgia inherited from the Soviet Union[2] and the clear advantage in manpower,[3]—the Abkhaz resistance was not expected.[4] "Convinced of the military superiority of the Georgian troops, [the Georgian leadership] hoped to crush the numerically inferior Abkhazians in a 'small victorious war'" (Coppieters 2000, 25). Indeed, Abkhazia was encircled in the span of a day, with Sukhum/i and Gagra seized by August 18 (Pachulia 2010, 28). Nonetheless, the Abkhaz mobilized in response and formed an army during the war, which in a little over a year ended in the Georgian defeat and displacement of most all Georgian population from Abkhazia (Trier et al. 2010, 21).

The victory of the emergent Abkhaz army in the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-1993 high-lights the puzzle of insurgent survival and success against superior state forces. As Arreguín-Toft (2005, 5, emphasis in original) finds, "states have *lost* nearly 30 percent of all conflicts in which they out-powered their adversaries… [and] have been losing such fights more and more often over time [between 1800 and 2003]." Kalyvas and Balcells (2010, 1397)

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[1] Estimates of Georgia's forces vary from 1,000 to 5,000 troops and 250 to 1,000 marines (Lezhava 1999, 102; Baev 2003, 138; Pachulija 2010, 27, 77).

[2] The May15, 1992, Tashkent Agreement transferred Soviet weapons in the Transcaucasus to Georgia (Zverev 1996, part 4; Zürcher et al. 2005, 272).

[3] The 240,000 Georgian population of Abkhazia (in 1989) greatly outnumbered the 93,000 Abkhaz (Trier et al. 2010). The troops from Georgia proper added to this advantage.

[4] "A group with the structural characteristics… of the Abkhaz" should not have mobilized (Beissinger 2002, 222).

argue that the technology of warfare may explain this discrepancy: "strong rebels directly confronting strong governments should have a better chance to win victories compared to weak rebels indirectly fighting strong governments; hence, conventional civil wars ought to produce more victories for rebels compared to irregular wars." However, the Georgian-Abkhaz war was not conventional—characterized by battles, front-lines, and heavy weaponry on both sides— across time and space. Early fighting involved irregular, poorly armed Abkhaz groups in both the east and west of Abkhazia and guerrilla warfare continued in the east until the end of the war. As fighters in the west of Abkhazia recall, "people without arms began organizing into groups in their villages" at the war onset (Interview 36, Pitsunda, Fall 2011). "We conducted a subversive guerrilla war," eastern fighters report guerrilla activity during the war, "[c]arried out sudden sorties against Georgian units" (Interview in Khodzhaa 2009, 726).

Moreover, the Abkhaz remained a relatively weaker actor in the course of the war, observed in the failed attacks on Sukhum/i in October, 1992, January, and March, 1993. External support has been seen as core to the Abkhaz survival and success. "The key factors determining the outcome of the war were to be found outside Abkhazia," Baev (2003, 139) argues, referring to military support provided by Russia and foreign fighters who joined the Abkhaz, mainly from the North Caucasus. Yet, both sides had external support. Georgia took over most Soviet weapons in the Transcaucasus, unmatched by the Abkhaz access to arms (Chirikba 1998, 51; Baev 2003, 139; Zürcher 2007, 141). The Russian support was not straightforward, as different branches of the government and military shifted support (Trenin 1996; Zverev 1996). As a fighter says, "with some weapons they helped us, others we just took, yet others they sold to us" (Interview 81, Gagra, Fall 2011). While the Abkhaz gained tactical advantage from participation of Russian commanders and well-trained, particularly Chechen, units, the Georgian side exceeded the Abkhaz numerically, added by "mercenaries from West Ukraine, the Baltics" during the war (Interview 44, Pitsunda, Fall 2011; Zverev 1996, part 4).

Neither of these external factors explain how a population unprepared for a disproportionate advance transformed into a functioning army able to retain its fighters in the course of fighting[5] and achieve military victories against superior state forces. The analysis of the internal structure—the character of participation in pre-war inter-group conflict, the social bases of groups that emerged in the initial war-time mobilization, and the ways in which these groups were adapted for further war organization—can help explain the ability to sustain rebellion in the unlikely conditions of success.

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[5] Cohesion is closely related to retention of fighters in the war. On retention, see Gates (2002).

Research Design

The data on which this analysis is based include 180 semi-structured interviews collected in Abkhazia (see Appendix 1) and Georgia and Russia (see Appendix 2) and archival and secondary materials used for triangulation. The interviews were conducted in four locales in the west and east of Abkhazia, to capture the differences in the transformation of the Abkhaz force during the war in the areas under Abkhaz and Georgian territorial control respectively (see Figure 1 below). While the Georgian forces established control over western and eastern parts of the territory by August 18, leaving central Abkhazia under Abkhaz control, with the headquarters in Gudauta, this picture of territorial control shifted in the course of the war. The Abkhaz were successful in their operation to retake the major western city of Gagra and its surrounding territory, gaining access to the border with Russia, in October. The Abkhaz army formation formally began in Abkhazia's west thereafter and communication challenges remained between central command and the east, characterized by the Georgian and contested control, for the duration of the war.

This local-level variation can help establish how initial mobilization groups emerge and are incorporated into expanding armed structures and how pre-war experiences of conflict are invoked in the course of fighting to influence cohesion in structurally distinct locales. The interviews across the locales were structured to capture these differences by looking closely at individual mobilization trajectories, including participation in pre-war demonstrations, referenda, and inter-group clashes, initial responses to the Georgian advance in August, 1992, and fighting as part of the Abkhaz army. Respondents included fighters in combat and support roles who mobilized spontaneously at the war onset or had been recruited into the Abkhaz armed structure (SRIF) before the war. Representation of these groups was important, as levels of cohesion could be different among combatants with distinct prior military experience and individuals in the support apparatus. The presentation of data on these patterns is abstracted in this paper to protect respondents in an ongoing way (Fujii 2012).

