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## Post-war Existence in Georgia: After August 2008

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### **Abstract:**

*'Our greatest glory is not in ever falling, but in rising every time we fall' – these words of Confucius can easily be applied to the post-traumatic experience of a post-Soviet country such as Georgia. Wars represent collective trauma for our country. The 2008 August War was a real shock for Georgia, which has not fully recovered from the civil war. This chapter aims to represent collective trauma as one of the important elements of culture and to analyse responses within Georgian society to collective trauma. Collective trauma is a stressful experience for society and causes important internal changes. This includes the re-thinking of identity, which is often followed by an identity crisis. On the basis of analysis of cultural responses to trauma, such as narratives, monuments and memorials, produced since the War, this chapter attempts to assess the importance of making fear and trauma visible for overcoming its negative impacts.*

**Keywords:** *Collective Trauma, post-traumatic, stress, recovery, monument, hero.*

### **1. Introduction**

While the world was watching the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, a five day war took place in Tskhinvali, Georgia. During the five days, the Georgian side lost more than 300 people and the war left thousands displaced and homeless. This chapter argues that the 2008 August War, as it has been named, may be perceived as cultural or collective trauma.<sup>1</sup> The chapter analyses the responses which have been created in order to address this trauma and the consequences for understanding and moving past trauma. Consequently, this chapter has two aims. The first is to better understand 'collective' trauma in order to analyse ways in which to overcome the fear and problems associated with trauma. The second is to highlight the role of the visible reminders of trauma and the influence on invisible experiences and the fear it can cause.

As my observation shows despite the importance of overcoming trauma, research into conflicts in Georgia to date, has focused mainly on the events, and results of these events, rather than on the collective trauma experienced by the Georgian people. To address this, I will use a variety of trauma theorists to inform primary research conducted in Georgia. In particular, I focus on different cultural responses that attempt to reconstruct the Georgian identity in the face of trauma. Finally, I will suggest several implications for addressing the fear and loss of people, territory and identity.

### **2. Memory, Collective Trauma and Society**

There has been significant research attention on trauma and the individual.<sup>2</sup> The term 'post-traumatic stress disorder' was first coined by Mardi Horowitz in 1978 when working with Vietnam War veterans. Horowitz concluded that despite differences between traumatic events, the results and effects on individuals were similar. Addressing post traumatic stress disorder is often attributed to communication.<sup>3</sup> That is, talking about a traumatic event helps an individual see his/her involvement. It also helps in the re-creation of memories and placing one's own identity in the context of collective responses. Individuals are then reconnected to the traumatic event and this time the memory of actions is seen from the result, or 'consequence' position.

Memory is the medium between past and present and collective memory is an attempt by individuals, as well as an attempt by societies, to define their origins by interpreting history, reflecting upon shared experience and memorialising important events; thus, this paper shifts analysis of trauma from the individual to the collective.<sup>4</sup> Collective memory represents a very important part of culture which needs to be studied in the context of responses to trauma and this is because 'collective memory' creates a frame for interpreting the past which influences perceptions of the present and planning for the future. In the last decade, studies of collective memory became especially, important and popular; this is caused by the assumption that collective memory is the basis for the formation of national identity and remembering the past helps the society understand who they are and what their values should be.<sup>5</sup>

Collective trauma is part of collective memory and it creates disorientation and confusion when it comes to national memories and values. It is a psychological effect shared by groups or members of society.<sup>6</sup> In this context, events or processes are, or become, sacred for society, with a fixed interpretation of their meaning. That is, the process of making something sacred means that the event and its invisible consequences are associated with elements that are "set apart" from ordinary society. Their status has extra-significance.<sup>7</sup>

As a rule, a traumatic event is not only sudden and causes shock but also has immense meaning for the integrity of a particular society, which requires a response from the individual and the society. Victims have a feeling that ordinary, habitual practices do not work anymore, which in turn creates even more depression as every habitual action and experience is questioned. In contrast, the most important effect of collective trauma is a break down in the psychological structure of an individual. As a psychological disease, trauma appeared in textbooks only in 1980's and was considered to be caused by wars, natural disasters and catastrophes. Individuals might overcome this condition through rehabilitation and continue their life under new circumstances or he/she might refuse to create new patterns, psychological structures and completely ignore what is happening. Of course, the second result has dangerous consequences for both the individual and for society. Collective trauma that results from an event that affects the whole society (such as a war) needs responses at both the individual and the collective level to fully address the implications of fear and trauma.

