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Collective Action and Political Mobilisation of Georgian IDPs in Response to Changing Housing Policies

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Abstract This article studies collective action and political mobilisation of Georgian internally displaced persons (IDPs). It focuses on IDPs' responses to a controversial housing policy implemented as of 2010 by the Georgian government, which mandated resettlement of IDPs from collective centres to private accommodations. Building on relative deprivation theories, the article pinpoints and analyses four types of responses shown by IDPs in the aftermath of resettlement. Finally, it provides an assessment of the obstacles faced by IDPs' in their collective and political action, and recommendations for policy developments. This exploratory study is based on qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews conducted in Tbilisi among IDPs from Abkhazia.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Theoretical Underpinnings. – 3 Methodological Note. – 4 IDP Responses to Forced Resettlement. – 4.1 Passive Acceptance. – 4.2 Individual Actions Undertaken on Behalf of the Group. – 4.3 Conventional Forms of Political Mobilisation. – 5 Unconventional Forms of Contention. – 6 Discussion of the Results. – 7 Conclusions.

Keywords Internally displaced persons. Collective action. Housing. Political mobilisation. Human rights. Georgia.

1 Introduction

While much continues to be written on frozen conflicts and the functioning of *de facto* Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Broers et al. 2015; Comai 2018), a less significant amount of academic literature is dedicated to the people who were displaced following the outbreak of separatist conflicts in these territories. With three major waves of displacement in 1991-93,

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1998 and 2008,[1] around 300,000 Georgians threatened by ethnic cleansing fled Abkhazia and South Ossetia – former autonomous republics within the Georgian SSR.

In the existing literature, which is overwhelmingly made up of reports drafted by international (Rebosio et al. 2016; UNHCR 2009, 2015), non-governmental humanitarian agencies (Amnesty International 2011; IDMC 2012) and think tanks (Brookings 2011; CRRC 2010), IDPs are more often addressed as recipients of humanitarian aid programmes, than as socio-political actors. As specific research on political sociology of Georgian IDPs (Conciliation Resources 2009; Kharashvili 2001; Rokke 2012; WPRC 2012) is limited, this article wants to provide insights on how IDPs engage in collective and political action aimed at expressing their interests and defending their rights, with a focus on IDPs' responses to housing policy change.

According to governmental sources, around 273,411 IDPs are officially registered in Georgia:[2] IDPs make up 6% of the country's population. Due to the absence of a proper peace treaty and the persistence of frozen conflicts, IDPs are stuck with the impossibility of returning to their home regions. At the same time, as it is often the case in situations of conflict-induced displacement, Georgian IDPs are instrumentalized by the state as a geopolitical tool in order to claim sovereignty on the separatist territories (Kabachnik et al. 2015; Tarkhan-Mouravi, Sumbadze 2006). This explains why Georgia still keeps a strong stake on the safe return of IDPs, as one of its main arguments in the process of peace and control over the contested territories (Lundgren 2014). The (geo)political tension between integration in the local communities and return, for a long time presented by the Georgian authorities as mutually exclusive solutions, crystallises a widespread socio-economic precariousness among IDPs.

There are no significant differences in poverty levels of IDPs and non-IDPs; however, differences persist in unemployment and income security for IDPs. Besides the (meagre) state allowances[3] to which they are entitled

1 In 1991-93, the armed clashes between the Georgian government and the two separatist regions (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) generated the displacement of around 260,000 people. In 1998, renewed violence re-displaced thousands of ethnic Georgians which (after the ceasefire declared in 1994) had informally returned to their homes in Abkhazia's Southernmost district (Gali/Gal). The 2008 war with the Russian Federation over South Ossetia led to a third wave of displacement for 28,000 people.

2 This figure appears in the Georgian version of the official website of the Ministry for Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees of Georgia. However, other estimates are much lower – for example, the figure on the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC)'s website is of approximately 208,000 displaced as of 31 December 2016. Such variation calls into question "the validity of these estimates and points to the difficulties in proper accounting and registration of IDPs" (Kabachnik et al. 2015, 185).