I pursued a number of strategies to address issues of memory and endogeneity of responses to war-time processes and post-war loyalties (Wood 2006). I sought respondents with diverse pre- and post-war backgrounds to prevent homogeneity of responses due to political affinity. Participant observation in private, public, and organizational settings, including speeches, remarks, rumors, and the social composition of daily activities, war-related events, and meetings of veterans and mothers associations, helped develop probes for the interviews, cross-check responses, and verify the socio-structural basis of mobilization. I used archival materials on pre-war mobilization and secondary interview archives collected by other

Figure 1. Field Sites: Territorial Control in the Georgian-Abkhaz War of 1992-1993
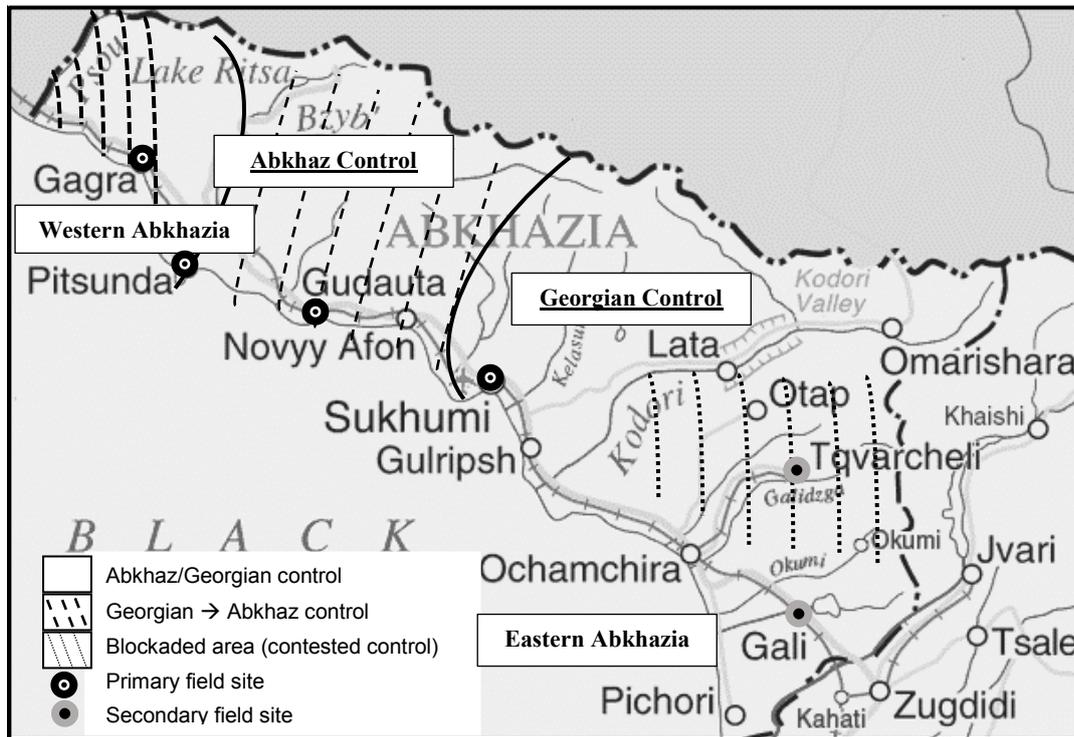
Source: Based on UN map of Georgia, August 2004

researchers, especially on war-time mobilization in the east, to support my findings (Khodzhaa 2003, 2009). The rich data that emerged from my fieldwork capture detailed individual trajectories as they are situated in their socio-historical context.

Disaggregating Cohesion: Fighters, Commanders, and the Broader Struggle

How did the small, initially poorly armed Abkhaz population manage to win the war against the stronger Georgian state? While the Russian and foreign fighter support strengthened both sides, adding to the existing military and numerical advantage of the Georgian side and enabling the early Abkhaz successes in the war, the actors were differentiated by the level of cohesion in their troops. The Georgian "troops were so ill-disciplined that the Abkhazian victory… should have come as no surprise," Billingsley (2013, 155) argues.[6] In contrast, "Abkhazian units… were filled with outside volunteers but still managed to be much more cohesive. Though outnumbered, they were able to find common cause and make better use of their limited resources" (147).

What were the sources of Abkhaz cohesion? We seem to know better what cohesion is not in civil war contexts, namely, it is not social disintegration, associated with desertion and surrender (McLauchlin 2015; Shils and Janowitz 1948, 282). Instead, it is related to control

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[6] Georgian cohesion is beyond the scope of this paper. On the contrast between the troops, see also Coppieters (2000, 25) and Zurcher (2007, 138). On Georgia's forces, see Darchiashvili (2003) and Driscoll (2015).

(Pearlman 2011). Thus, Staniland (2014) defines cohesive insurgent organizations by their ability to establish central and local control. On the one hand, "robust central control coordinates its strategy and retains the loyalty and unity of its key leaders" (5). On the other hand, "[s]trong local control processes involve reliable, consistent obedience from foot soldiers and low-ranking commanders… even in risky and dangerous environments where central leaders cannot easily monitor or punish local units" (6). The sources of organizational—what I call Type II—cohesion lie in the pre-existing social bases of insurgent organizations, or "horizontal ties between organizers and vertical ties between organizers and local communities" (9). Focused on the structures of social interaction that link central, macro-level leaders to one another and the pool of fighters in civil war, this theory is based on a top-down mobilization process. Here, I focus on vertical ties between local, meso-level leaders and fighters and quotidian, micro-level horizontal ties within communities—what I call Type I, or small group cohesion (see Table 1 below).

As we shift the focus of cohesion from the insurgent organizer to the fighter in her social environment and disaggregate the concept of cohesion, a cohesive organization can be defined by horizontal, within-unit cohesion reflected in the risks taken by members of fighter units for one another and two-tiered vertical cohesion linking fighters to local-level commanders and to broader goals of the insurgency reflected in the risks taken as part of and outside the unit in attainment of top-level commands. I use the risks that fighters take for one another as an indicator of small group cohesion drawing on McLaughlin's (2015, 669) argument that "directly signaling a commitment to the armed group matters most for building inter-combatant trust." While McLaughlin focuses on voluntary recruitment to decipher costly signals of a willingness to fight, I focus on risk-taking in the course of fighting as an instance of direct signaling in the dangerous conditions of civil war.

