CONCLUSION

Let us first summarize what we discussed so far in this publication.

In *Chapter One*, we reviewed major previous studies on ethnicity. The review showed that shared language is one of the most important defining criteria of an ethnic group. The modernist approaches to explain the role of language in the context of modernization, especially in the context of nation-building or state-building, effectively establishes that a shared language is a prerequisite for a modern nation. Many scholars of ethnicity also correctly emphasize the role of ethnogenetic myth and system of its dissemination (school system and print media). Yet, they do not provide us with any clue to the cases where two or more ethnic groups are competing or rivaling with each other. Moreover, they assume that the sharing of a common language is real or achieved successfully. However, in order to explore the role of language in ethnic conflict in general or Caucasian ethnic conflicts in particular, we need to deal with such cases that are neglected by the previous studies on ethnicity.

For this purpose in mind, we examined several conceptual tools and concepts so far proposed to deal with ethnic hostility and conflict. Among them are the notion of nested conflict, homogenization and differentiation of language, elite closure, and language officialization. On the basis of the review, we proposed a new concept of ethnic enclosure as a theoretical framework to understand the role of language in ethnic rivalry or conflict.

The concept of ethnic enclosure enables us to view ethnic rivalry as a process of simultaneous exclusion and inclusion, i.e. as enclosure. The model of ethnic enclosure was introduced so as to account for a specific type of the policy of ethnic leadership aimed at the exclusion of rival ethnic group(s) from the disputed territory. A policy of ethnic enclosure heavily relies on the employment of such myths of ethnogenesis, which expand in time and space dimensions the group’s attachment to the territory in question and which place argument of the continuous use of language by the ethnic group at the core of the entire myth’s construct.
It is possible to distinguish two facets of ethnic enclosure: symbolic and practical. As a result of the attempts to implement a symbolic ethnic enclosure, ethnic groups acquire a language-territory complex – a particular way of collective remembering based on a strong correlation between the territorial boundaries of the ethnic group, its ascribed language and the historical past of the territory in question. Often, the process of the formation, maintenance and spread of language-territory complex is a cyclical one. Moreover, in the case of mutual ethnic enclosures, language-territory complexes are formed simultaneously among the ethnic groups that are involved in a territorial dispute. Thus, the existence of a strong language-territory complex can be an important feature of the relationships between ethnic groups and one of the causes of long persistence of inter-ethnic hostilities.

Next it was necessary to examine Soviet language and ethnic policies to properly set the context of the Caucasian ethnic conflicts, because they are both constrained and accelerated by the Soviet policies. In Chapter Two we showed that despite the changes of policies, fluctuations between internationalization (Russification) and indigenization, the essence of the Soviet ethnic policies have been consistent. The Soviet administrative territorial division was hierarchical and ethnic, and ethnic groups were ranked and placed somewhere in the territorial-administrative hierarchy of the Soviet Union. In the hierarchy some ethnic groups enjoyed greater autonomy according to their rank, while others suffered from lower rank and less autonomy. The most important criterion of this ranking was language, more precisely, the language that is uniquely associated with a particular ethnic group.

The system of ranking of languages became closely linked to the system of ethno-territorial division in the USSR. The Soviet political settings facilitated the implementation of the policy of ethnic enclosure by leaders of ethnic autonomies in the Soviet Union and provided a fertile ground for the growth of strong language-territory complexes among rival ethnic groups in many parts of the USSR. This was one of the reasons why the efforts of ethnic leaders had to be directed towards language, in order to maintain or upgrade the status of their group in the hierarchy, and usually this objective could be achieved by the promotion of an appropriate myth of ethnogenesis,
the core element of the policy of ethnic enclosure.

In Chapter Three we showed what was actually done in order to create, maintain and disseminate ethnogenetic myths that could be used in the process of ethnic enclosure. Under the Soviet political settings, language was considered to be the “primordialized” property of an ethnic group, and it was necessary to show that the ethnic group in question had continued to use its own, distinct language for a significantly long period of time. Moreover, the postulate of the continuous use of a distinct language had to be linked to the first-settlers status in the territory of autonomous unit. The outcome of the efforts to maintain or upgrade the status of an ethnic group was closely tied to the availability of historically-proven link between the area inhabited by the ethnic group and the language ascribed to the ethnic group. However, often there were the scarcity of historical evidences or they were contradictory. That is how the role of intellectuals became of an enormous importance.

The way intellectuals were involved in the process of myths construction in the Soviet Union can be viewed as a staged process and it is necessary to adapt ethnogenetic myths with the shifts in the Soviet language policy. When indigenous historians conducted their research on the topics concerned with the distant past of the area in question, the results of such academic endeavor were in high demand by ethnic leadership, which needed scientific evidences to support the politically important stand of the continuous use of language by the ethnic group. The simplified versions of academic publications were turned into official histories, incorporated in textbooks of local history and made public through mass media, thus, leading to the transformation of a purely scientific account of the distant past into a myth of ethnogenesis held by the majority of ethnic group.

