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Lost in the Desert – from Despair to Meaningful Existence: A Chechen Refugee Family Crossing Borders

Nino Makhashvili & Lela Tsiskarishvili

"*Can your medical center help me in selling my kidney*?" These words, which caused a shock-like state of several colleagues sitting around the table in our treatment center in Tbilisi (Georgia) belonged to Kazbeg, a man of 40 years, refugee from Chechnya. This was his first visit to our center.

Kazbeg's grandfather was a participant of 1944 Chechen rebellion against Soviet Regime and by Stalin's order, together with his family (Kazbeg's 7 years old father among them) and some 1 million Chechens has been deported to Central Asia stuffed in railway car for cattle. The itinerary from Chechnya to Kazakhstan was extremely long and full of suffering. After 6 weeks of journey, only half of the million Chechens managed to survive. However, that did not break their spirit. As Alexander Solzhenitsyn describes in his Archipelago Gulag:

> The Chechens never sought to please, to ingratiate themselves with the bosses. As far as they were concerned, the local inhabitants and those exiles who submitted so readily belong more or less to the same breed as bosses. They respected only rebels. And here is an extraordinary thing – everyone was afraid of them. No one could stop them from living as they did. The regime which had ruled the land for thirty years could not force them to respect its laws. (as cited in Baiev, Daniloff, & Daniloff, 2003, pp.3–4).

In 1957 Chechens were allowed to return home and start over a new life, however they were not rehabilitated formally. During years of living in extremely harsh conditions in exile, Kazbeg's grandfather and 2 uncles died alongside many others under forced labor. Kazbeg's father refused to leave Kazakhstan, and the family separated. Kazbeg's pregnant mother, older sister and grandmother returned to their native town of Grozny in 1963, the year that Kazbeg was born.

He and his sister were growing up in caring family, among loving women, mother and grandmother. From those years of his childhood and adolescence, Kazbeg developed deep respect of women and belief in their power and outlook.

After graduation from the secondary school, Kazbeg became a student of civil engineering department in Moscow. During one of his holidays back home, he met Khava, a beautiful Chechen young girl of 18, fell in love with her and soon they married. The couple went to Moscow, where after graduation from the university Kazbeg started to work. Their family was quite

wealthy. They gave birth to three boys. After Chechnya declared independence, the family decided to return to homeland. Their fourth child, a baby girl was born in Grozny.

When the first Russian-Chechen war broke out (December, 1994–August, 1996), Kazbeg's family seriously suffered, like many others. Bombardment damaged his house, the walls came apart, caught fire and his elder son, who then was 13, burned his legs. There was no place to hide 3 infants (2-year-old twin boys and a baby girl of 10 months). In the following year, during continuous bombings, Khava had a miscarriage of twins because of stress.

One day soldiers of Russian federal troops broke into Kazbeg's house. He was severely beaten (especially on his head) with feet and guns, and threatened that his wife and children will be executed. The assault lasted for more than an hour. The soldiers were demanding "information", money and gold. "It was the hardest when they pointed a gun at my wife and asked if I could see her killed and still say nothing," told us Kazbeg. Khava too has undergone physical and psychological abuse (mocking, threatening).

After that, he was arrested and held in custody in the basement of the Gudermes Prison. They interrogated him about the Chechnyan Resistance and since he "did not know anything", he was subjected to a severe torture. They tortured him for 10 days and he ended up with a broken collarbone and perforated appendix. Then they threw him unconscious out into the street where he spent all frosty night.

Upon termination of the first Russian-Chechen war, Kazbeg together with his wife and children left for Ukraine. In Ukraine, he met a Tibetan lama, who determined Kazbeg's further life outlook – a philosophy of active non-violence. The Tibetan lama preached that a human being had to resist injustice with all his spirit and energy. One has to be free, although not through war and brutality, but through active nonconformity and non-violence.

Kazbeg was so fascinated by this concept that he started introducing this philosophy to his fellow Chechens in Ukraine. He created a forum for non-violent struggle and organized a conference for promotion of non-violent vision of resolution of the Chechen conflict. For majority of his compatriots this philosophy was unacceptable, since "historically, Chechens are fighters". Unfortunately, violence reached his family again. Before the outbreak of the second Russian-Chechnyan war (in 1999), Khava, together with her elder son and little daughter, returned to Chechnya to visit her family.

One night, during a regular "Zachistky[1]" the Russian soldiers burst into their house and arrested her 26 year old brother. "They did not even allow him to put on his clothes" remembers Khava. All this was happening in front of the family members, accompanied by physical and psychological abuse. The soldiers

[1] "Zachistky" – a periodic cleansing carried out by Russian Federal Troops aimed at arresting resistance fighters, however in many cases peaceful population, including women and children, were subjected to torture and ill-treatment

pointed a gun at Khava's head and at her small daughter threatening them with execution. Khava was crying, trying to defend her brother and was seriously beaten, especially on her head. Finally, soldiers took her brother and after that, nobody has ever heard of him. That night many men were taken away from their homes.

Khava later described that "despite the summer heat, I froze and I was shivering". She could hear how her daughter was weeping and begging to be taken away from the house. After that incident, whenever her daughter saw uniformed people, she always tried to hide, starting crying and asking for help. That time Khava's psychological state deteriorated. She developed a fear of being left alone, a fear of darkness and uncontrolled shivering. Her daughter started to suffer from night enuresis. Since it was not possible for Khava and her little daughter to leave for Ukraine, Kazbeg with his sons immediately returned to Chechnya, but soon upon his return he was taken by Russian soldiers to a filtration camp[2], where he spent 10 days kept in waist-deep water. He has again undergone insults, threats, beating. He was released only after his relatives had paid the ransom. After having witnessed all this terror, Kazbeg's elder son, despite his father's arguments and reprimands left the house and joined the resistance fighters.

In autumn 1999, Kazbeg moved with his family to Georgia, and left his mother, who refused to leave Grozny, behind.

In 1999, the Georgian Government declared its readiness to accept refugees from Chechnya and settle them in Pankisi Gorge, a place populated by ethnic Kists. Historically Chechens and Kists have the same origin, they speak the same language and share common customs and traditions. The refugees were granted a group refugee status, meaning that they did not receive individual documentation and were restricted in their traveling within the country. The State did not take any responsibility to provide refugees with shelter or material assistance and addressed international humanitarian organizations to support the refugees. However, those refugees who would leave the Gorge and settle somewhere else in Georgia would not receive any assistance whatsoever. Nevertheless, a certain number of refugees chose to live in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia instead of being trapped in Pankisi Gorge. Kazbeg was among those refugees. The family lived in harsh circumstances and poverty. Very often they did not have money to pay their bills and were left without electricity and gas. After spending two years in Tbilisi Kazbeg learnt about our center, which provided medical and psychosocial assistance to refugees from Chechnya.