Overall, the notion of cohesion that emerges from this analysis resonates with the standard model of cohesion developed in military studies (Siebold 2007), where cohesion

> consists of four related, interacting components based on different structural relationships: peer (horizontal), leader (vertical), organizational, and institutional bonding. Peer or horizontal bonding is among members at the same military hierarchical level (e.g., squad or group members). Leader or vertical bonding is between those at different levels (e.g., between squad or group members and their leaders). Peer and leader bonding within a small group (e.g., a platoon) together compose primary group cohesion. Organizational bonding is between personnel and their next higher organizations (e.g., company and battalion), and institutional bonding is between personnel and their military branch (e.g., the Army).

Table 1. Disaggregating Cohesion

Type	Level	Ties	Commitment		Risks
I: Small group cohesion	micro	quotidian	inter-fighter (horizontal)		for unit members
	meso	local	fighter-commander	(vertical)	for local command
II: Organizational cohesion	macro	central	fighter-organizer		for central command

This concept highlights the importance of multiple forms of micro-, meso-, and macro-ties underlying insurgent organizations. As Moody and White (106) argue, "the ability of the group to 'hold together' increases with the number of independent ways that group members are linked." In civil wars involving spontaneous, bottom-up mobilization, quotidian, micro- and local, meso-level ties play central roles in generating close-knit fighter groups. The effect of pre-existing social bases of insurgency organizers on cohesion is overemphasized in these cases, as insurgency organizers, while connected to one another, may not be sufficiently integrated into local communities to recruit fighters in the limited mobilization timeframe. Nevertheless, organizations that emerge can still be "characterized by leadership unity and discipline at the center and high levels of local compliance on the ground"—integrated organizations, in Staniland's (2014, 6) terms.[7] Built on "[s]trong, trust-based quotidian relationships," such organizations, Parkinson (2013, 419) finds, persist even "after formal chains of command [are] severed." In other words, changes in individuals running top-level command do not affect cohesion, as it is based on ties other than those to the insurgent organizers.

This was evident in the Abkhaz case, where collective mobilization decisions at the time of the Georgian advance were made in the private and local public settings of community gatherings and social ties within quotidian, local, and central structures interacted in spontaneous mobilization on the Abkhaz side. Regular men and women formed small defense groups with their friends and family, often led by respected community members, and joined the SRIF forces, commonly referred to as the Abkhaz Guard, organized by the Abkhaz leaders prior to the war. A fighter who mobilized spontaneously at the entrance to Sukhum/i when the war began captures this process of interaction:

> [I] entered a group of unarmed boys who were standing on the Red Bridge with the Abkhaz Guards, [m]et [my] friends… [including] Abkhaz Guard recruits there…, [and]

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[7] In Staniland's (2014, 7) typology of insurgent organizations, this social setup of mobilization should instead produce "[v]anguard organizations [with] robust central control but fragile local control."

was chosen spontaneously to lead the group… [We] introduced [ourselves] to the military commissar of the Republic… as a group ready for any commands (Interview in Khodzhaa 2009, 760).

Bonded by "strong, *quotidian* ties" of friendship and family and leadership structures within local communities, these initial fighter groups formed the basis of military units in the Abkhaz army (Parkinson 2013, 422, emphasis in original). "The Abkhaz army," commanders corroborate, "was formed on the basis of location and friendship ties" (Interview 47, Pitsunda, Fall 2011). "No one was appointed. We gathered and chose whom we could rely on to be responsible" (Interview 117, Sukhum/i, Fall 2011). Members of the resulting fighter units knew each other closely from pre-war interactions at the local level. The strength of pre-existing ties, "the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services," generated cohesion among fighters and between fighters and local commanders, reflected in the reciprocal risks taken in the fighting (Granovetter 1973, 1361). Cohesion occurred "at the small-unit level among the intimate, face-to-face groups" based on pre-war relations (Henderson 1985, 9). The early Abkhaz successes, namely, the retaking of Gagra and the area bordering Russia, can be attributed to this social basis. As Billingsley (2013, 156) confirms, Abkhaz "cohesion on an individual- and group-level was… illustrated so clearly at Gagra."

However, the composition of the initial fighter groups changed over time, as fighters shifted between military units in the course of the war. The following report of a fighter captures the extent of inter-unit shifting that took place, especially in the east of Abkhazia, where the Georgian forces retained control over the major city, Ochamchira, and blockaded its adjacent mountainous territory:

> On August 16, [I got] together with friends… and on August 18 we already participated in the first sortie… In late August 1992, I joined the commandant platoon. In a month… I was transferred to city defense. On October 12, I participated in the 1st Ochamchira operation… in Otar Gvaramia's platoon… When Valera Pipia (Balamut) organized his group "Swallow" I went over to him. In the 2nd Ochamchira operation I went with "Swallow"… In [all later] operation[s] I participated in the Serdyukov group (Interview in Khodzhaa 2003, 115-6).

Moreover, new units were formed with the arrival of volunteers with previous fighting experience. "Volunteers merged with Abkhaz armed units. Some of them… had good field training. To create a unified military structure, separate battalions were formed on their basis" (Pachulija 2010, 45). If pre-war social ties were solely responsible for cohesion, military units should have disintegrated in this context. Evidence of disintegration early in the war exists. Yet, the Abkhaz force became not less, but more cohesive over time. As a commander says,

> After the [failed] March offensive [on Sukhum/i], we conducted a thorough analysis of the operation. Multiple reasons for the failure were identified…, [namely], the responsibility of a soldier, especially the commander, [and] the absence of military discipline… [However], the [successful] July offensive [in eastern Abkhazia] demonstrated that we finally created an efficient army that can win the war (Arshba 2002, 28-9).

Increasing Abkhaz cohesion despite the changes in military unit composition suggests that cohesion did not simply stem from the pre-existing social bases on which the initial fighter groups were structured. In-process dynamics, including formal and informal military socialization through training and rituals (Wood 2008), participation in (particular forms of) violence as part of the group (Fujii 2009; Cohen 2013), and peer pressure (Kalyvas 2006), can help explain Abkhaz cohesion in the units whose social structure was altered in the course of the war. As Wood (2008, 546) argues,

> the powerful experiences of endless drilling, dehumanization through abuse at the hands of the drill sergeant, and degradation followed by "rebirth" as group members through initiation rituals typically meld individual recruits into a cohesive unit in which loyalties to one another are felt to be stronger than previous loyalties, such as those to family.