3 The allowance varies according to the housing conditions of IDPs. Since 2013, IDPs receive 45 GEL (around 15€) per month.

under the Georgian Law on Internally Displaced Persons (since 1996), IDPs show a higher dependency on pensions and remittances than the non-IDP population (Rebosio et al. 2016).

On a geographical level, IDPs concentrate in the capital city, Tbilisi, and in the other major cities of Georgia: Zugdidi (the closest to the Abkhazian territory), Kutaisi, and Gori (close to the administrative boundary line with South Ossetia). IDPs' living arrangements in their places of 'temporary' residence may vary: collective centres, private accommodations and settlements[4] constitute the three main types of housing. Collective centres are probably the most peculiar form of dwelling, accommodating around 45% of the total IDP population (Salukvadze et al. 2013). These are non-residential state-owned buildings, such as former hospitals, schools, kindergartens or sanatoria, where IDPs found 'temporary' shelter in the aftermath of displacement. Such accommodations were provided by the state or squatted illegally, and are still inhabited by those IDPs who lack the financial means to establish themselves independently. Collective centres were never designed for permanent housing, and the majority of them do not meet the minimum living standards (lack of living space, overcrowding, poor sanitary conditions, malfunctioning of sewage and water supply systems, need for major structural repairs of the buildings). Moreover, collective centres often form compact settlements isolated from the local environment (Gogishvili 2015).

Since displacement was initially considered a temporary phenomenon, it was addressed as such by the government. Until 2003, IDPs experienced restrictions on voting rights in their place of 'temporary' residence[5] (Mooney, Jarrah 2005): this was another measure aimed at hampering local integration of IDPs, so that they would not lose impetus for return (Kabachnik et al. 2015). Moreover, only in 2007, the Ministry for Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees (MRA), the main governmental agency responsible for IDPs, published a State Strategy on IDPs-persecuted (hereinafter State Strategy) aimed at improving IDPs' living conditions.

With the State Strategy, the Georgian government addressed for the very first time the issue of local integration of IDPs, thus marking a turn-

4 So-called 'settlements' (დასახლებები *dasaxlebebi* in Georgian) were constructed for IDPs from South Ossetia who were displaced following the August 2008 conflict. In October 2008, the Municipal Development Fund of the Government of Georgia had already constructed thirty-five new dwelling places, not far from the conflict line, were each IDP family was attributed a standard cottage house. Differently from what happened in the 1990s, the Georgian state's response to the new wave of IDPs was quick and focused on durable housing solutions, generating dissatisfaction among IDPs from the previous waves of displacement. Cf. Dunn (2012).

5 IDPs could not vote in local elections, nor could they vote in electing majoritarian MPs to the Parliament (although they could vote through the proportional system).

ing point in its approach.[6] Based on the neoliberal assumption that IDPs living in collective centres would have their conditions improved by living in private housing, governmental efforts were aimed at

> reducing the number of collective centres, gradually closing them, vacating them for rehabilitation, and supporting alternative resettlement for IDPs. (Government of Georgia 2007)

In some cases, the transfer of ownership of collective centres to its occupants (in exchange of a symbolic sum) was foreseen.

Despite the overtly stated goal, the process of resettlement of IDPs from collective centres in Tbilisi, which started in August 2010, was highly criticised: it was eventually suspended due to violations of fundamental rights of IDPs, which were forcibly evicted from their accommodations (Amnesty International 2011), and resumed in January and August 2011. Besides failing to respect IDPs' human rights, in the initial implementation of the State Strategy (under the Action Plan 2009-12) the Georgian government did not foresee alternative housing solutions in Tbilisi. Resettled IDPs were offered accommodations in the regions – often in remote locations with lesser economic opportunities, limited or insufficient access to infrastructure and resources (*Public Defender of Georgia*, 21 January 2011) – or, in the best cases, in the outskirts of the capital city. For those IDPs who were resettled from Tbilisi to other regions, vulnerability linked to housing conditions decreased, but socio-economic vulnerability increased considerably (Amnesty International 2011; Kurshitashvili 2012). Resettled IDPs had to quit their job or endure commuting costs, and rebuild their lives and social networks in a new community. On top of that, resettlement did not challenge the pattern of urban segregation that characterised collective centres, as IDPs were offered accommodation in marginalized areas, where there is no mixing with local population (Gogishvili 2015, 15). This happened in the IDP districts built by 2014 in Batumi, Zugdidi, Potskho Etseri and Poti, but is also happening in the capital city, as IDPs are being resettled in the so-called Olympic village near Tbilisi sea (*Georgia Today*, 7 March 2017).