[2] Filtration Camp – military camps where Chechens were gathered by federal army soldiers for identification of resistance fighters. Often these camps served as punitive prisons – big majority of refugees were severely tortured there. See Baiev, et al. (2003) for additional information.

The First Meeting

"Can your medical center help me selling my kidney?"

"Sell your Kidney?!"

"Yes, this is a very expensive organ; I'm selling it for cheap, for transplantation."

Kazbeg said that he was in urgent need of money, in order to leave Georgia, since he and his family were in danger.

He described how he found out about the center through several Chechen refugees, who were our clients already. When Kazbeg saw their psychological state improving, he decided to "check us out, pay a visit and see what kind of work we are doing". That is why he asked a friend (a client of the center) to accompany him during his first visit.

At our first meeting, he and his friend Said were sitting around the table with gloomy faces. Said remained mostly silent. Kazbeg was telling the story of his family – how they lived in extreme poverty in Georgia, how his children, who were 10 and 8, did not attend school because they couldn't speak Georgian, and how he refused to take them to a Russian one out of his principles.

As Kazbeg explained, one of the main reasons why he wanted to leave Georgia for any European country was to give his children proper education. Since he had not received from the authorities any answer to his requests to transfer him and his family to the third country, he decided to sell his kidney, and considered this as the only way to earn money for the trip and save his family.

After the "kidney story", the center's lawyer was invited to join the meeting, in order to persuade Kazbeg that selling the kidney was illegal and that nobody would be willing to help him. We tried to convince him that he should forget this option. He seemed convinced, and gradually dropped the issue.

Then we[3] explained to Kazbeg what services the center is offering to our clients, what kind of assistance he and his family could receive from the team, and what was the concept of "psychosocial and medical treatment and rehabilitation". We also offered him to involve his children in therapy group at the center, as this might be useful for them. Kazbeg refused these offers, though he continued the conversation. He spoke of Chechnya, he recalled the history of his people, mentioned the Georgian-Chechen unity stressing that both nations belong to the culture of the Caucasus, sharing similar history, traditions, etc.; spoke of the hard lot of the refugees, as "most of them feel endangered in Georgia and would like to seek asylum in the West."

At the end of our first meeting, our lawyer offered Kazbeg his assistance in preparing documentation for submission to relevant official bodies that deal with transfer of refugees to the third countries. Kazbeg accepted this offer and we set the next appointment date.

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[3] This article is written by Kazbeg's psychotherapist and the child therapist who worked with his children. By using the "we", authors pay tribute to the colleagues, center's multidisciplinary team members, who were involved in Kazbeg's and his family's treatment/rehabilitation process at various stages.

This meeting gave the onset to our long-term relationship with Kazbeg and his family. Presumably, during the first meeting we managed to gain some trust of Kazbeg and from that day on, slowly, over the following two years, he became our client, friend, partner and one of our main contact persons with the Chechen community in Georgia.

The Next Visit

At the second visit, Kazbeg came with his three children, but not at the appointed time, we had previously agreed with him. He did not consider it necessary to explain why he had not come to the appointment on time. As we eventually learned, there was no use to set appointments, neither with him, nor with other refugees from Chechnya. The only time category that worked was "first half of the day or second half of the day", however even this often was not respected either.

At the second meeting the center's lawyer helped Kazbeg in writing a statement for granting asylum. Kazbeg engaged in the discussion on the legal procedures with great interest. Meanwhile, his children were informally talking with a psychologist. They were drawing pictures and viewing other kids' paintings that were hanging in the office.

After finishing the affairs with legal documents, Kazbeg remained at the office. It was obvious that he wanted to continue the dialogue, so he was invited to the psychotherapy room. He talked about what was going on among the Chechen refugee community in Pankisi Gorge, what was happening in Chechnya and how people lived there. Suddenly he took out his mother's letter and started to read it. Mother was informing Kazbeg about the deaths of several relatives and about frequency and horror of "Zachistky". Kazbeg could not finish reading the letter, as his voice started to tremble, his breathing became uneven, and he stood up and started to walk in the room nervously. When he calmed down, he remembered how he was leaving Grozny, and spoke of his journey from Chechnya to Georgia. Together with other refugees, he and his family crossed the Georgian-Chechen border through steep and mountainous areas, the route was difficult, especially for little children, who had to walk and climb for hours. Then he briefly recalled their short stay in Pankisi and hard days in Tbilisi. "Now I don't know who I am any more", he said, while he kept smoking, felt restless and slightly shivered. He mentioned that his family did not suffer that much, and that there were hundreds of thousands of other Chechens who experienced worse things. Their family members have died or disappeared. "At least I see my kids running in front of me", he added. Once again, he was offered to engage his kids in group therapy sessions, but he refused it again.

However, several days later Kazbeg called the centre saying that his children really wanted to come and asked when this would be possible. He started bringing his children to the group sessions.

Children

Records of the Child Group Therapists

Twin Brothers Musa and Abek (10 years old) and Their Sister Zara (8 years old)

All three children had a high level of anxiety, sense of insecurity, fears; little girl had sleeping disturbances with nightmares. She had witnessed the violence of the soldiers, saw the kidnapping of her uncle and beating of the mother, blood and despair; she had night enuresis, could not stay in bed alone and slept in one bed with her parents. Apart from group work, she was engaged in individual psychotherapy course with a child-psychotherapist; the sessions with her and sometimes together with her mother proved to be successful.

Children engaged in group work with great enthusiasm. They showed interest towards different activities and topics. They were smart, though there was an observable gap in their education. Sometimes group work was impeded by the fact that all three were from the same family. The brothers often made fun of their little sister, and she always reacted with crying.

Children had a brother who was a Chechen resistance fighter and they have not heard of him for over a year. They talked very often about the brother. While recalling him their narration became incoherent and fragmented, as they got upset. Little girl's breathing became uneven and difficult.

During discussions, they overtly expressed revengeful attitudes, saying that all Russians, including little babies, should be punished. Their parents were very concerned about this disposition.

At some point, children stopped attending the group sessions. As we learned, due to material poverty, the parents took the twin brothers to Medresse, an Islamic boarding school, where they were given shelter and food and taught Koran. Although, several weeks later parents realized that this school would intensify enmity of the boys towards the surrounding world and took them out.