While a traumatic event can be easily seen, collective trauma is an invisible phenomenon within society. The responses of society to the invisible trauma come later. The deep psychological effect of collective trauma changes the inner structure of society, a new system of values is created. On the collective level, trauma can be made visible in narratives, commemorations and material artworks.<sup>8</sup> This helps to ensure the life changing experience is not forgotten. It is an action which includes the whole of society attempting to stay linked to the negative event and recognising its significance in order to construct new patterns of everyday life.

In this sense, collective responses can include narratives to which people respond, giving them a collective place in history/life. This is the reason post-war narratives and art, which make trauma visible, have special meaning. They help individuals in finding their place in trauma and in regaining lost identity. Narratives, art, and commemorations can promote creation of new identities as well.<sup>9</sup> Any sample of material culture created by trauma victims and dedicated to a traumatic event, might be discussed as the response of individual to the trauma. The meaning of the response increases when it is made by a whole society. Study of the Georgian books written about the 2008 August War, monuments erected after the event, and the artificial village created for the victims of the event provide a good basis for understanding the response of the whole society.

### 3. Criteria for Defining Collective Trauma

How do we decide whether an event can be discussed as *collective* trauma? According to La Capra, there are 4 criteria that must be satisfied to classify an event as traumatic:<sup>10</sup>

- 1) A traumatic event happens suddenly and ends quickly;
- 2) A traumatic event has impact on many people and it is clear to everyone (it does not need specific knowledge);
- 3) A traumatic event is accompanied by radical, profound and fundamental changes. They occur in every social circle and often are expressed as disorientation and destruction of old values.
- 4) A traumatic event is shocking: it is unimaginable, sudden and unbelievable.

According to these criteria, the 2008 August War can be considered as a collective trauma for Georgian society.

First of all, the 2008 August War happened very suddenly. The Georgian government, as well as people were not preparing for war.<sup>11</sup> Second, the collective understanding of 'everyone' understood that the war started when Russian tanks entered Georgian territory on August 8. The war was occurring around us and it was not something remote. Third, the most obvious change brought on by the 2008 August War was the creation of refugees. People lost their homes and were left with feelings of fear; with no feeling of security. Other cities of Georgia started to doubt the effectiveness of government. I have witnessed that feelings of fear and insecurity and deep depression became the leading forces in Georgian society. With these feelings came the creation of the iconic enemy. Georgian society changed its values. Russian language was despised and those who spoke fluent Russian were suspicious. It was not encouraged to read Russian authors. Lastly, the 2008 August War was unbelievable, because it was sudden and lasted for only 5 days. People had no time to realise that war had started. Many people chose to ignore the war and its results. They had problems in believing that the war was not a local conflict.

### 4. Narratives as Responses

After the 2008 August War Georgian society tried to recover from the ordeal and as a result the first narratives were created. If narratives are a sign of recovery, then the Georgian process of recovery moved quickly, as the first novel on the topic of war was created within two years. Others soon followed. Narratives are important in the study of collective trauma because they help individuals and groups create context for remembering, analysing and overcoming traumatic experience. Richard O'Kearney posits that traumatic narratives have specific features, including:

- 1) Emotionally fragile features;
- 2) Fragmented recall of events (disorder of structure);
- 3) Mixed time context (trauma causes fragmentation of memories, so it becomes impossible to keep clear structure);
- 4) Show who bears the responsibility (who is guilty in the things that happened); and
- 5) Self-perception of the narrator.<sup>12</sup>

Below, I analyse two narratives to assess whether they can be seen as traumatic narratives and also how these narratives make visible the values that Georgian society is reconstructing as part of its recovery process. I argue these narratives are responses to collective trauma because society responded to, and engaged with them to make visible personal and public responses to trauma. The first is the novel *Calculation* by Tamta Melashvili and the second is a commemoration book organised by the Georgian Press Association, entitled *Hero*.