Taking the implementation of the State Strategy as a starting point, this article looks at IDPs' responses to eviction and forced resettlement. In the next sections, I present the theoretical underpinnings of the research, discussing relative deprivation as a possible factor triggering collective action of IDPs in the aftermath of forced resettlement. Then, based on qualitative empirical data, I provide an account of different forms of IDPs' responses to forced resettlement and take stock of their efficacy. I conclude by as-

6 The Action Plan for the concrete implementation of the State Strategy was delayed due to the Georgian-Russian war in August 2008, put in place (unevenly) starting in 2009, and subject to revisions until May 2010 (Kabachnik et al. 2015).

sessing the obstacles faced by IDPs' in their collective and political action, and listing out some policy recommendations.

2 Theoretical Underpinnings

According to Wright et al. (1990, 995),

> a group member engages in collective action anytime that he or she is acting as a representative of the group and the action is directed at improving the condition of the entire group.

Collective action and group-based mobilisation are particularly relevant for individuals of lesser social status (Taylor et al. 2001) or with lower political visibility – as in the case of Georgian IDPs. Collective mobilisation can take a more or less structured form. In this article, I will take into account not only

> sustained and organised public collective action aimed at making claims involving political authorities. (Pinard 2011, 4)

but also other forms of "occasional and barely organised" contentious collective action (Pinard 2011, 5) engaged in challenging normative arrangements.

Scholars of the relative deprivation theory have shown that injustice, as well as a sense of deprivation and inequality, are an important variable to predict collective action (Carrillo et al. 2011; Tarrow 1994). Relative deprivation is described as a subjective state of unjust disadvantage or a feeling of discontent, which arises through a series of comparisons of one's group situation (De la Sablonnière, Tougaze 2008) that influence distress. Affolter and Findlay's investigation (2002) on IDPs from Nagorno-Karabakh living in camps in Azerbaijan has shown that, despite the fact that these people do not consider themselves as a collective unit, they are anyway likely to come together to tackle their future, due to the pain and frustration generated by the shared experience of protracted displacement. Indeed, a common experience to many Georgian IDPs is the loss of 'home' and the precarious living conditions: in the context of protracted displacement, they already perceived themselves as deprived relative to locals (social collective relative deprivation) as well as compared to their situation before displacement (temporal collective relative deprivation). Comparisons with the future, meaning with the expected future situation of the group, can also entail feelings of temporal collective relative deprivation. An abrupt social change such as forced resettlement, which turned upside down the life of many IDPs, can be a strong triggering factor for

grievances and feelings of deprivation. On top of that, the promises made by the MRA on how resettlement would improve IDPs' living conditions generated false hopes and expectations, which were not met by the actual implementation of the State Strategy.

In collective centres, large numbers of IDPs had been living together for a long time. Social exclusion and the hardship of living conditions have imposed on IDPs the necessity of putting in place self-organisation strategies, which have strengthened social networks among residents of the same collective centre (Kabachnik et al. 2010, 317). Against this background, I hypothesise that, when confronted to eviction, IDPs developed group-based feelings of relative deprivation, meaning the perception that one's entire group is being deprived (Runciman 1966, 34). In turn, this might have fostered collective action in response to forced resettlement (Van Zomeren et al. 2008).