Many Abkhaz underwent military socialization in compulsory Soviet service. "We did not have professional officers," fighters explain, "But we almost all served in the army" (Interview 58, Gagra, Fall 2011). Informal and formal military training accompanied the Abkhaz army formation. "The Ministry of Defense was created on October 11, [after the retaking of Gagra]," a fighter says, "We formed a regiment, began to teach people how to fight" (Interview 61, Gagra, Fall 2011). Yet, socialization processes characterizing state militaries that would detach fighters from their pre-war loyalties (Shils and Janowitz 1948) were not present, as the emergent Abkhaz army was formed in the course of the fighting and did not have the time and resources necessary for such socialization. Failed operations with major losses on the Abkhaz side despite the training added to disintegration rather than socialization of fighters.[8] As Christia (2012, 43) suggests, "severe battlefield losses can cause a breakdown in group cohesion as subgroups begin to fear that survival is at stake."

Intra-group dynamics that develop in small groups through shared fighting experiences can clarify why Abkhaz fighters continued to take reciprocal risks on the battlefield, even as they left their initial fighter groups. "By participating in group rape," Cohen (2013, 465) finds, for example, "combatants signal to their new peers that they are part of the unit and are willing

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[8] The losses in the January and March, 1993, attacks on Sukhum/i, for example, were great for the small Abkhaz force: dozens were injured and 35 and 222 fighters were killed respectively (Pachulija 2010, 139, 175).

to take risks to remain in the group." Fujii (2009) advances this argument, relating participation in violence as part of the group to the new identities that it confers on group members. "Once initiated," she says with regard to the participants (Joiners) in the Rwandan genocide, "Joiners continued their participation because killing in large groups conferred a powerful identity on these actors" (19). Kalyvas (2006, 46) summarizes the peer dynamics involved in collective participation in civil war violence:

> combatants are usually motivated to fight not by ideology or hate or fear but by peer pressure and processes involving regard for their comrades, respect for their leaders, concern for their own reputation with both, and an urge to contribute to their success of the group—in short, what is known as "primary group cohesion."[9]

Yet, while small group processes might explain intra-group cohesion, indicated by the risks taken for other unit members, they do not account for the risks taken as part of and outside the unit, for broader aims of the struggle. Shared pre-war and war-time experiences of conflict and violence, I argue, relate individuals to the struggle beyond the small unit and shape the salience that fighters attribute to their continued commitment and associated risk-taking for the broader group. Abkhaz cohesion was most evident in the Gagra and Sukhum/i battles understood as critical for the survival of the Abkhaz as a group based on the prior Georgianization of Abkhazia and Georgian brutality in the war. Cohesion was thus based on the strength and content of social ties underlying the emergent army, which produced risk-taking behavior of its members for each other and the broader struggle.

Social Ties and Small Group Cohesion

The roots of Abkhaz cohesion in the Georgian-Abkhaz war cannot be understood without looking at the pre-war period. As Davenport et al. (2008, 8) say, "[a]ctive rebels recruit before civil war, practicing rebels instigate others to protest before civil war, experienced rebels attack authorities… [I]n every case, pre-civil war behavior [is]… important for understanding latter conflict behavior." Indeed, individuals who joined the fighting in the war on the Abkhaz side were often part of the Abkhaz movement, participated in the Georgian-Abkhaz clashes of the late 1980s, and/or served in the Abkhaz Guard in the early 1990s. "I joined all the [pre-war] clashes," fighters regularly report, "My friends participated in all the strikes" (Interview 28, Pitsunda, Fall 2011).

While participation in inter-group clashes was often spontaneous, Abkhaz activities were in general coordinated by the movement's leading organization, Aidgylara. "The central coordination point was in Sukhum, and then all the information about, for example, hunger

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[9] On primary group cohesion, see Shils and Janowitz (1948). See Siebold (2011) on the evolution of the concept.

strikes, would go to towns" (Interview 15, Gagra, Fall 2011). When tensions escalated in 1989, leading to the major set of clashes over the opening of the Tbilisi State University branch in Sukhum/i, Aidgylara member illustrates, "[w]e passed information by phone. We had representatives in every region, called them …, and momentarily everyone turned out [in the capital]" (Interview 104, Sukhum/i, Fall 2011). "Information and organization wise, Aidgylara did a lot to unite the Abkhaz" as a result (Interview 15, Gagra, Fall 2011). As Hewitt (1996, 207) says, "the events leading up to, during, and following the clashes of 1989 have produced a unique and impressive solidarity among the [Abkhaz]."

The organizational capacity developed in the pre-war period was central to the Abkhaz war effort, as social ties involved were often forged through participation in previous conflict events. In particular, leaders of the organizations in the pre-war Abkhaz movement were actively involved in fighters' mobilization at the local level when the war began. Aidgylara was at the forefront of this effort across Abkhazia. Its Deputy Chairman "went from house to house with locals [of villages in the east] in search of weapons [and g]athered village assembl[ies]" where collective mobilization decisions were made (Interview in Khodzhaa 2003, 50). Similarly, Aidgylara activists in the west "organized the boys, told them not to fall in spirit, that something will come out… [and] the people will not leave us" (Interview 86, Gagra, Fall 2011). Leaders of related organizations were active as well. For example, the Chairman of the Strike Committee—the violent branch of the movement—captures the importance of his ties to the local population for mobilization in the village of Bzyb:

> A group of locals stood by the village council [when t]he war began. Debates were going on … There were people higher than me there who did more than me. But maybe I was more in contact with the people. And once I came they said, "Nikolaevich is coming. He will tell us something serious" (Interview 64, Gagra, Fall 2011).