*Calculation* is a novel by the young Georgian writer, Tamta Melashvili. It was published in 2010 and by 2011 it received the highest Georgian prize for the best book of the year. *Calculation* was soon published in German. It tells the story of two thirteen year old girls,

who live in a conflict zone. Comments made by the main character express confusion, sorrow and fear: 'Is this war? They are standing there, we are here, planes are flying... Is that war? When are they going to bomb us?'<sup>13</sup> The entire novel is dedicated to the process of building a new identity and destroying the old one. The dyad of "Us" and "Them" is explored in the conflict where Melashvili underlines that 'we' is different from 'them' and 'they' are necessarily bad because 'we' are good. The book plays on this fear and tension as characters await bombing and death at every minute. *Calculation* does not mention the 2008 August War concretely, but the book is generally dedicated to the war and the life of the people in the conflict zone. Furthermore, the opposing side of the conflict in the novel needs to be guessed, but it is identifiable. When the soldiers speak, they speak in Russian. But rather than dwell on the enemy, the author pays specific attention to the life of ordinary people in the war zone. The trauma is reinforced as *Calculation* tells the story of corpses left unburied just because they are the 'enemy'; the 'other'. It is a place where newborn children die of hunger and where women fight just because their men are already dead.

Melashvili's *Calculation* may be considered as a narrative response to 'collective trauma'. First, it is an emotionally fragile story that is organised as a self-perceiving narrative, a diary. The tone of the novel is very delicate and peaceful. This is not an example of aggressive narratives which attempt to apply blame. It focuses more on the tragedy of the Georgian people told from the Georgian perspective. To be more precise *Calculation* tells the story of the traumatic event seen by one individual, the writer.

A second collective narrative that has emerged is *Hero*. *Hero* was a project organised by the Georgian Press Association. It consists of over 300 stories written by the victims' families and has multiple storylines that address the 2008 August War from the Georgian gaze. It describes the traumatic event and helps in overcoming fearful painful experiences. It received numerous prizes.<sup>14</sup>

This book is the clearest example of how the traumatised ensure that the casualties had some special mission; a sacred role in defending a 'holy cause', a sacred reason for death. Project 'Hero' represents the epitome of trauma symbolization. Even the name *Hero* tells you about the assessment of the victims' death. By entitling it *Hero*, Georgians fully underlined the importance of the 2008 August War to their national identity.

As a narrative, *Hero* meets the criteria of traumatic narrative:<sup>15</sup>

- 1) Each story is written by the members of victims' families. Each account gives a self-perceived detailed story of the events of August 2008. It also fragments the story, as each is told from the numerous authors' perspectives;
- 2) *Hero* is dedicated to a target group, to the victims of the war, making blame and responsibility clear. The enemy is identified; and
- 3) In those stories trauma is linked not only to the people who died in war, but also to their families. Thus, time shifts between past and present and trauma is generalized to the whole society.

The sacralisation of the event and deaths is also seen in this work, because the traumatic event is portrayed as mysterious and 'set apart' from life.<sup>16</sup> People attempt to underline the transcendent and ethereal nature of the event and state that the death of their relatives was inevitable:

- 'Since his death every night I see him in my dreams... I am not happy, but I am definitely proud to be the wife of hero and to have his children'.
- 'I had bad dreams in that week. And that day when he deceased, my cross was broken'.
- 'Last time he held his father asking him to take care of the family. He knew he was going to die'.
- 'I am not going to dress in black. I am waiting for my son'.
- 'I am sitting by the window and waiting for my husband. The boys told me he was lost but I know he will come home'.<sup>17</sup>

The last two quotes show not only the supernatural side of the war, but also the refusal to accept death. Neglecting trauma can be considered as a main sign of post-traumatic stress disorder as it is hard for victims to accept the loss and to adapt to the new conditions.