In addition, the teachers of local histories in Soviet autonomies were allowed a significant degree of freedom in choosing the methodology of teaching and the curricula content, which, in turn, facilitated the process of myths dissemination and absorption. Furthermore, since the changes of official histories of one or another ethnic group were part of the policy of ethnic enclosure, the introduction of new interpretations of the
distant past and attempts at changing the patterns of perception with regard to language
ascribed to the ethnic group in question greatly contributed to the growth of
language-territory complexes of rival ethnic groups.

Another main objective of this research was to apply the notion of ethnic
enclosure in order to explain the role of language in ethnic rivalries in the Caucasus.
The focus of our attention in Chapters Four, Five and Six was on the conflict in
Abkhazia. The examination of the role of language in the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict
disclosed some very important aspects of how language is exploited as a political
resource. It is possible to summarize the major findings as follows.

Firstly, due to the unfavorable treatment of Abkhazians by the Russian colonial
administration in the 19th century and as a result of the policy of the re-settlement of
non-Abkhazians (mostly Georgians) in the territory of Abkhazia during the first part of
the 20th century, the ethnic composition of the population in the territory in question
dramatically changed. This can be seen as part of physical enclosure (homogenization)
on the part of Georgians. Ethnic Abkhazians numerically became a minority in
Abkhazia and suffered a significant language shift to the Russian language. However,
since language was a crucial political resource, the real ability of population to
comprehend Abkhaz, Georgian or Russian mattered the least while the perceived
identity or differentiation – the most. That is why, during the entire course of the
development of the Georgian-Abkhazian ethnic rivalry, the ethnic leaders in Abkhazia
and Georgia were able to exploit language as a political resource based on the formation,
maintenance and dissemination of opposing patterns of perception with respect to the
Abkhaz language.

Secondly, the conflict between Abkhazians and Georgians during the most of
the Soviet period had a nested structure. On the one hand, Georgians were the titular
ethnic group of a union republic and subordinated to the central authorities in Moscow.
On the other hand, Georgians were a dominant group with respect to Abkhazians, since
Abkhazian autonomy was made part to Georgia. Hence, the struggle for the
maintenance and upgrading of the status of the ethnic group became a key objective of
the political leadership in Abkhazia. The Soviet political settings for the status struggle required ethnic groups to demonstrate the continuous use of their ascribed language in combination with the first-settlers principle and the roots of Abkhazian and Georgian ethnic groups were extended deep into the remote past. Here, it was language, which enabled – through the construction of ethnocentric myths – the perceived identification of the population that inhabited Abkhazian territory in the distant past with ancestors of Abkhazians (in the case of the Abkhazian myth of ethnogenesis) or Georgians (in the case of the Georgian ethnogenetic myth). These are clear examples where language plays a great role in the ethnogenetic myths.

Thirdly, the school system and mass media were actively used by both parties to the conflict in order to distribute new versions of history and, consequently, to reinforce the myths of ethnogenesis. During the most of the 20th century, the shifts in the Soviet political environment created opportunities for Abkhazian and Georgian ethnic leaderships to promote opposing versions of official histories of Abkhazian and Georgian ethnogenesis, sometimes even simultaneously, leading to the emergence of myths construction. That is why the role of intellectuals in the construction of an appropriate version of the distant past became of crucial importance. In addition, the Soviet education system allowed a significant degree of academic freedom in the teaching of local histories, and both Georgian and Abkhazian school students were constantly exposed to the rival versions of history of the distant past of Abkhazia. In the narratives of locally published textbooks, language was always presented as a key evidence of the first-settlers status of ancestors of Abkhazians (in Abkhazian textbooks) or Georgians (in Georgian textbooks).

Fourthly, the examination of the development of the Georgian-Abkhazian ethnic rivalry during the period from the end of the 1950s to the end of the 1980s exposed an interesting phenomenon of the so-called Abkhazian letters. The Abkhazian letters clearly exemplifies the nested nature of the conflict. More importantly, however, these letters, like other documents, emphasized the existence of ‘scientifically proven’ evidences for Abkhazians being first-settlers in the area and Abkhaz being spoken continuously in Abkhazia from time immemorial. Besides, the authors of the letters
denounced Georgian ‘falsification of historical truth’, pointing out the facts of the appearance of new versions of history produced by Georgian intellectuals or publications in mass media of ‘distorted’ descriptions of Abkhazian history. The letters were sent directly to the central authorities in Moscow but the content of the letters was always made known to the majority of Abkhazians and generated mass support among them. Normally, Moscow was forced to respond to the letter in one way or another, providing Abkhazians with some concessions, and, thus, the Abkhazian letters can be considered an important tool of the status struggle in the specific nested settings of the Soviet ethno-territorial division.