Finally, in order to spur collective action, grievances generated by relative deprivation need to become politicised. When the group experiencing deprivation has a concrete target for blame attribution or can identify a particular culprit, participation in protests will be higher because the costs of mobilisation decrease, as the boundaries of the action to undertake are defined (Commercio 2009, 511). This specific blame attribution is possible in the case of Georgian IDPs, since the origins of deprivation are identified with the new housing policy implemented by the MRA. As one of the interviewed IDPs framed it:

> resettlement was a nightmare. It was worse than when we left Sukhumi[7] because at that time we had hope that we would come back. This time it was not the enemy's fault, but the fault of our own government. (Roza, 71, F, pensioner, civil society activist, forcibly resettled)

3 Methodological Note

With these assumptions, we can now dig into the analysis of IDPs' responses to forced resettlement. The analysis is based on empirical material gathered during a fieldwork conducted in Tbilisi, between February and April 2016. I will build on qualitative content analysis of data issued from two sets of in-depth semi-structured interviews.

The core of the interviews consists of a case study of seven IDPs (2 men and 5 women, aged 34-71) from Abkhazia, having experienced reset-

7 The usage of this name (as well as of the names of other geographic locations in Abkhazia) is disputed by the conflicting sides. In Georgian, the capital city of Abkhazia is known as Sokhumi, while the Abkhaz/Russian use is Sukhum. In this article, the English form Sukhumi is used out of commodity.

tlement under the State Strategy. They had been living since 1992 in a collective centre in Old Tbilisi (Ortachala): the former Institute for Health Resort Studies, hosting 23 IDP families from Abkhazia. On 18th August 2011, after being given an eight-day prior notification, all families were forcibly evicted and resettled to a Soviet-era format kindergarten, located in the Vazisubani micro-district (North-Eastern outskirts of Tbilisi). Other families from a different collective centre were also resettled in the same building, for a total number of 37 families now living in the new accommodation. Flats made available in the former kindergarten are now private ownership of IDPs. This case of eviction was reported by the Georgian media and addressed in a statement by the Public Defender (Ekho Kavkaza Эхо Кавказа, 12 August 2011), as residents were registered in the building officially and it was known that private investors had an interest for it.

Complementary insights were gained through an additional set of eight interviews conducted among IDPs from Abkhazia living in collective centres (but who did not experience resettlement), IDPs living in private accommodations, IDP political leaders and representatives of NGOs (2 men and 6 women, aged 26-70). Interviews were conducted in Russian and English, recorded and transcribed. They are quoted in the article in inverted commas, with indications about the respondent's name, age, gender, professional status and living arrangement (when relevant). I complemented and triangulated the empirical data with secondary sources such as reports and news articles, in order to embed the single case-study in a wider context and back the validity of the findings.

The conducted research constitutes an exploratory study. As the selected sample of interviews is not representative, the conclusions of this article are not meant to be generalised to the wider Georgian displaced population. They pinpoint some trends in IDPs' collective and political action in response to changing housing policies, in order to provide insights for further investigation on the topic.

4 IDP Responses to Forced Resettlement

I identified four types of response strategies put in place by IDPs in Tbilisi in the aftermath of resettlement. Despite the expectation that group-based feelings of relative deprivation would trigger collective action, most of the IDPs interviewed in the framework of the case study showed an overall passive acceptance of resettlement. Nevertheless, some of the respondents put in place different kinds of responses, ranging from individual actions aimed at improving the group's conditions, to conventional forms of protest and political mobilisation. Other IDPs were also involved in unconventional and violent episodes of contention (both individual and collective).

4.1 Passive Acceptance

Even though the way in which interviewed IDPs from the case study were evicted from the collective centre constituted a blatant violation of their rights, most of them did not actively resist their forced resettlement:

> We did not have any other solution, so we moved. I did not think that it would be possible to protest, there was no chance. That was the order. (Ia, 70, F, pensioner, forcibly resettled)

Another respondent, who, in the new accommodation, was given a single room for herself and her two elderly parents recalled:

> The distribution of flats in the new accommodation was not fair, people were not satisfied. But I did not even try to change my room, my parents were old already. (Lia, 50, F, unemployed, forcibly resettled)

Moreover, interviewed IDPs showed scepticism about the possibility of resisting to forced resettlement and about the efficacy of IDP collective action in general.