*Hero* attempts to overcome this resistance, making the enemy, villains, and revealing how brave Georgian soldiers were in comparison to Russians soldiers. The biggest similarity between *Calculation* and *Hero* is that both attempt to diminish the opposite side and show the inhumane face of the 'other' – the enemy. Unlike the novel *Calculation*, in *Hero*, the enemy has a clear collective name, 'Russians', and they are blamed for every misfortune. *Hero* underlines deeds of Georgian victims and contrasts them to the actions of the enemy others. The role of the enemy is to do everything bad and this becomes the main background for showing how good 'our' group is. The enemy is violent, cowardly and stupid. In contrast, our heroes are kind, brave and clever. The enemy is seen as violent in these quotes:

- 'She thought destiny would be content to take her husband, but then, Russians killed her son'.
- 'In the buffer zone Russian soldiers told her: your son will never need a uniform again and they laughed...'
- 'The life of a 21-year old boy was taken by the Russian bomb'.

In these ways, this book is dedicated to the sacralisation of the deaths and the cause of the war. The sacred mission given to the Georgian soldiers is to fight for freedom, for their homeland, for the security of their families and to overcome fear. This sacred mission resurrects past memories of Georgian wars. For example, this sacred mission revitalised the slogan from the 1992-1993 civil war, 'We Will Return' (to the lost territories). This causes constant remembering of trauma, which might be beneficial in overcoming the effects of a traumatic situation. In this way, present heroes are linked to past heroes and also the loss of territories during the civil war.

On the one hand, war brought loss and pain, but at the same time it created new social circles, heroes and families of heroes. This creation of social circles strengthens the importance of national identity. *Hero* is laden with metaphors which give the reader impressions that Georgians have a special historical mission and heroic deeds are in their blood.<sup>18</sup> Victims' families believe that the

death of their family members was necessary in order to save society. This is the sacred mission which links the present to past memories of sacrifices for freedom.

*Hero* is an important source in the study of collective trauma, because it was widely accepted and welcomed by Georgian society and government.<sup>19</sup> Thus, *Hero* became the dominant narrative. Dominant narratives impact society as they are shared experiences and bring forward social unity. *Hero* became the dominant version of what happened in August 2008 from the Georgian perspective.

In addition to narratives, there are also other examples of material culture making visible the trauma of the 2008 August War. This is seen in art pieces, which commemorate and symbolize collective trauma. Such art pieces have special importance (they are something sacred, or 'set apart'), because they are seen by both locals and foreigners. Monuments and memorials enshrine art pieces in national identity.

### 5. Monuments and Memorials as a Response

Specially designed pieces of art can make visible the memory of events and commemorate them not only for one moment but for future decades as well. The function of memorials is especially noteworthy as the term itself highlights that they are designed for remembering something.<sup>20</sup>

Memorials have a tendency to become the source of identity for societies. Individuals put themselves in specific contexts. Memorials may be erected by the state or by the individual and can be in a neutral place or in a place which is directly associated with the traumatic event. They have special importance as their visibility is persuasive and informative. The visual attributes of a memorial helps us see the meaning of traumatic events for societies.

Memorials do not merely function as reminders of a particular traumatic event, but also represent the foundation for future generations. The mission of memorials is to give basic knowledge to future generations and ensure specific, collective lived memories.<sup>21</sup> More than a hundred memorials were created after the war in different places around Georgia. Each of them commemorates the war and acts of bravery undertaken by Georgian soldiers. There are privately financed and erected memorials, as well as memorials funded by the state.

The Georgian state strongly supported the creation of the 'Monument of Heroes' which was erected in the Square of Heroes, in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. Locating the monument in the Square of Heroes was a symbolic and a purposeful choice as the Square was created after the civil war of 1992-1993 and commemorates the traumatic experience of the 1990's. One of the main demands from the government was that the height of the monument should be the tallest structure on the Square. This would underline the importance of the event as well as the attitude of Georgian society towards war.

Analysis of the way the monument came to be constructed, also reveals how the monument is believed to make national identity, and the trauma inflicted, visible. The artist selected to create the Monument of Heroes was Spanish designer Alberto Domingo Kabo. Georgian forums actively discussed the question of having a foreign architect for a national project dedicated to heroes. For many Georgians, this type of tragedy could only be commemorated adequately by a Georgian. Nationality was the core element as the trauma was used to strengthen the national identity of society. From this perspective, Kabo was a foreigner who could not understand Georgian loss or tragedy. Trauma was so dear to Georgia at that moment, that a non-Georgian architect would not be able to show the full extent of the tragedy appropriately. The response of the state was immediate.