Fifthly, by its goals, methods, and the way the war is financed, the Georgian-Abkhazian ethnic war is a clear example of a new type of war resulting from a political rivalry that turned violent. According to Mary Kaldor, in ‘new wars’, political elites heavily rely on ‘new identity’ politics, which are employed in the context of the failure or the corrosion of other sources of political legitimacy. This type of identity politics is inherently exclusive and therefore tends to fragmentation (Kaldor 1999, 78-79). Kaldor also points out one of the most important characteristics of a new warfare, namely, that while avoiding open battle, ‘warring parties share the aim of sowing ‘fear and hatred’… and operate in a way that is mutually reinforcing, helping each other to create a climate of insecurity and suspicion’ (Kaldor 1999, 9). The continuous reinforcement of language-territory complexes at a core of attempts at mutual ethnic enclosure of Abkhazia implemented by Georgian and Abkhazian ethnic leaderships after the active combat is over is surely attributive to the persistence of hostilities between Georgians and Abkhazians.

It is also possible to agree with theorists of the new war approach that the strategic aim in this type of warfare is population expulsion, which leads to forced migration and displacement. Actually, the striking increase in the number of internally displaced persons and refuges in contemporary world is a direct result of the tactics of the warring parties to target primarily civilians in those violent conflicts that can be characterized as new wars and in which land or valuable recourses are at stake.\(^1\)

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\(^1\) See, e.g., Rouvinski and Vasquez 2005 for the examination of the case of IDPs in Colombia.
However, although the wars in the Caucasus are indeed fought over tangible resources such as territory or resources, what differentiate Caucasian cases from many other new wars and what make the achievement of effective conflict resolution in this region so difficult are the intangibles like myths and symbols. That is why the conflicts in the Caucasus can be better explained by the concept of ethnic enclosure. As argued by Kaufman, ‘[e]xisting strategies of conflict resolution fail in ethnic wars because they are based on an inadequate understanding of how ethnic identities work, why group members mobilize for war, and how they can be mobilized for peace’ (Kaufman 2006, 203). In fact, various efforts of international mediators to reach a lasting solution and escape stalemates in Abkhazia, South Ossetia or Nagorny Karabakh have not been successful so far.

Some scholars explain the persistence of ethnic hostilities in the Caucasus by the notion of security dilemma. Indeed, the actions of Caucasian ethnic leaderships in the end of the 1980s, when the degree of Moscow’s control over the Caucasus started to diminish, can be explained by the rise of their security concerns. Moreover, as we showed in this publication, during the entire Soviet period, the appeals to the notion of historical superiority of one’s ethnic group with respect to the disputed territory and the importance of this stand for the well-being of the members of the ethnic group in question in the specific Soviet political settings undoubtedly contributed to the rise of fear and insecurity among Abkhazians and Georgians.

Last but not least, our case study in this volume clearly confirmed the major assumptions of the notion of ethnic enclosure as regards the way language functions in an ethnic rivalry. It can be argued that the entire course of the development of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict can be viewed as a sequence of attempts at ethnic

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2 As Gen Kikkawa emphasized, the absence of an international standard for the recognition of independence is one of the obstacles for “making the domestic root causes of conflicts a matter of international concern so the international community … can play a more effective role…” (Kikkawa 2003, 55).

3 See, e.g., Nodia (1997), Haindrava (1999). The notion of security dilemma, applied to the study of ethnic conflicts by Barry Posen, refers to the situation when two parties – in our case ethnic groups – are drawn into conflict even though none of them actually desires a conflict at the first place. The dilemma raises because “what one does to enhance one’s own security causes reactions that, in the end, can make one less secure” (cited in Kaufman 2001, 9).
enclosure by Georgian and Abkhazian ethnic leaders and both Abkhazians and Georgians hold a very strong language-territory complex. With the demise of the real control of the Soviet authorities over the Caucasus in the end of the 1980s, the clash of Georgian and Abkhazian attempts to implement the policy of ethnic enclosure in Abkhazia led to a dramatic escalation of ethnic confrontation and resulted in an ethnic war. Today, the continuation of the attempts to ethnically enclose Abkhazia is one of the major reasons for the endurance of the hostilities between Abkhazians and Georgians.

Let us now summarize the main conclusions as a result of the examination of language and conflict in this volume. They are threefold.

First, on the basis of the review of previous studies on ethnicity and ethnic conflict and considering the Soviet ethnic policy, we proposed the concept of ethnic enclosure as a model to understand persistent ethnic rivalry and hostility where a shared political myth with an intangible factor like language at its core plays a very important role.

Secondly, the case study in this volume presents the first attempt at a comprehensive examination of the role of language in the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, providing an overview of the conflict process as a continuous development from the 19th century to the present day. The new concept of ethnic enclosure accounts for the long process of clashes of myths between Georgians and Abkhazians. The concept can also be applied to other Caucasian conflicts such as Georgian-South Ossetian conflict and Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorny Karabakh.

Thirdly, through the case study under the framework of ethnic enclosure, the present publication demonstrated that an intangible or symbolic factor like language is one important dimension of ethnic conflict.
Epilogue

There is a traditional game in Abkhazia. It is called “Charazh”. The idea of the game is to make a horse accelerate and then slide through a wet field. The horse must not stumble and must not interrupt its slide. The horse that leaves the longest track wins. Sometimes, it seems that politicians in the Caucasus are trying to play a similar game when they talk about who was first in Abkhazia and whose language has being spoken uninterruptedly from ab uribe condita. What the politicians forget, though, is that the horse will eventually stumble. Or their horse may never fall as it is mythical.