After returning to the group, the younger twin brother was very happy whereas the elder one was stiff, and unwilling to communicate. He declared that he preferred to be in Medresse where he was taught how to pray.

Children remained in the group for one year. In the beginning, the group sessions took place 2 times a week for 1.5–2 hours. Afterwards the meetings were less frequent.

The primary aim of the group work was mainly to support the development of children and the correction of disturbances – high level of anxiety, fears, aggression, etc. Another intention was to engage the whole family into the treatment and rehabilitation process via children.

First sessions of the group process were devoted to creation of safety, offering some routine and recurrent experiences, trust-building exercises, and fairy-tales. Therapists tried to structure their day, offering very simple home tasks, like "draw the tree that is seen from your window", "produce the best day story".

The work was mainly implemented through art-therapy techniques (painting, drawing, using clay, etc.), developmental games and expressive methods. Later they were offered exercises in effective communication and conflict resolution. Special attention was given to the topics "acceptance of subjective realities", tolerance-building through stories, etc. We tried to teach them how to identify emotions and manage them. Later on, we focused on processing the enemy image.

In the beginning of the intervention, their drawings were full of blood, killings, and shootings. Children used much red color. Gradually the content of the drawings changed and centered on family, nature, heroes from the books that we were giving them to read. Regularly, we exhibited their paintings at office walls and organized exhibitions for staff and office-attendees.

As the treatment process unfolded, the children became more joyful and open, their anxiety level significantly reduced and mistrust and enmity was transformed into positive attitudes towards their immediate environment. They showed their regained confidence in many ways, but most obvious was the touch[4] – they started to allow others to cuddle them and they were spontaneously hugging others when greeting or leaving. In case of Zara, her enuresis stopped after 6 months, she gradually was able to sleep separately from parents, her self-esteem raised and became clear that she reacted adequately to jokes and teasing.

Khava

After 1.5 months from the initial meeting, Kazbeg brought his wife to the center. Khava presented mainly with somatic complaints – headaches, nausea, periodic vomiting, pain in the waist area and in the lower abdomen, difficulties in movement. She was mainly visiting a GP of the center, though she counseled with a psychiatrist and other specialists as well.

[4] Touch is the cultural taboo among Chechens; men and women are not allowed to touch each other; it is impossible to form the cycle while playing or doing the exercise as girls and boys can not hold each others hands.

Record of the Psychiatrist

Khava, 39 years old

The client complained about persistent insomnia, inner tension and increased irritation. She could not name the cause of her problems, because "there are so many reasons and it's impossible to track them". During conversation, her voice trembled and her eyes became tearful. Before recalling something that was particularly painful, she made a long pause, closed her eyes and took a deep breath. General anxiety, depressed mood and impaired attention were observable.

Client required medication, but refused to take them. "Due to the lack of food, I can't take the pills", she says. Client was willing to get medical assistance, although it was difficult to persuade her to keep appointments with a psychiatrist or attend psychotherapy sessions.

Khava was referred for consultations to a neurologist, gynecologist, and psychologist. She underwent laboratory and clinical examinations and was assessed by PTSD, depression and anxiety questionnaires. She was diagnosed with chronic PTSD, residual effects of cranium trauma, intracranial hypertension, angiothrophic neurosis and some other somatic diseases.

Khava was prescribed a course of poly-vitamins to regain strength. Afterwards she went through a medication treatment for somatic symptoms and physiotherapy with medical massage. Her careless attitude towards health was alarming; she repeatedly said, that when her brother and son are missing, when her children are so malnourished and pale she could not possibly think of her health. She was missing the appointments with the doctor and was taking medicines irregularly.

The family atmosphere was very loving. Kazbeg and Khava had mutual understanding and were very affectionate towards the kids. As for children, the elder twin brother was slightly thorny and always reprimanded his younger brother for his softness.

Kazbeg

Increasingly the trust towards the center and the team working with his children and his wife was growing; Kazbeg was visiting the center systematically, the meetings with various colleagues were becoming regular. The sequel of his trauma was becoming evident also.

Kazbeg gradually started to open up and talk about his concerns. He said that he had a constant feeling of danger. He feared that one day he would be "stopped in the street and imprisoned", suspected that he was under constant observation. He could not walk alone. 'I have to be accompanied by at least one of my kids,

in order to tell the family afterwards what has happened to me in case that I get arrested". He was afraid that Georgian security forces together with Russian FSB (Federal Service of Security) would capture and eliminate him. When, in the therapy process, rationality of his fears was discussed, he told about friends and acquaintances that have simply disappeared. Kazbeg's feeling was that one day, he too, could just disappear, vanish. Thus even taking his little daughter with him might have prevented this, or, as he said, he could at least have a witness.

Because of this on-going, permanent feeling of threat, Kazbeg was careful, he was checking the street out of the center's window, selected time of leaving the building. Often his actions seemed incoherent and reckless, he was impulsive; might leave the room on the mid sentence, was easily irritated.

On various occasions Kazbeg mentioned that he "doesn't believe in anyone or anything", "doesn't trust anyone", "entire world and surrounding reality contains danger", "world is an enemy", "we are surrounded by enemies." Sometimes he was in complete despair – "with this attitude I am not able to bring up my kids properly", "I know that it is damaging for their development to be growing up in the atmosphere of such hatred". That's when he asked us to help him in bringing them up.

Kazbeg had difficulties communicating, he was afraid of leaving his house. Officially, due to a refugee status, he was not allowed to work, although sometimes, "when luck was on his side" he managed to earn money by working as a loader at the railway station. However, because of his physical weakness he had difficulties working. In the beginning of the treatment, he seemed rather lonely, disconnected from others despite the fact that he had some close Chechen friends.

Apart from a psychotherapist and lawyer, Kazbeg was referred to the medical doctor as well. He was complaining about itching pains in the heart, general weakness, asthenia and dizziness. Doctor assumed that he was malnourished; once he was not able to finish the cardiac test – became weak, dizzy and finally he fainted.

We realized that very often the family did not have enough food and gradually, very carefully and politely, began offering them a lunch at the office. This could probably be considered as a turning point in their treatment. We started offering something to the entire family. At first, it was just a cup of hot tea, and later on, we invited them to the office kitchen to share a meal with us. We were trying to convince them that we just had lunchtime as they arrived. Half a year later, while having a meal with her, Kazbeg confessed to our medical doctor that his dream was to treat himself one day with lot of roasted beef and a half a liter of vodka.