The Georgian press started to advertise the background, as well as education, of the Spanish architect. He was portrayed as the best professional available and only he could fulfil such a difficult task. Several interviews were recorded and published. His Ph.D. and Master's degrees were especially highlighted by Georgian journalists. It seemed that supporters of the project tried to convince the opposition by giving detailed information about the advantages of selecting Kabo. The press and state attempted to emphasise his professionalism and competence stating that none of the Georgian architects would be able to work so effectively and efficiently. In addition, the project was extremely important and it would be important to rely on a renowned professional. Discussions on public forums continued with the newspaper articles eager to find out the position of the architect himself. Kabo, himself, mentioned that the Georgian project was very important for him and that he fully understood its importance for Georgian society.

Moreover, in an interview published in the newspaper 'Georgia Today', Kabo talked about the relationship of the Georgian and Spanish communities. He underlined our friendship which had its roots in history and proudly confirmed the legend that Spanish Iberians and Georgians (who were called Iberians in the Middle Ages) were relatives. In this way, Kabo identified himself as the relative of the Georgians.<sup>22</sup> In the end, Kabo was allowed to create the monument. However, another wave of protest arose after the completion of the monument.

This time the anger of the public was caused by the memorial inscriptions placed on monument. The monument itself represented a candle rising up from the ground to the sky. From the base to the top were inscribed the names of heroes. This was the decision made by Kabo and agreed to by the State. The reason for the names was the commemoration of casualties, as well as recording how many people fought for the freedom of the country. The problem occurred when the inscriptions were actually made. The names of the heroes occupied only half of the monument. The other half was left blank. The Georgian population started a massive attack Kabo saying that the government and Kabo did this on purpose and that they wanted to indicate that the freedom and independence of Georgia may need more victims. Thus, space was left for future generations.

Opening of memorial on Georgia's Independence Day, reflected the importance of the sacrifice. The first speaker was the Georgia president. The implications of this monument and its high profile unveiling were four fold:

- 1) It was dedicated to every traumatic event for Georgians and the monument linked past and present, through the victims of every war;
- 2) It strengthened 'group' identity. With a memorial that clearly defined who 'Our Group' is and who the 'enemy' is;

- 3) It educates future generations, ensuring information about the 2008 August War will be interpreted in favour of the Georgian side; and
- 4) It makes visible the trauma, loss, fear and pain. It is said, that the process of recovery is intensified with the help of visualization.

Another memorial erected for trauma commemoration is located in the mass cemetery created after the 2008 August War, called 'Brother Cemetery'. It is a very interesting phenomenon because the cemetery in general is associated with the loss of people. The memorial is in the shape of a church and is named The Memorial of Hundred Thousand Saints. It is clear that the name of the memorial is related to the war trauma and the soldiers who became victims of the war. It also sacralises the memorial and the traumatic event.

The mass cemetery was the cemetery for every victim of the 2008 August War, mainly, soldiers, and has become the *place* for commemorating trauma. Brother Cemetery is visited not only by relatives of the buried, but also relatives of those that were never found. Families think of this place as the site for paying tribute to their lost and deceased relatives. Such a perception of a particular place can be related to the desire to overcome trauma.<sup>23</sup> People feel a particular solidarity when their misfortune is shared by others, or when they see another person struggling with the same misfortune. Brother Cemetery became the place for gatherings and socialisation. It gained symbolical meaning; as it became the place for paying respect to the war event and to the heroes who sacrificed their lives for the freedom of their society.

### 6. Living Memorial as a Response

The 2008 August War resulted in the loss of people (those victims who died in battle) and the loss of territory. The first type of loss has been widely considered throughout this chapter in its commemoration by different kinds of material culture: including narratives and monuments. But the second type of loss, loss of territory, is very specific to the displaced people. In such cases there is a population who is traumatised by the war itself as well as the permanent loss of their homes and land. Refugees are closely linked to trauma. These are the people who became the commemorated visible victims of collective trauma and who needed recovery the most. Coping with trauma for refugees is especially hard because they experience fear, a lack of security, changes in values and changes in day-to-day life due to the impossibility of 'going home'. All of this change and loss happened to these refugees in one single week. As a result, the government decided that the refugees were to be settled in a single village which was specifically created for them.