> If IDPs can come together to claim their rights? No. We cannot do anything to improve our situation. (Shorena, 57, F, unemployed, forcibly resettled)

> Protesting does not work: we protested when electricity was cut down, but it did not help. (Temo, 34, M, unemployed, forcibly resettled)

One of our respondents explained that she tried to contest resettlement by asking for an alternative accommodation or for financial compensation. However, she did not succeed:

> I did not want to move, nobody wanted, but we did not have any other solution. I asked to be resettled somewhere closer to the centre but it was not possible. I was offered 10,000 GEL to buy a flat but did not take them. With that you cannot afford anything [in Tbilisi]. (Eteri, 65, F, unemployed, forcibly resettled)

4.2 Individual Actions Undertaken on Behalf of the Group

Evidence to counter this general passiveness nevertheless emerged from the interviews. Even though she was unable to prevent the eviction from the collective centre, one of the respondents (Roza, 71, F, pensioner, civil

society activist, forcibly resettled), who had been involved in civil society, conflict-resolution and humanitarian activities since her displacement from Abkhazia, showed a proactive attitude in the aftermath of resettlement. On her own initiative, she set up a residents' committee, gathered signatures for petitions and wrote statements on behalf of the group to negotiate with the MRA and gradually obtain improvements of the living conditions in the new settlement.

> We need to fight. When we moved here I organised a residents' committee, I was chosen as a representative. I ran from office to office to ask to improve our conditions. One day some people from Saakashvili's National Party [the ruling party at the time of the events recounted] came here, when we did not have gas, and asked me "What is your attitude towards the government?" I answered "A very bad one. But it can change if you do this and that…" So then they fixed the gas system, they even set up a yard where the children could play. They set up the landline because we did not have one. […] After many statements, many petitions something is progressing. We will see. (Roza, 71, F, pensioner, civil society activist, forcibly resettled)

The interviewees confirmed that, as the State Strategy was being implemented, representatives of collective centres started to actively communicate with and relate to the MRA, primarily to try to negotiate better conditions in resettlement. For IDPs in Vazisubani, this kind of initiatives was facilitated by the fact that all families were resettled together, and that the collective nature of their dwelling was retained.

A similar example of this behaviour was observed in a collective centre located in P. Saakadze Street (Tbilisi); in 2009, its residents (over 100 IDPs from Abkhazia) resisted their resettlement to a different region and opted for privatisation of the building – even though it was a collapsing facility meant to be demolished. IDPs were hoping that, in the future, the MRA would offer them an alternative housing solution in Tbilisi. However, the ministerial authorities now consider that IDPs are 'satisfied', even though they are stuck in a life-threatening building. Ira (46, F, unemployed, collective centre), a resident of the collective centre, continues to struggle to change the status quo and claim better living conditions for her fellow residents. As she stated,

> For five years I have been speaking to everyone in the Ministry [MRA]. They all know me.

Initiatives such as petitions, statements, meetings with government officials can indeed be classified as forms of collective action, where an individual is acting on behalf of the group in order to improve the group's

situation; however, they constitute merely reactive coping strategies that allowed IDPs to adapt to their new situation once their forced resettlement had already taken place.

4.3 Conventional Forms of Political Mobilisation

Another part of the Georgian displaced community was involved in proper forms of protest aimed at challenging resettlement: demonstrations and sit-ins were held in Tbilisi. Already in the summer of 2010, a structured campaign was initiated by IDPs, leading to the creation of a 'Civil Movement of IDPs' in September 2010. Representatives of certain opposition parties, including the Conservative Party and the Popular Party (Kavkaz-Uzel Кавказский Узел, 2 February 2011), also supported this coalition of NGOs and activists. One of the tasks of the movement was to visit collective centres in Tbilisi in order to inform IDPs about the State Strategy and their rights. The Civil Movement was still active in January 2011, when a new wave of evictions started: rallies and demonstrations were organised in front of the MRA and the Parliament of Georgia, though gathering no more than 200-300 IDPs (Markedonov 2011; Vekua 2011). The Civil Movement was actually seen as 'very marginal' by knowledgeable observers belonging to the IDP community (Julia Kharashvili, e-mail to the Author).