Meetings with Kazbeg were not "formally" named as psychotherapy. These were just his "visits" to the center and conversations with me, but also with other members of our team – psychologist, lawyer, medical doctor, child therapist, social worker, nurse, and others. Topics discussed concerned problems of his community, family, politics and general philosophical issues. Sometimes he was agitated, impulsive, talked much and associated freely. From time to time, he was engaged in "Socratic dialogues" or was listening silently to the explanations

about the trauma psychology, human behavior and power of the mind. There was a time when he told me that those conversations were "as rain to the dried out soil of the desert".

On several occasions, Kazbeg repeated during the sessions that these conversations "make him weaker, softer. He looses strength". Despite these reprimands, he continued individual "meetings". "I am regaining my internal world that had vanished," told he.

Our team was giving him a frame to understand his complaints and pains, providing some structure in daily routines and guidance in reorganizing his life.

His visits to the center went on for many months, and never had he come alone. He was accompanied either by his children, by his wife, or by other Chechens, but most frequently he would come with his little daughter.

The psychotherapeutic process was directed at deepening a secure and trustful relationship. On the other hand, the work was directed at re-structuring trauma and identifying his values and principles, meanings that he was giving to the events and situations. We also worked on channeling his visible interests and skills – working on the community problems, leadership. Much time was spent in helping him to identify his problems, prioritize them and play with options to resolve them positively. This process turned out to be very fruitful.

Gradually Kazbeg's social inclusion was increasing. This involved caring for others, his fellow Chechens. He articulated to us their problems and addressed the center's lawyer, psychotherapist, social worker or doctor to help him in solving them. One thing was apparent – in all his activities, he wanted to engage either the center, or particular professionals to back him up and support him. This was related to his lack of confidence and insecurity. In order to compensate these feelings, Kazbeg established safe relationships with the center and tried to rely on us.

Slowly Kazbeg managed to channel his energy in activities such as writing petitions regarding various problems of the Chechen community in Georgia. He advocated for refugees living in Tbilisi who did not receive humanitarian assistance, kept pressing relevant organizations to increase the food ration for refugees and to provide them with at least tea and milk and to give additional aid to families with infants.

At our center Kazbeg organized several meetings with a relatively large group of refugees, who shared with us the problems of their community, like absence of medical assistance, lack of proper education for children, having a group refugee status and, most importantly, disappearances and extradition of various refugees living in Georgia.

These large group meetings, for long time, stayed very chaotic and repetitive in content. The group was all heavily emotional, irritated and frustrated. Most of the times these men, inhabitants of Tbilisi and Pankisi Gorge, talked about entrapment – "Georgian government offered us a refuge, but imprisoned us in Pankisi Gorge and use Chechens as a tool for bargaining with Russia". Sometimes we too were objects of their rage, as Georgians, representatives of the country with above-mentioned double standards of behavior. On several occasions they

recalled the Georgian-Abkhazian war[5], which is the main reason of hostility towards the Chechens in Georgia. They were mentioning that only mercenaries fought against Georgians in that conflict, and that all the hired soldiers from the Northern Caucasus were wrongly labeled as Chechens. "How can't you understand this, we forgave you Stalin!" they once said. They were recalling the 1940s genocide and deportation of Chechens by Stalin's order and that Stalin was of Georgian origin.

They were going even further back in history and talking about Imam Shamil[6] and the 40 years of war with Russia-"That's when Ichkerya[7] was devastated. In that conflict, Georgians were on the Russian side, against Shamil and freedom!" These accusations came up on a number of occasions. These were unconscious articulations of their doubts towards our team's intentions and motives and, at the same time, their hope for help. Together with the lawyer and other colleagues, we tried to facilitate meetings, summarize speeches, and conclude with small steps to the direction of improvement and justice.

Kazbeg was an obvious leader during these meetings. He was respected, was being listened to, he always managed to calm down the heat in discussions, but he could also be very strict, uncompromising and demanding. He was very grateful for our support. During one of these meetings he declared – "We considered entire Christianity as our enemy, but now, after getting to know you, we realize that we were mistaken".

Gradually, Kazbeg took up a role of an informal leader within the community. He revived the Chechen Human Rights Committee, although he did not occupy any formal position there. He became the main organizer of a hunger strike, a well-organized action that took place simultaneously in Tbilisi and Pankisi Gorge, which lasted for a month. The aim of the action was to bring to the attention of the Georgian Authorities, International Human Rights organizations and Mass-Media, the problems of Chechen refugees and to publicize the facts of disappearances and extraditions. With the center's facilitation Kazbeg organized a round table that was held at the Public Defender's office, where the voices of Chechen refugees were heard for the first time. Kazbeg opened the meeting. The presentations of Chechens were well-structured, succinct and very clear. This was the first dialogue of the refugee community with various stakeholders, a meeting where they were perceived by others as equals. After that event this dialogue has been continued with unstable success and regularity until now.

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[5] After becoming independent in 90's, Georgia started a process of transition to democratic State, characterised by the long-term political-social-economical crises, accompanied by the internal ethnic conflicts with Abkhazians and South Ossetians. After these conflicts Georgia lost its territorial integrity – two important regions, Abkhazia and Shida Kartli, became cut off from the rest of the country and approximately 272 000 persons (nearly 5% of the country population) were displaced.

[6] Imam of Dagestan who ruled for 25 years and united Dagestan and Chechnya in struggle against the Russian rule

[7] Historical name of Chechnya

Later on, Kazbeg became a respondent of various international human rights organizations. He gained fame; he strived for protection of the rights of Chechen refugees and incessantly revealed facts of different human rights violations. On the behalf of Chechen community, he participated in the pacifist action against war in Iraq. He continued being in touch with the center, however his visits became rarer. Whenever he came, he tried to express his gratitude to us. On one occasion, he donated a part of humanitarian assistance, which he had received, to the center. "You know people who might benefit from these things", he explained.

Unfortunately, Kazbeg's feeling that he was endangered continued to intensify. He was mentioning several suspicious, threatening phone calls from the side of Georgian law enforcers that he had received. His wish to leave Georgia was becoming stronger. Although he always assured us that he preferred to stay in Georgia, among friends and, most importantly, close to Chechnya and his mother, he also thought that his children should be brought up differently. "Our nation requires a new generation – well educated and civilized. Freedom is not reached only through war, but through civilized means, through bright mind" – he would add. Finally, Kazbeg and his family managed to cross the Georgian border illegally. Only after his departure, we realized that the refugee community lost its main drive, its unifying force.