Beyond the organizational ties between Abkhaz movement leaders and local communities, the macro-level Abkhaz Guard structure created by the Abkhaz government leadership served as a core social setting for mobilization.[10] Participants in the inter-group clashes often joined the Guard. Reservists commonly report: "in 1989 I participated in the Georgian-Abkhaz armed clashes… [and f]rom the first days of the Abkhaz Guard joined it with friends…, guarded the Ingur/i and Okhurej posts" (Interview in Khodzhaa 2009, 793). When the Georgian forces crossed the Ingur/i River on August 14, 1992, the Abkhaz guards who were on duty were the first to mount resistance. "On the morning of August 14," a participating

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[10] The Presidium of the High Council of Abkhazia formed the Abkhaz Guard with resolutions of 29 December, 1991, that subordinated the 8th Regiment of the Soviet Army in Abkhazia. See resolutions in Volhonskij et al. (2008, 120-1).

fighter recalls, "our platoon commander comes by and says we now leave for the Inguri. We went… to get weapons in Agudzera. But did not reach Agudzera as we clashed with the Georgian column and were… taken captive" (Interview in Khodzhaa 2003, 46). Reservists who were not on duty informed each other of the advance and, when feasible, mobilized together in response. A reservist demonstrates a typical mobilization pattern:

> I participated in the clashes in 1989… After the Abkhaz guard was created… we formed the "Afghan" group on [Aidgylara] leader's initiative. My university friend… and I went across the regions to gather [others who served in Afghanistan]. We recruited a group of about 20 … [On August 14], I immediately went to Achadara (to the base)… And by the evening…, we were at the Red Bridge…, defending [Sukhum/i] (Interview in Khodzhaa 2009, 681).

The macro-level structure of the Abkhaz Guard was not only important for individuals who were directly related to it, but also for those who mobilized spontaneously, as defense volunteers.[11] Commanders of the Abkhaz Guard held explanatory sessions in the locales where groups of defense volunteers were formed. An Abkhaz Guard reservist discusses commanders' role in mobilization:

> We… stopp[ed in]… Tkhina, Chlou, Gvada, Kutol on way to Abkhaz Atara. In all villages [the Abkhaz Guard commander] conducted explanatory work with the local population. He taught local defense volunteers how to defend the village, which hills to select for guarding posts, [and] how to make incendiary mixtures (Interview in Khodzhaa 2003, 51-2).

Defense volunteer groups joined the fighting led by Abkhaz Guard commanders near Sukhum/i and Gagra. Volunteers who merged with the guards at the Red Bridge at the entry to Sukhum/i confirm: "We took some weapons from the Russian barracks [in Gudauta], gathered the boys we knew. Right away we were let out with one bullet to the Red Bridge—'You'll get more in the battle'" (Interview 81, Gagra, Fall 2011). The combined Abkhaz forces similarly defended the western city of Gagra: "we stood at the crossroads in [Gantiadi between the Russian border and Gagra]. Local population was there with hunting weapons and without weapons at all" (Interview 40, Pitsunda, Fall 2011).

While individuals who mobilized spontaneously often joined Abkhaz guards at the war on-set, there was variation in their pre-to-war mobilization trajectories. Defense volunteers frequently report pre-war participation in the conflict: "I participated in 1989… [and] on the first day of the… war joined as a defense volunteer" (Interview in Khodzhaa 2003, 117). However, social ties forged through pre-war activism did not always drive mobilization as

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[11] *Levée en masse* comes closest to Russian *opolchenie* used to describe this spontaneous aspect of the Abkhaz force.

individuals mobilized in a variety of social settings (see below). Moreover, not all potential fighters with such ties joined the Abkhaz side in the war. For example, "a decision was made to protect the intelligentsia and scientists given the small number of our people," and many escaped the fighting even if they were active in the pre-war Abkhaz movement (Interview 84, Gagra, Fall 2011). Finally, not all who fought in the war had pre-war mobilization experience. For example, war-time mobilization of youths, too young to have engaged in pre-war conflict events, was common. "Even young boys, 14-15 years old, [mobilized]. There are many examples," an Abkhaz commander confirms (Interview 60, Gagra, Fall 2011).

This variation in pre-war activism in mobilization trajectories suggests that social ties other than those related to macro-level organizational leadership were involved in war-time mobilization. Critical decisions were made in the meso-level setting of village and town gatherings: "the Abkhaz gathered [at the Sukhum/i administration] and discussed what to do, whom to tell, how to save the city, where to get weapons" (Interview 86, Gagra, Fall 2011); "there was a gathering of the Abkhaz [in Mokva in the east]… We made a decision… to organize a partisan unit" (Interview in Khodzhaa 2003, 67). Meso-level leaders, namely, local authorities and highly regarded community members, such as the elders, greatly influenced these decisions. "When the war began," a fighter illustrates, "I … went to the administration. Everyone gathered there and expected a message from the leaders" (Interview 117, Sukhum/i, Fall 2011). The head of the Gagra administration, for example, urged the locals to "retreat and organize city defense… given our small numbers, lack of weapons, and inflow of the Georgian forces" (Interview 78, Gagra, Fall 2011). Local defense volunteers confirm: "we were told to give up and retreat. We did" (Interview 85, Gagra, Fall 2011). The elders advised who could be trusted to lead defense volunteer groups formed in villages and towns: "I was elected head of the local militia at the request of the elders of the village" (Interview in Khodzhaa 2003, 90).

While the meso-level community gatherings and formal and informal leadership structures played central roles in collective mobilization decisions at the war onset, it is the micro-level family and friendship ties that provided the social structure for the initial fighter groups. Nearly all fighters in my sample and alternative interview archives entered the fighting with their quotidian relations: "I learned that the war began… and together with my son… immediately went to an Abkhaz Guard unit" (Interview in Khodzhaa 2003, 63); "[We heard that t]he war is in Sukhum…, went there with my friends" (Interview 73, Gagra, Fall 2011). Hence, "[l]ocal defense groups were made of close friends and family" (Interview 5, Pitsunda, Fall 2011).

One result of this social composition of the initial fighter groups was cohesion at the small group level, including horizontal cohesion between fighters and vertical cohesion between fighters and local-level commanders. As Gould (1993) finds in the Paris Commune, residential proximity influences cohesion, albeit this does not necessarily translate to participation in insurrection. Once fighters mobilized in Abkhazia, inter-fighter, horizontal cohesion was reflected in the reciprocal risks fighters took for each other, underlined by the strong, quotidian ties of family and friendship. "I took my father's hunting rifle," a fighter illustrates, "We passed the rifle back and forth with my cousin" (Interview 73, Gagra, Fall 2011). That commanders were chosen from a range of respected local-level figures or within micro-level friendship groups produced fighter loyalty to commanders that weak macro-level organizational ties could not. Fighters confirm: "[w]e were 15 boys from the village…, our commander… was the kolkhoz Chairman and people listened to him" (Interview 33, Pitsunda, Fall 2011); "We thought, whatever the[se] older men do, we should do, too. They told us to join [a] battalion, go into [an] attack…, and we went" (Interview 41, Pitsunda, Fall 2011). These strong micro- and meso-level ties were critical to the formation of the Abkhaz army during the war.