As a demonstration of the low visibility of IDP mobilisation, only one of the respondents was aware that other IDPs were staging protests in 2010-11 – being herself personally involved. Political leader and specialist Lela Guledani, also an IDP woman from Abkhazia, recalls that

> in 2011 there were many episodes of rights violations. […] I was there when this happened, trying to defend the rights of IDPs. But it was difficult, because the government was not open to dialogue, the Ministry [MRA]'s doors were closed, no chief of department ever came to speak to us, we could not get any answers; there was no communication at all.

IDPs interviewed in Vazisubani might have been unaware of the ongoing protests due to a general lack of access to information among IDPs living in collective centres (Gogishvili 2015). As reported by different media (Эхо Кавказа *Ekho Kavkaza*, 12 August 2011; *Civil.ge*, 12 August 2011), the eviction of the former Institute for Health Resort Studies on 18 August 2011 occurred almost simultaneously with the eviction of Hotel Abkhazia (15 August), a collective centre inhabited since 1991 by IDPs from South Ossetia. Being offered a new accommodation in the city of Rustavi, in a building still under construction, the residents of Hotel Abkhazia led a campaign to stop the process of eviction, which was also joined by representatives of opposition parties and human rights defenders from

Georgia's Young Lawyers Association. However, when asked whether they heard about demonstrations or actions initiated by other IDPs against resettlement, none of the respondents in Vazisubani mentioned this campaign.

5 Unconventional Forms of Contention

In challenging their forced resettlement, IDPs in Tbilisi were also involved in more unconventional episodes of contention. These were spontaneous and isolated one from another. Due to the despair and probably also to the difficulties faced by IDPs in making their voice heard and their rights respected, some of the protests against resettlement came out in quite violent forms. In August 2010, four IDPs sewed their mouths shut in protest (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 25 August 2010). They were part of a group of 10 IDPs from Abkhazia taking part in a hunger strike to protest forced resettlement from Tbilisi to Potskho Etseri village. This was an extreme demonstration of how IDPs were "epitomizing their silenced subjectivity at the hands of the state" (Kabachnik et al. 2014, 8).

This episode was followed by an even more violent and emblematic act of protest. As interviewee Lela Guledani recalls, "one woman committed suicide in front of the MRA". Nana Pipia, an IDP woman from Abkhazia, set herself on fire outside the ministerial building in Tbilisi in October 2010 (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 29 October 2010). Previously, she had set camp with several dozen IDPs from a collective centre, demanding that minister Subeliani should either step down or re-house them in Tbilisi. According to reports, the woman had complained to a senior ministry official that the housing in Western Georgia, which was offered to them, did not offer employment opportunities or provisions for growing food, and nothing in the vicinity but grass. The official answered: "Then you can live on grass".

6 Discussion of the Results

In light of the findings, it is possible to argue that, even though forced resettlement triggered feelings of relative deprivation among IDPs, these did not translate into widespread or sustained collective action. The level of participation of IDPs in collective and political action aimed at challenging forced resettlement (and the State Strategy) was very low. Most IDPs did not mobilise at all, and even those who took action did not manage to prevent forced evictions from taking place. Moreover, the findings suggest that Georgian IDPs are bound to resort to unconventional, extreme and violent forms of collective action and protest in order to voice their

grievances, under the impossibility of claiming their rights through conventional political structures. In the case of the State Strategy and the resettlement policy, the governmental institution (MRA) which was supposed to represent IDPs acted in violation of their rights and interests, while the support shown to IDP demonstrations by the representatives of certain political parties did not bring concrete outcomes. Overall, mobilisation of (part of) the IDP community only had very indirect effects on the State Strategy: under the Action Plan 2012-14 (Public Defender of Georgia 2013, 9), housing solutions in Tbilisi were finally made available for resettled IDPs. However, the general approach of the State Strategy, based on the privatisation principle, remained unchanged.