Soon after he left, he called. He was in one of the refugee camps in Slovakia. He enquired whether it was possible for us to consult the young psychologists working with the refugees in Slovakia. "They don't know how to work with our people here", he added.

Kazbeg is now, after 6 years since his escape from Chechnya, a citizen of one of the European countries. He still keeps in touch with us. During one of the phone calls, his little daughter Zara asked to talk with her therapist. "I have changed, I am a big girl now," she said happily.

Multilevel Trauma

In Kazbeg's case we are dealing with several levels of trauma – with the individual trauma, inflicted to him during two wars, and entailing his physical and psychological abuse; with the secondary trauma, related to insults and abuse suffered by his wife, intimidation of his children and disappearance of his eldest son; and with the large group traumatic experience associated with defeat, collective extermination and humiliation of his ethnic group. Moreover, he is still subjected to on-going, stressful and severe social-economic living conditions mixed up with a strong feeling of intimidation and threat.

Although Kazbeg is a refugee, his life is still in danger. There is a significant difference in how refugees are treated in western countries and what they have to confront with in developing countries like Georgia. Apart from the scanty food, lack of education and proper housing, and absence of work opportunities, these people often fall victims of political manipulations. Any new event on political arena, a diplomatic meeting or a statement can easily intensify their sense of insecurity.

Periodic bombings of the Pankisi Gorge by Russian air force, and Georgian Police checkpoints with machine guns at the entrance of the Gorge, where they check the refugees' documents, make their old traumas feel more painful.

Due to the abovementioned multilevel traumatic experience, Kazbeg was diagnosed with PTSD. However, his after-trauma sequel can be fairly described within the category of complex Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (Herman, 1992; Van der Kolk, Roth, Pelcovitz, Sunday, & Spinazzola, 2005). Apart from 'classical' PTSD symptoms, he suffers from changes of **basic assumptions** (Janoff-Bulman, 1983; McCann & Pearlman, 1990), feeling despaired, hopeless and unable to trust. He presents **alterations in affect and regulation of impulses** (affect regulation, modulation of anger), **somatization** (fatigue, pains in chest, respiratory problems, and headaches), **alterations of self-perception** (crisis of I-identification) and **alterations in perception of abusers** (Enemy image formation).

The last two phenomena – Identification crisis and Enemy image – are strongly linked with the post-traumatic societal dynamics of Kazbeg's community. These are not just his, as individual's, traumatic features, but represent the large group's after-trauma processes that greatly influence the individual responses, are inseparable and interrelated.

Identification crisis and Enemy image formation portray well the individual and societal domains of complex trauma and should be taken into consideration while addressing the traumatized individuals and traumatized groups. These processes will be specifically described below.

Who Am I?

The most evident aspect related to Kazbeg's traumatic experiences is connected with his self-esteem, identity and inability to ascribe meaning to things. This was verbalized at the first our meeting, when he said "I don't know who I am any more, what do I represent". A symbolic externalization of the loss of identity was manifested in the fact that angry Kazbeg has torn his Russian passport into pieces. He no longer needed an identification document, a card verifying his name, place of birth and residence, since he has lost all of these. Therefore, Kazbeg demonstratively destroyed his ID. On the conscious level he explained his action as a protest against being a citizen of Russia, the country which is responsible for torturing his people and being its worst enemy.

His inaction, a sense of guilt (towards his family that is unprotected and vulnarable), his humiliation, helplessness and uncertainness about his present and future have deepened Kazbeg's deprivation of self perception. In Chechnyan masculine culture, a man is the leader and decision maker, and his helplessnes is perceived most dramatically. It is noteworthy that many young Chechen men, who were clients of our center, had complaints of impotency of a psychological nature. This, of course, was related to a type of torture they have been subjected to (severe beatings in genital area, kept in waist-deep water for many days in a row, cases of

male-rape), however in *all cases* clinical examinations showed that these men did not have any organic disturbances of their genital apparatus. After a course of psychotherapy some of these men overcame the problem, got married and had children. This syndrome mirrored the internal psychological state of the defeated men, their self-perception and attitude towards the oposite sex. The psychological impotency portrayed the loss of basic capacities, like the reproduction and satisfaction. This was a metaphor for the lost future and reflected a profound existential crisis among the defeated, insulted and traumatized men. Kazbeg shares this sense of dishonour and loss of self-respect that affects his core personality.

Subsequently, Kazbeg felt himself hunt down "driven into a corner", entrapped in Georgia, sticking deep in his memories of wartime, and his trauma. He was unable to change anything, to help, to persuade, to earn, to escape. A feeling of inescapability has being described as one of the most critical features of a severe trauma (Saporta & van der Kolk, 1998).Inescapability is a feeling that all the ways to escape are cut off and a victim can not do anything to eliminate a massive threat. Victim's coping ability is shattered. While facing repetitive and uncontrollable stress, humans and animals develop the phenomenon of "learned helplessness", a syndrome characterized by a behavioural deficit (Maier & Saligman, 1976). One develops:

- Deficit to learn avoiding new stressful situations
- Low motivation to learn response outcome relationship
- Low ability of exploration and learning
- Signs of chronic subjective distress

Learned helplessness affects and modifies the perception of the "Self" as competent, capable, and being in control. The "Self" perception is damaged and gradually transformed into an "I-concept" that is negative, helpless, and full of guilt.

Kazbeg's self-esteem and self-perception are damaged. "I was a strong person, but I lost every bit of myself", confessed he to me. He has difficulties making decisions, since he does not know what he is capable now of. "I can't identify what I can do" "I can't even bring up my kids", he admitted. He has no confidence toward himself and therefore does not trust others either. When he starts up something, he feels a strong necessity of help and "others", since his "I" identity is helpless and impotent. This leads us to discussion of his attachment to his daughter which is very remarkable. This relationship bears the signs of mutual traumatic bonding. The two helpless souls reciprocally support and strengthen each-other. The little girl needs to be protected, especially during the night, when she feels frightened and has to sleep with her parents, next to her "protector" father. On the other hand, Zara, the scared child who is often crying without any reason, gives Kazbeg enough strength to walk in the streets in her company. Both, Zara and Kazbeg use these traumatic rituals in order to diminish their anxiety caused by obsessive fears. This happens through a silent agreement between the two of them.