Salience of Victory and Insurgent Cohesion

The organization of the emergent Abkhaz army closely followed the socio-structural basis of initial mobilization for war on the Abkhaz side. A parallel process of macro-level subordination of the Abkhaz Guard and other military personnel present in Abkhazia to the central Abkhaz leader-ship and military unit formation that incorporated small groups formed at the meso and micro levels into the larger structure took place from the first days of the war. On August 18, 1992, as Georgia's forces gained control over Gagra in the west and Sukhum/i in the east, blockading the territory near the administrative border with Georgia, the Abkhaz leadership headed by the Chairman of the High Council of Abkhazia, Vladislav Ardzinba, issued the resolution "On the Establishment of the State Defense Committee."[12] With headquarters in Gudauta in central Abkhazia that remained under the Abkhaz control, the Committee assumed command of regulars and reservists of the Abkhaz Guard and Soviet army officers and staff who were not part of the Guard and charged these forces with the formation

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[12] Formally, army formation began after the Abkhaz capture of Gagra to the Russian border, with resolutions of October 11, 1992, "On the Armed Forces of the Republic of Abkhazia" and "On the Formation of the Ministry of Defense and General Headquarters of the Armed Forces." See Pachulia (2010) and Volhonskij et al. (2008) for war-time documents.

of the front lines separating the Abkhaz-controlled territory.[13] The authority established by the central leadership shaped cohesion at the macro level, immediately observed in the actions of officers who arrived to fortify and adjust the front lines (Pachulia 2010, 79). A former Soviet officer demonstrates this macro-level subordination: "an order came from the State Defense Committee to move the defense line… As a former Soviet Army officer, I understood what it meant to disobey orders of the commandership in times of war" (Interview in Khodzhaa 2009, 441-2).

Military units were organized to defend the front lines. Fighters confirm: "[w]hen the front line was shaped, detachments were formed, commanders chosen, and military command appeared. Some structure emerged" (Interview 72, Gagra, Fall 2011). The units incorporated Abkhaz guards and defense volunteer groups mobilized at the local level. For example, locals of Eshera—a village located at the base of the Gumista front line—took positions set up by the Abkhaz Guard and Soviet army officers. "Prior to 18 August," the group's commander reports, "I managed to gather up to 35 local defense volunteers… The day after we started digging trenches all the way from the sea along the Gumista River, [o]rganized daily duty" (Interview in Khodzhaa 2009, 45). This group was soon replaced by the mixed Abkhaz Guard and volunteer coy formed in Gudauta (Pachulia 2010, 40).

Leaders worked to maintain this socio-structural basis of military units during the war. "We all knew each other in the military unit that I joined," Abkhaz guards regularly say, "First, we went to free Gagra with my coy, then we formed a battalion with three coys…, [and later] became part of the provision platoon responsible for providing clothing, food" (Interview 13, Pitsunda, Fall 2011). "We met three years before the war," defense volunteers confirm, "We then stayed together in the trenches, in the unit, in the battalion" (Interview 48, Pitsunda, Fall 2011). The local-level command structure as well persisted where possible. A commander illustrates its continued importance,

> I was appointed assistant to the commander… The fighters were from my village. I knew them all as I grew up with them, it was a relative environment. My tasks involved support of the mood, explanation of what was happening. I did not let anyone doubt that we were right, that we would certainly win (Interview 117, Sukhum/i, Fall 2011).

Fighters who joined the Abkhaz force later in the war merged with these units bonded by local ties. "I returned to Gudauta, joined a group of 30 defense volunteers they formed," a newcomer recalls (Interview in Khodzhaa 2003, 202). Foreign fighters also "merged with the

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[13] Three front lines were formed early in the war separating the Abkhaz-controlled territory from Gagra along the Bzyb River, Sukhum/i along the Gumista River, and around Tqvarchel/i and the surrounding territory blockaded by Georgia.

Abkhaz armed units" (Pachulija 2010, 45). "Five volunteers from the Caucasus and five from Transnistria entered [my] group," a commander confirms (Interview in Khodzhaa 2009, 82). A fighter captures resulting social structure of the Abkhaz force as it transformed into an army:

> The war was the common struggle of close ones. We were 17 and called each other to go to war together… There were two fronts, one at Bzyb, the other at [Gumista]… We went to the Bzyb front and there found commanders who assigned us, altogether but with the addition of other men, to fight (Interview 5, Gudauta, Fall 2011).

While most transformation took place in the west of Abkhazia, in proximity to the headquarters of the Abkhaz central leadership, a similar process took place in the east. A commander demonstrates:

> By an order of the Defense Council of Pokvesh [village] I went to Gudauta to report on the situation at the east front… The Minister of Defense proposed formation of a battalion from the Ochamchira and Tqvarchel/i region residents… A seal was made and given to me with an inscription—Mechanized Infantry Battalion of the East Front. This unit integrated the [existing local] groups (Interview in Khodzhaa, 2009: 580-581).

This social structure of the emergent Abkhaz army facilitated continued cohesion at the unit level. Fighters are reported to have taken incredible risks for one another in the fighting throughout the war, demonstrating horizontal, inter-fighter cohesion. "Those who knew each other pulled each other out," a commander explains, "There was psychological support" (Interview 53, Gagra, Fall 2011). In particular, selfless acts were commonly performed for the sake of the unit. A commander exemplifies: "our fighters occupied Georgian positions… [and] managed to get out only due to the brave act of the fighter… [who] went up the railway track and with direct fire eliminated the sniper who was shooting at us" (Interview in Khodzhaa 2009, 49). Fighters are regularly reported to have rescued injured unit members from the battlefield, including under highly risky circumstances. An assistant commander, for instance, recalls a unit member who "rescu[ed] a wounded fighter…, went to bring him to a safe place…, and was killed" during an attack (Interview in Khodzhaa 2009, 65).