Reasons for the failure of IDPs' collective action can be found in the way in which the Georgian government voluntarily failed to address IDP needs for integration in the local communities – thus undermining IDPs' capacities for socio-political participation. Since the beginning of the 1990s, political participation of IDPs has been rather limited. This was due to previous restrictions on electoral rights, but also because the so-called 'governments in exile' (the Abkhazian government in exile and the Provisional Administrative Entity of South Ossetia) did not fulfil a truly representative role for the displaced population, nor were they oriented to solving their problems (cf. Conciliation Resources 2009; WPRC 2012). Moreover, IDPs are still widely seen by politicians as a source of 'easy-to-get' electoral votes, and pay special attention and visits to IDPs (especially to those living in collective centres and compact settlements) during electoral campaigns (Salukvadze et al. 2013, 58) – as respondents also confirmed.

Notwithstanding its 'integration-oriented' approach, the State Strategy posed a serious threat to all the efforts that had been previously made (primarily by civil society organisations) on the level of political participation of IDPs. As reported by the Women's Political Resource Center,

> the violation of human rights [during forced evictions] highlights how the lack of consultation and participation of IDPs clearly results in adverse consequences for this population, with negative implications for further participation in public life. (WPRC 2012, 51)

An additional explanation for the failure of IDPs' collective action is rooted in the very nature of the IDP status and social identity. The so-called 'IDP identity' is merely an institutionalised, bureaucratical construction (Koch 2015; Zetter 1991) resulting from the perspective of external actors (the government, humanitarian agencies, the non-IDP population), as well as of individuals forming the labelled group. The latter may display different responses to this categorisation, either drawing political solidarity and status from it, or rejecting the label entirely (Zetter 1991). Because the constructed and heterogeneous nature of the displaced community

(Kabachnik 2010), the identity factor does not work as a glue that ties IDPs together. The interviews suggested that 'being an IDP' is seen as a stigma (see Link, Phelan 2011), rather than as a positive social identity that encourages self-identification (Tajfel, Turner 1986):

> The word 'internally displaced' sounds so offensive, so humiliating to me. I always just say that I am from Sukhumi. My relatives, when they were students, they were ashamed to say to their course mates, to their friends, that they are IDPs, that they live in a collective centre… […] The living conditions, the social status affected the younger generations too, because it was so humiliating. (Roza, 71, F, pensioner, civil society activist, forcibly resettled)

Another respondent shared the same view:

> IDPs are not a socially or politically mobilised group because they are ashamed of their status, they do not want to talk about it, they hide it. (Nika, 26, M, employed, private accommodation)

The IDP status is therefore associated to negative characteristics, such as the harshness of living standards and the low socioeconomic conditions, and to other factors that might fuel stereotypes, such as the adverse attitude of the local community:

> As soon as I say that I am an IDP nobody wants to hire me anymore. (Nana, 45, F, unemployed, collective centre)

According to respondent Alla Gamakharia, a woman IDP from Abkhazia who founded the NGO Fund "Sukhumi" (based in Kutaisi), this stigma also deters IDPs – in particular women – from participating in civic and political life, even at the local level and in areas where IDPs reside compactly.

Most important, the State Strategy remains rooted in a 'bureaucratic' conception of integration (Dunn 2012) limited to one single aspect: housing. This approach overlooks other priorities such as employment, access to resources and livelihood opportunities – which on the long-term are likely to influence the socioeconomic integration and political participation of IDPs. But the political payoffs deriving from the provision of housing for the victims of displacement very often push governments to leave aside the more complicated (and less visible) process of integration (Gilbert 2004). One of the resettled IDPs in Vazisubani summarised:

> the real issue [for her family] is not the housing conditions, but the fact that we are unemployed. (Shorena, 57, F, unemployed, forcibly resettled)

The intersection of specific characteristics – such as (un)employment, housing conditions, age or gender – can indeed determine a more or less disadvantaged situation for IDPs, which in turn influences their capacity for political participation. As respondent Lela Guledani explained:

> IDPs who do not have their own properties live as if one day they will have to move again and leave everything. 23 years passed and people remained in collective centres and have no information about what will happen to them in the future. They are afraid to be resettled to another place. They still feel displaced and that is why they do not have motivation [for political action].