Being in a "lost" and defeated position is unbearable for Kazbeg. At one point, he tries to make an unconscious sacrifice in order to overcome his sense of

vulnerability. He wants to cut out his kidney – a part of his physical body, if it only could help him to recover his confidence that he is the head of his family, able to support them, secure their future and regain freedom, and at the same time hoping that his self-perception might be liberated from the burden of helplessness.

"I am . . . Them"

One of the Kazbeg's main defenses throughout his personality crisis is his identification with his own group – the Chechen people, the refugee community, its shared problems and the common history. He finds strength in the "We-ness". The "Ethnic Tent" (Volkan, 1997) gives him a shelter, a sense of belonging and security, and eases his search for the lost "pillar" of identity.

An individual's core I-identity, a persistent sense of sameness within the self (Erikson, 1956), also includes the large-group, the We-identity, that links a person to the others within an ethnic, national or other large group (Volkan, 1999). When I-identity is shaken, We-ness is often actualized, especially in collectivistic cultures.

Collectivistic cultures are regarded as societies where the groups' interests prevail over the individual ones. In collectivistic cultures, people share strong "We-identity" feelings. The impact of massive or repeated trauma on these societies is different from societies where individual freedom and parity among group members are highly valued and individuals are not "tightly tied" by large groups' norms and traditions. Chechen society belongs to the collectivistic culture, where special importance is given to the group interests in general and to extended family interests in particular.

The need to attach to others increases during stress or exposure to danger. Stable and close attachments help in limiting overwhelming physiological reactions of distress. The presence of "others" also helps validating the individual experience and making sense out of what has happened (Bowlby, 1969, 1973). "Ethnic tent" and the We-identity help Kazbeg in mobilizing his efforts and coping with internal anxiety and personality crisis. Kazbeg openly identifies himself with a large group, with a refugee community. He always speaks on behalf of the "we" (the group of refugees) and struggles for the common goals, realizing that these activities are directed at wellbeing of his family, too. The collective "self" gradually manifested itself in increasing Kazbeg's social liveliness and, as it later appeared, this was his successful strategy of coping with traumatic experiences.

I Versus Us

There is yet another, very important, aspect that definitely deserves attention – the interaction of the developed "I" concept with the "We"-ness. Traumatic experience often contributes to regression of a person and causes one's declination from personal values and beliefs in order to maintain the "we" identity. In case of

Kazbeg, his conscious and moral achievement, the Tibetan non-violence concept, is in conflict with the large group's traditional concept of revenge. In the attempt to portray Kazbeg's psychological features, this internal fracture and the subsequent path towards synthesis might be the most essential aspect.

Kazbeg has an identity of a follower of Chechnyan Sufi Islam. He prays, pays tribute to traditions and customs. He is a son of his nation. This is the basic, core part of his We-identity, which largely evokes during the time of his exile, while identifying with his ethnic group. However, after some time from the first traumatic experience, he has found a new meaning through the concept of non-violent resistance. This attitude is alien to his culture. Confrontation and struggle are acceptable, but a "peaceful way" is a strange option, as people who had been in battles for over the centuries have become accustomed to aggression and revenge. These have become inseparable parts of their identity.

Kazbeg put lots of efforts and energy in interiorizing and gradually introducing his non-violence belief system, a system, which is in conflict with his "We" identity. His non-violent "I" has to either "pass away", has to be denied and suppressed, or Kazbeg has to say no to his "ethnic tent" – a frame that gives him strength and confidence in these difficult times of his life. Therefore, Kazbeg is going through a deep internal conflict; he is ambivalent and faces aversive choices. His identity is loosing its coherence and energy, it becomes fragmented. This resembles the metaphor for the fracturing of the soul, self, and identity – the broken spirit (Wilson, 2004).

It is no surprise that his anxiety level is high, that he is incongruent and unconsciously sending double binding, conflicting messages to his children. This is why, despite his conscious non-violent and peaceful choice, his twin boys are full of revenge on their enemies. "They should all die", – as one of them mentioned. An evident illustration of Kazbeg's incoherent actions is his decision to take his boys to Medresse, an Islamic boarding school. There they are brought up together with other Muslim boys, which will foster their "We" identity. However, as soon as Kazbeg realizes this and notices increasing aggression in his children, he immediately takes them out, and brings them back to the rehabilitation centre – a place where his non-violent "I" feels more secure.

His ambivalence towards the therapeutic process can be explained by this internal splitting, too. Under the "tent", Kazbeg's collective identity allows him to act aggressively for the sake of his people. He mentions the "white rage", which is rising in him when he is looking at the suffering of his people. He is unstructured, impulsive, and often full of destructive ideas, but gradually he gathers around him a group of refugees. On the other hand, during the therapeutic process, his hidden values and beliefs are revealed and emphasized. Here, his mindful "I" looks for explanations and arguments, to justify and explain why the Chechnyan path should be peaceful. This is the voice of his individual "I". It is perceived as weak and vulnerable, since it lacks the protection of the "We" shield. That is the reason why Kazbeg sometimes keeps repeating that psychotherapeutic conversations are making him weaker, though he keeps attending these meetings because they emphasize his "I" and prevent him from becoming completely merged with the

"We-ness". This is why he does not discuss his non-violence theory with Chechen groups, and never mentions his elder son who was fighting in Chechnya and is missing. He tries to draw a line between his two inner worlds.

Only after a certain time, Kazbeg manages to "reconcile" these two parts of his identity. This is the beginning of his integration and inner synthesis. Kazbeg discovers the concept of human rights, which allows him to lead an uncompromising struggle, using non-violent, peaceful methods. He manages to overcome his non-authenticity. Together with maintaining his "We" identity, his individual, unique traits become more distinctively outlined.

Societal Trauma

In order to understand the basis of Kazbeg's uncompromising struggle and, as he himself calls it, "power", it is important to discuss the psychological dynamics of large "we" ethnic groups. Description of this phenomenon leads us to the concept of societal trauma. The "large group" of Chechen refugees is going through a crisis itself. The group has been severely traumatized, and subsequently thrown into an alien culture, a different religious and linguistic environment.

To begin with, it should be mentioned that this society is bearing a historic trauma. A brief overview of the late history of the Chechen people illustrates at least two deliberate attempts of destroying this nation. First in the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the Chechen people struggled for liberation from the Russian rule for almost 40 years and almost lost all its male population, and in 1944 when the entire ethnic group was accused of cooperation with the Nazis and deported to Central Asia. These traumatic memories are alive in the society and their burden exacerbates the severity of more recent events. These mental representations are mixed with the memories of the current traumatic events – a lost war, torture experiences. They add and magnify each other and outline a perception of a group's role, its mission and place.