Unit commanders worked to sustain fighter loyalty, or vertical cohesion, by accompanying fighters in the training and fighting stages. "We often accompanied soldiers, to see how they lived during training," commanders frequently say, "We also participated in all the attacks together with them" (Interview 70, Gagra, Fall 2011); "When you go, everyone is your protection… Us comman-ders we were always at the front… All this united us" (Interview 53, Gagra, Fall 2011). "[O]ne of the Gumista front unit commanders," a front instructor observes the role of this support for fighters,

> was not just a commander for the boys but acted as a real father for them. Unfortunately, he was killed during the September 1993 operation. In battle, he walked

in front of everyone. Behind him, his sons—Zuriko and Amer (Interview in Khodzhaa 2009, 885).

Yet, due to lack of experience and inability to properly socialize fighters through training in the process of army formation, disorganization characterized some units. A commander explains:

> the army was being formed in the course of armed actions. Enormous work was done over three months. Not everyone understood what was happening. Sometimes we had to explain to each platoon or coy commander why they are no longer in the fifth battalion…, [why] the platoon has 21 soldiers rather than 50 [defense volunteers] (Interview in Zantaria 2008, 46).

Furthermore, the necessities of warfare prompted shifts in the composition of fighter bodies, which contributed to this disorganization. Groups of fighters were moved between larger units to produce functioning military structures. For example, an east front commander "was tasked with reforming the semi-guerrilla groups of the front into army structures. He had to form brigades from [scratch]" (Interview in Khodzhaa 2009, 435). Fighters with specific skills were moved between units when their skills were necessary. A communications specialist exemplifies:

> I worked as the chief of mechanization before the war… I organized a mining group [during the war]… At the end of December, 1992, I was transferred… to organize communications of the East Front headquarters and all its subdivisions (Interview in Khodzhaa 2003, 123-4).

As a result of these shifts, the micro- and meso-level basis of the initial fighter groups was disrupted, with implications for fighter cohesion. East and west front commanders capture the outcome: "new people were sent to my reconnaissance [unit]. I [did] not know if they would stay in reconnaissance or flee to another platoon" (Interview in Khodzhaa 2009, 377); "many [fighters] did not know each other… We realized we had to ensure that fighters knew each other, so that there was coordination" (Interview 53, Gagra, Fall 2011). Failed Abkhaz attacks were related to this disorganization. The Chief of the General Staff of the current Armed Forces of Abkhazia accounts for these failures:

> we are still silent… about the responsibility of a soldier, especially the commander…, in the absence of military discipline…: some units came late…, others refused to go to battle. But the worst thing is that some commanders, having sent their units on the offensive remained behind [the front line]… Having crossed [the front line], personnel sometimes did not know how to act and where to move, and so suffered most losses (Khodzhaa 2009, 34).

Despite disorganization in small groups where fighter shifts occurred and in implementing central, top-level command, fighters demonstrated commitment to the broader

struggle beyond the small group. These features of organizations "do not necessarily covary," Kenny (2010, 534) finds. Abkhaz fighters demonstrate: "people could not be stopped. If there was an attack everyone rushed there" (Interview 97, Gagra, Fall 2011). Immediate casualties among Abkhaz fighters support this observation. This commitment, in spite of shifting unit composition and failed attacks, has roots in not only strong ties underlying the initial fighter units, but also collective experiences that shaped a shared view of the salience of Abkhaz success. Fighters drew on the memories of Georgianization in the Soviet period—the changes in Abkhazia's political status, Georgian demographic expansion, prohibition of Abkhaz language and schools, and repression of Abkhaz activists—to interpret the consequences of Georgia's potential victory in the war. As fighters report, "If the events had turned out differently, we would be eliminated or killed and expelled. We had no other ideas as to how Georgians would behave" (Interview 117, Sukhum/i, Fall 2011).

This view was consolidated after the events of inter-group violence of 1989 and subsequent polarization of society in Abkhazia, reflected in the splitting of formerly integrated social groups in day-to-day activities, employment settings, especially the university, and government institutions, and the formation of armed groups on both sides of the conflict. "Open division began after 1989" (Interview 70, Gagra, Fall 2011); "We were now certain about their hatred toward the Abkhaz. This was one of the factors that helped us unite," fighters regularly say (Interview 58, Gagra, Fall 2011). Violence perpetrated by local Georgians and those mobilized in Georgia early in the war supported these fears. "They were brutal to the civilian population," fighters report (Interview 58, Gagra, Fall 2011); "Their brutality made it clear that Georgians hated us" (Interview 107, Sukhum/i, Fall 2011).

The expectations associated with the potential Georgian dominance in Abkhazia as a result of the war raised the stakes in the war for the Abkhaz fighters. "It was a difficult war," fighters say, "but it was our goal, our necessity, we did not have any other idea than freeing our territory. Either self-destruct or free" (Interview 58, Gagra, Fall 2011). Certain battles were viewed as particularly salient. Exemplary are the Gagra and Sukhum/i operations of October, 1992, and September, 1993, respectively. Fighters commonly express the fears of encirclement by the Georgian forces early in the war that prompted the Abkhaz to conduct the Gagra attack: "[t]hey entirely closed Kolkhida, so that no Abkhaz could leave… It was so scary… What would happen if they had broken through our Kolkhida block posts and gotten right away to Bzyb?" (Interview 83, Gagra, Fall 2011); "I thought they would kick us out… We prepared to live in the mountains, lead a partisan war" (Interview 72, Gagra, Fall 2011). Fighters thus

associated the survival of the Abkhaz with the recapture of Gagra: "If Abkhazia was to survive, we had to free Gagra" (Interview 20, Pitsunda, Fall 2011).

The small group horizontal and vertical cohesion based on the strong micro- and meso-level ties was vividly demonstrated in this attack. A participating fighter notes the associated risk-taking between fighters related by the same family name (*familia*) and commander support in the fighting:

> I went to the Gagra front line with up to seven of my familia members… We had only three Kalashnikovs. Our position was… too close to Georgians… [But] the front line commander often came to us [and h]elped with cartridges (Interview in Khodzhaa 2009, 198).