It is interesting to spend a few last words on this respondent's attempt to create a political party called IDP Party (დევნილთა პარტია Devnilt'a partia) in 2015. One of the party's objectives was to raise the state budget for IDP issues and to make IDPs a priority for the government. Besides, the party's highest aim was to work on peaceful solutions for the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and to achieve sustainable return of IDPs. However, due to lack of resources and limited visibility in the media, the party did not manage to mobilise IDPs, especially outside of Tbilisi (Nikuradze 2016). While Guledani hoped that the party would be able to participate in the Parliamentary elections in October 2016 through cooperation with the ruling (Georgian Dream) party, her efforts failed – proving that political action and participation of IDPs are an open challenge deserving further research.

7 Conclusions

This article has provided insights on how Georgian IDPs in Tbilisi responded to a controversial housing policy implemented by the government as of 2010. Based on qualitative data issued from in-depth interviews, the article has identified four response strategies, analysed their forms and efficacy, and pinpointed some trends in IDPs' collective and political mobilisation. The present conclusions summarise the article's main findings and provide policy with possible recommendations for further action on IDP issues.

On the one hand, this article has shown that human rights violations perpetrated upon IDPs by the ministerial authorities during forced evictions, together with the discrepancy between expectations and outcomes of resettlement, fuelled the potential of relative deprivation among the displaced community. The actions of individual IDPs, as well as the demonstrations initiated against forced resettlement in 2010-11, prove that a high level of relative deprivation can trigger mobilisation in favourable circumstances (for example when a significant shift takes place on the policy

level). On the other hand, mobilisation among the displaced community remains limited and inefficient. IDPs have a very low level of influence on the decision-making processes, and struggle to express their claims through conventional political structures; this is why their mobilisation sometimes translates into extreme or violent acts of protest. Besides being the result of structural obstacles, limited collective and political action among IDPs can also be explained by the bureaucratically constructed nature of their social identity: as the IDP status is perceived as a social stigma, it provides scarce motivation for individual self-identification with the community, while hindering the development of collective solidarity.

In order not to fuel grievances and to break the circle of passive dependence on top-down decisions, the Georgian government should engage in genuine consultation with IDPs on issues that matter to them. With regards to the violations of IDPs' fundamental rights, the Government should ensure accountability and guarantee that IDPs can exercise their right to compensation and effective remedy. For future policy developments, permanent mechanisms of consultation and cooperation with civil society organisations and informal groupings of IDPs should be put in place to ensure that their voices are taken into account at all stages of the decision-making process.

On a final note, the article has argued that the capacity for collective action and political participation among IDPs still remains heavily dependent from the policy measures implemented by the Georgian government, and more particularly from the concept of integration that these policies convey (cf. Kabachnik et al. 2015). In 2016, 39% of IDPs were recorded as having already received durable housing (USAID 2017), even though these numbers are difficult to verify. However, the Government should ensure that a holistic approach with regards to IDPs integration is put in place, which takes into account not only housing, but also less straightforward issues such as employment, access to resources and infrastructure, long-term psychological and social assistance. Without such a comprehensive policy, IDPs' integration in the local communities will hardly be achieved, as well as their full-fledged involvement in the civic and political life of the country. Still, the reshuffling of the Georgian government and ministries announced in June 2018 by the new Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze does not send encouraging signals. The MRA is expected to be dismantled and have its functions divided, with the Infrastructure Ministry taking over the settlement of the IDPs, the Interior Ministry migration issues, and Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Affairs take care of social policies (*OC Media*, 26 June 2018). Even though it is still too soon to make conclusions, the Government of Georgia should take the necessary measures to avoid that the disbandment of the specific agency responsible for IDPs leads to further 'siloization' of the integration policies addressed to this population or to serious budget cuts for IDP issues.

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