After prolonged and/or repetitive traumatization, the whole community develops a complex constellation of shared feelings, attitudes and behaviour patterns. It forces a group into the role of a victim. "We –representation" of the victimized group correlates to a passive, unskilled, unable and unsure image. The large group of refugees experiences threatening of its identity. A role of victim is unbearable and offensive for Chechen fighting community.

The group tries to maintain the positive "We –concept". One of the basic mechanisms used for this purpose is projection. The group projects all bad, non-human, non-tolerated affects to "others" in order to "clean up" its own victimized and negative identity.

Formation of the Enemy Image helps the group of refugees in defining their collective identity and promoting a sense of "We-ness". Aggressive attitudes towards the "Enemy" give them the strength to "assemble" themselves and achieve an inner cohesion between community members. Aggression becomes a powerful weapon for keeping the group mobilized and fighting back the enemies.

Kazbeg is full of a sense of danger and mistrust, he is afraid of the entire external reality – the city, the people in the city, etc. "Entire world is an enemy," he says. Kazbeg tries to cope with this fear through non-violence, in order to compensate destructive tendencies and his longing for revenge. However, the "Enemy Image" is a phenomenon that we consider an important marker for his psychological portrait, as well as the portrait of the other Chechen refugees.

These feelings and attitudes are spread around and passed down to future generations through the processes of interpersonal and intergenerational transmission. These feelings are contagious. "Enemy Image" is easily generalized beyond the real adversary, exaggerated and transferred to immediate but different neighbours, other ethnic or religious groups, or international organizations. Sometimes, as we observe in the case of Kazbeg, the whole world represents the enemy.

The transgenerational transmission of the enemy image is well illustrated by Kazbeg's children (especially his elder son), who are developing a traumatic identity and becoming reservoirs of hate and aggression. This has a great impact on their development. The only responsibility and mission they uphold in their life is revenge:" We will grow up and pay back the Russians, Christians and other people who betrayed us."

Core Elements of the Intervention

The case of Kazbeg and his family helped our team to get insight into the individual and community problems of refugees from Chechnya living in Georgia, and create an integrated, culturally sensitive intervention approach.

Explaining core elements of the approach will outline the strategy of intervention with Kazbeg and his family and clarify the process and the goals of working with the Chechnyan community in general.

The first, basic and broadly accepted element is ***creating an atmosphere of trust***. One of the consequences of complex trauma is a loss of trust – when one cannot trust and does not feel safe and secure anymore. Kazbeg, Khava and many others have difficulties believing that others "hear" and understand them. In the beginning, they trust neither our organization, nor the team. They think that the world is full of enemies. We are required all our professional patience, openness and a non-formal attitude to shorten the distance between us in interpersonal contact, in order to gradually change this attitude and persuade the client that he/she can share the pain with us. Therapeutic intervention requires a long-term relationship, which can only be built on trust.

We realize that we are dealing with complex trauma in complex and difficult circumstances, so general treatment schemas are discarded. The length of initial meetings is not limited; sometimes they last for 2–3 hours, as in case of Kazbeg. We allow the client to ventilate his emotions, listen to him empathetically and give him our time. The most important thing is our solidarity, eagerness and delicacy to recognize the person with his/her needs, aspirations, etc. This core

element of the approach is ***non-neutrality and empathy***. Therapist's emotional availability and engagement creates the framework of healing.

A safe environment contributes to a formation of feelings of trust and safety. The interior of the center plays an important role here. The office is located in a regular apartment building, which already creates an informal atmosphere. At their first visit, after the intake interview, we show the clients the office, its different rooms, in order to "identify the territory" for them, reduce their anxiety level and explain how the center functions.

To reach inclusion of clients into the treatment process we often ***start working with children***. As we mentioned earlier, caring for the family is characteristic to the cultures in the Caucasus region. Well-being of children is given the primary importance. Improvement of children's psychological and physical condition increases trust towards the therapeutic process as well as our organization. Simultaneously, in the course of the treatment we try to engage other family members as well. Apart from caring for their individual health, this is aimed at studying the functioning of the family and selecting further intervention strategies. Therefore, the following important element is the ***emphasis on the family***.

The next important element is bearing a message – "***Be flexible and pursue the uniqueness of each client***." Kazbeg did not accept his role of a patient, neither consider himself a "victim of trauma"; nevertheless he was willing to continuously visit the center and receive indirect assistance. He wanted to be more than a client, rather a friend. My colleagues and I allowed him to have this role. We did not try to bring his visits under a somewhat strict schedule of psychotherapeutic sessions (e.g. your appointment with the therapist will be held on Tuesday at 12:00). We tried to get him "invited" inventing different reasons, like therapy of his children, appointment with a lawyer, or just a conversation. A turning point in our relationship was when Kazbeg started to accept our invitations for a meal. One usually shares a meal with a friend. This is a demonstration of hospitality and closeness. Since that moment, he actually started to believe that we accepted him as a friend and happily took up that role. As a result, he became our center's contact person and advanced in his role of a "friend-client-collaborator". He had identified and referred to us many severely traumatized Chechen refugees. He has also become an active advocate of their rights, knowing that we are backing him up.

Providing a structure is one of the central elements of intervention and entails introducing a structure into the chaos that traumatized victims suffer from.

The traumatization is very vivid in the attitude towards time. A group of Chechen refugees is attached to their Past, that is brighter than the present, which is interlaced with it filling with new emotions. At the same time, the Future is unclear, vague and full of uncertainty. For many of them the future is lost, since they do not have any hopes. Nobody is making any plans for Future, while being deprived of the Present too, containing danger and humiliation. The time line of Yesterday-Today-Tomorrow is confused and mixed up. Time is disregarded and given hardly any attention. We can judge about such attitude towards time by Kazbeg's and others untimely visits to the Center. The community is lost in time and space.

Routine tasks for children or routine appointments are necessary for "improving" a sense of time and fostering feeling of regularity, a rhythmic order. Sometimes the clients do not know what day or which month it is. Marking the "mental" calendar arranges days, and helps planning. Continuity of relationship and offering care contributes to organizing one's future and forming the feeling of safety.

The next element of our approach "***goals orientation instead of symptoms orientation***" is defined by the social-political, economical and cultural reality of the refugee community. To justify this approach we need to analyze the complex context of refugees' life.