The small group cohesion was reinforced by the importance that fighters attributed to the operation. The high numbers of poorly armed and unarmed participants indicated the salience of the attack for fighters: "Many went to free Gagra with sticks… We went to necessarily free the city. This helped" (Interview 72, Gagra, Fall 2011).[14] As a result, even though "[t]he communications systems were very poor," fighters report, "the first operation to free Gagra was carried out… on big enthusiasm," to capture the city on October 2 (Interview 20, Pitsunda, Fall 2011; Interview 72, Gagra, Fall 2011).

Similarly, the Sukhum/i attack of September, 1993, which terminated the war in the Abkhaz favor, was viewed as critical to the Abkhaz survival. It was carried out after the signing of the Sochi Ceasefire Agreement of July 27 and its importance was perceived in this context. A fighter explains:

> Ardzinba asked if we should separate Abkhazia into two parts and leave the eastern part to Georgia… If once again we had a failed attack, we would be declared political criminals and killed, but otherwise the war would go on for Abkhazia. We decided to fight, breached the agreement, and freed Sukhum in two weeks (Interview 61, Gagra, Fall 2011).

Hence, fighters report, "we waited and only then attacked. We knew, if we freed the capital, the war would be over at that. Getting into Sukhum meant a free country" (Interview 97, Gagra, Fall 2011). The consistent use of the terms *freeing* and *liberation* in referring to the Gagra and Sukhum/i battles underlined the fighters' collective understanding of the broader struggle. "There is a big difference between separatists and a national liberation movement," fighters demonstrate, "We are the latter" (Interview 7, Gudauta, Fall 2011). The difference between the Abkhaz and Georgian views on the salience of the war outcome is captured in this context: "We will inscribe on the graves of our boys. 'They died for the Motherland.' What will the

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[14] 108 fighters died in the Gagra operation. Only 15 were foreign fighters (Pachulija 2010, 91).

Georgians write?" (Interview in Brojdo 2008, 71); "When a Georgian died, he did so for territorial integrity" (Interview 48, Pitsunda, Fall 2011).

Conclusion

This paper demonstrated that micro- and meso-level ties underlined cohesion in the fighter groups formed on the Abkhaz side at the beginning of the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-1993. The strong, quotidian ties bonded fighters to one another in intimate ways that ensured reciprocity and shaped horizontal cohesion between them, while local community ties facilitated vertical cohesion with commanders, even if unstructured at the war onset. The Abkhaz army built during the war was based on these initial, cohesive groups of fighters.

Due to the necessities of warfare, fighters shifted between military units in the course of the war and the Abkhaz force experienced multiple failures, with significant casualties on the Abkhaz side. Despite these changes in the composition of military units and war-time losses, Abkhaz cohe-sion was maintained as the war progressed, especially in the small groups formed at the war onset. However, cohesion beyond the small group, or commitment to the broader struggle, was reinforced by the collective understandings of the conflict shaped through the history of the Georgian-Abkhaz relations. The fear of the potential Georgian victory and perceived necessity of the Abkhaz success in the war were related to the shared past characterized by the Georgianization of Abkhazia and expectations of continued Georgian dominance in Abkhazia in the event of the Abkhaz war loss.

This analysis has implications for the study of the internal dynamics of civil war. It suggests that most mobilization takes place in a social setting, but the insurgent organization is not the only setting involved in collective decisions to join the fighting and the development of cohesion among fighter groups. While the macro-organizational leadership was critical for the Abkhaz mobilization at the war onset, it was the micro- and meso-level ties within local communities that produced the initial, cohesive units. This stands in contrast to organizational theories of cohesion that prioritize insurgent leader ties to communities in explaining the evolution of armed groups (Staniland 2014).

Furthermore, the analysis challenges the view of cohesion as isolated from self-perceptions and underlying preferences (Kalyvas 2006). The process of the Abkhaz army formation indicates that in the conditions of ongoing fighting, when limited time and resources are available for the so-cialization of fighters into new military units, pre-existing conflict experiences shape commitment to the broader struggle. Future research should explore these sources of cohesion and look at the quotidian bases of insurgent organization survival and success, generalizing beyond Abkhazia to other civil war cases with power asymmetries.

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Appendix 1. Summary of Primary Interview Data: Abkhazia

			Total[15]	Percentage (rounded)
General information	Gender	Male	99	70%
		Female	43	30%
	Self-identified	Abkhaz	127	90%
		Other	15	10%
	Age	<50	72	51%
		>50	70	49%
	Location	Eastern mobilization	45	32%
		Sukhum/i	45	32%
		Western mobilization	97	68%
		Gagra	42	28%
		Pitsunda	36	26%
		Gudauta	19	14%
Pre-war	Occupation	State	29	20%
		Non-state	113	80%
	Mobilization	Organized	45	32%
		Spontaneous	43	30%
		None	54	38%
War-time mobilization	Fighters	Organized	14	10%
		Combat	13	9%
		Male	13	9%
		Female	-	-
		Support	1	1%
		Male	1	1%
		Female	-	-
		Spontaneous	69	48%
		Combat	50	35%
		Male	50	35%

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[15] Calculated based on 142 respondents in 150 interviews.

				Total	Percentage
			Female	-	-
		Support		19	13%
			Male	12	8%
			Female	7	5%
	Non-fighters			59	42%
			Male	23	16%
			Female	36	25%
Post-war	Occupation	State		42	30%
		Non-state		100	70%
	Mobilization	Organized		59	42%
		None		83	58%

Appendix 2. Summary of Secondary Interview Data: Georgia and Russia

				Total[16]	Percentage (rounded)
General information	Gender		Male	23	62%
			Female	14	38%
	Location		Georgia	31	84%
			Russia	6	16%
Interview type	Expert[17]			24	65%
	Focus group[18]			7	19%
	War witness[19]			6	16%

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[16] Calculated based on 37 respondents in 30 interviews and one focus group.

[17] This category includes university professors, governmental officials, and representatives of non-governmental organizations and research institutes.

[18] The focus group was carried out with support of the Ministry of Education of Abkhazia in exile with respondents who witnessed the war in Abkhazia and were displaced to Georgia.

[19] This category includes respondents who witnessed the war in Abkhazia and were displaced.