Traumatic symptoms of traumatized refugees are aggravated by the uncertain, troubled and alert reality. In the beginning, when we heard their stories of living in Georgia full of fear and danger we thought of delusional nature of such thoughts. However, we soon learned that these fears were quite realistic. Refugees living in Georgia were suddenly disappearing. There were other numerous facts of deportation and illegal extradition of refugees to Russia. Kazbeg's feeling of constant danger was, perhaps, an overreaction, but the external reality was indeed threatening[8].

When the reality is so forbidding, the treatment and rehabilitation process goes extremely hindered and blocked. Any efforts to alleviate the trauma symptoms are futile and ineffective. Orientation on goals implies to strive for ensuring the clients maximal desirable and achievable quality of life and a maximal health potential within given circumstances. Our main goal was to facilitate the development of the optimal functionality and personal potential of Kazbeg, his family and his community. On the long run, we tried to achieve mobilization of his resources, enabling factors that would help him to cope with the contextual and personal threats.

The process of intervention often follows a route "***from periphery to the center***," with the traumatic experience as the "center" and resources – the knowledge, the experience, and the skills – as the "periphery." Strengthening the resources, we can subsequently deal more efficiently with the trauma. In some cases, similar to that of Kazbeg, it might seem that no direct work on trauma experience took place, and that we only build up the "periphery", his self-esteem and social engagement. In his treatment, our attention was mainly focused and the most time spent on strengthening his ability to concentrate on his problems, identify possible ways of solving them, and increase his skill to make decisions independently, to revitalize the interests and motivation to act and to overcome the feelings of helplessness and inescapability.

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[8] For more facts see reports issued by organizations as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, etc.; especially the most recent report by Human Rights Documentation and Information Center (2006) *Situation of Refugees from Chechnya*. retrieved October,10, 2006, from http://www.humanrights.ge/eng/files/Chechen%20Torture%20in%20Georgia%20-%20JZ%2011-04-06.pdf

Much attention was paid to his social domain, which seemed more important for him than just physical and psychological health improvement. Thus, sometimes working on client's social domain is the only opening into the therapy – it is required by the client's disposition, interests and by the community needs and evidences (e.g. deprivation, injustice, etc.).

Kazbeg's case showed that it is not effective to work on the problems of an individual or a family if we are not familiar with the general tendencies of the person's community and its psychosocial patterns. One has to ***involve community as much as possible*** and be aware of how the individual relates to the community and what feelings are reinforced by the large group's We-attitudes. Both, individual and community define and characterize each other. In case of Kazbeg, we are dealing with individual and societal consequences of trauma that are interrelated. Because of that, we combined the individual and family tailored therapy with community directed psychosocial interventions.

Dealing with the Enemy Image is a central part of our strategy developed for addressing the Chechen refugee community at individual, family and societal levels. "Enemy image" formation is a survival strategy for the community, because this process fosters inter-group attachments, prevents identity crisis by maintaining positive self-image and gives the meaning to the community members' life – that is seeking the justice and revenge! However, this survival strategy soon grows into destructive and negative attitudes and lifestyle. It drains the psychic energy from the community/group, imposes fragmentation within the group and deteriorates the functioning. This phenomenon is so dominant in Chechen refugee community that it becomes crucial to tackle it at all levels and in all formal and informal institutions, including kindergartens and schools.

For addressing the Enemy Image, it is important to operationalize the concept and "translate" it into concrete feelings, stances, attitudes, behaviors, etc. These characteristics of the Enemy Image can be called the secondary "derivative toxins" (Makhashvili & Javakhishvili, 2005).

The "secondary toxins" of the Enemy image in traumatized communities and individuals are:

- Mistrust and alienation
- Feelings of betrayal and hatred
- Intolerance and prejudices
- Rigid stereotypic interpretations of events, world order, etc.
- Low self-esteem and self-confidence (sometimes hyper-compensated in exaggerated, false self-esteem)
- Aggression, violence outbursts
- Destructive behaviors – towards oneself, others, environment
- Not taking responsibilities

All these "derivatives", sometimes hidden and silently poisoning the society for a long period, should be considered and targeted during psychosocial intervention. We deal with a closed cycle – on one hand, these "toxins" are rooted in the

Enemy Image and on the other, they themselves reinforce and strengthen the Enemy Image phenomenon. After the identification of "derivative toxins", we had the targets for intervention on individual, family and community level. Each of them are addressed systematically, repeatedly and on the long-term run by different therapeutic means, exercises and techniques; the promotion of creativeness is much used as an "antidote" to rigidity and intolerance.

To summarize the intervention strategy it should be emphasized that using metaphors, as therapeutic tool, appeared to be very fruitful during all levels of the treatment process. The Chechen culture is very open towards metaphoric thinking. An explanation and argument is better understood when it is proposed in a condensed way, through fables, parables, sayings. The metaphoric arguments work with individuals, as well as groups.

They are especially successful with children who are main targets of intervention when dealing with the Enemy Image (as victims of its transgenerational transmission). Metaphors help children to comprehend basic values (friendship, love, and faithfulness), to generalize personal experiences and to develop forgiveness and tolerance. They offer models, which can be internalized during the process of personality development and promote the children's ability to conceptualize an empathetic understanding, a caring attitude towards others, and some strong ethical principles (Sarjveladze, Javakhishvili, Makhashvili, Beberashvili, & Sarjveladze, 2001).

To close with, we would like to tell a story, a parable, which helped Kazbeg, as he told us several months after having heard it, in overcoming his identity crisis.

The River Story

One day a rapid river reached the sands of the desert. For some time the river continued to flow carelessly, but gradually, because of heat, it started loosing its water and slowed down its pace. After some time the river could not flow any more, it started to dry out and became lifeless. The desert sands tried to soak it up and the river struggled for its survival. Then, a hot desert wind blew through and told the river: "Follow me, I will take you on my wings, lead you through the desert and then return you back to the earth". The river responded: "I can not come with you; I don't know what will await me there, high in the sky. I won't be myself any more; I do not want to loose myself". The wind repeated: "You should better follow me, you have only two more days to live, what do you have to loose?" The river preferred to stay in the desert, although the next day it realized that it is loosing all its strength and was in anguish. The desert wind came back again and this time took the river to the sky. The river became a cloud and a companion of the wind. After having crossed the desert, it returned to the earth as rain. Then it transformed into a small stream that was slowly getting stronger. The river thanked the desert wind: "I am still myself, I survived and also I discovered so many interesting things during my journey.

The story of Kazbeg resembles the story of this river and trust in wind. He allowed us to join him on this interesting journey and enriched us with new impressions and ideas. While we share them, we hope to follow the path that leads out of the desert.

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