This village became known as Village Tserovani. Geographically it is close to the old homes of the refugees - Tserovani is located by the border of Georgia and south Osetia. The government believed that this would somehow neutralize the feeling of being far from home. All the houses are the same; the similarity of the homes was designed to not distinguish anyone. Equal conditions were created for every family. According to the state position, every victim was damaged equally, so they could not distinguish anyone.<sup>24</sup>

Inhabitants of Tserovani are differentiated by numbers. Each house has the number of a row and an individual number. It is true that you will not find any type of memorial or special monuments here. Instead, every person including very young children can tell you the story of war. Older people remember it, but young ones hear it from relatives and grow up with the constructed memory of this war.

For collective Georgian society, Tserovani is the village of refugees. People there mainly talk about the war, about the loss of home, relatives and maybe the most important, loss of status in society. Their collective identity has become so closely linked to war that there is a risk of forming a group within a group. Their shared identity is based on a shared memory of war, fear, terror and horror. Their everyday life resembles group therapy where people share their painful experiences with each other and try to overcome it together by trying to live everyday life.

On the other hand, settling refugees together can be interpreted as putting psychological pressure on Georgian society and on those people who live there. This pressure for Georgian society stems, in part, from the location of the village. Firstly, Tserovani is situated near to the homes of the refugees, but at the same time, Tserovani is located very close to the main highway. As a result, every passer-by must see the results of the war. In this sense, Tserovani can be considered as a 'Living Memorial' for remembering the 2008 August War. The village is a practical solution to homelessness, but as a memorial, Tserovani might also initiate fear of war and fear of loss every time people use the highway. It serves as the main source of information for tourists as well. Most of the foreign visitors find out about the 2008 August War as a result of both the Monument of Heroes and the village of Tserovani.

The psychological pressure on those people who live there comes in the relationship between commemorating the trauma of the war and loss, and being able to move on. Some of the victims might recover faster than others and living in a stressful environment anchored to war and loss creates serious obstacles for speedy rehabilitation. The constant remembering of war in everyday situations can lead to a closed circle of grief and worsening of the post-traumatic stress experienced by individuals. As a result, refugees start to form a subculture in general society. They become different from other members of society with an identity forged through traumatic experiences. By living separately, refugees become less socialised and society often refuses to accept them as ordinary individuals. The juxtaposition of the refugee, created by war, is that they in turn become 'the other'; 'foreigners' within society. As a consequence, they need to exert immense effort to be successful and not to be consistently associated with trauma.

What is more alarming is that the young generation is involved in the process as well. They are reminded of fear, danger, war and the enemy on a daily basis. This triggers an increase in the level of aggression towards the 'other'. Their main aim is to return to the lost territory, to return home, at any cost. This means accompanying the sacred mission of keeping Georgia free, is the desire to right past wrongs. These are the wrongs that are memorialised in the village. Inhabitants do not exclude the possibility of another war for that and prepare for fighting to recover the loss. For example, children as young as 4-years old have been heard saying:

'I often play war games in the garden. I have a tank and military airplane. When I will grow up, I will buy a real gun'.<sup>25</sup>

While many children may play war games, the difference here is that these 'games' are linked to real events that are honoured through commemorations and sacralised. Finishing the sacred mission (to return home through force) becomes the honourable option to address the trauma, to overcome the negative effects seen throughout the village. This is re-enforced by the forms of post-traumatic stress, where many of the refugees believe that they will return home shortly and fully ignore the fact of war. This fact of ignoring the reality of war and displacement is a key sign of post-traumatic stress. Some of the inhabitants of Tserovani fail to re-socialize with the new conditions and they stay increasingly attached to their past life. While help may be available, many refugees are unwilling to accept this help. Some of them try to stay faithful to the trauma and refuse to overcome it, remaining the living memorial that the visible village has created.

In sum, Tserovani is a constituted place for refugees. That is why it can be described as a living memorial. People who live there were the witnesses of the 2008 August War. They keep the memory of the past and share it with every interested person. Life in Tserovani develops and continues but new generations are brought up as the living memory of war. Memories are kept and transferred from one generation to another. In this sense, the label for the village living memorial, contains two opposing forces. 'Living' should mean growing and changing, but as a memorial, the village is frozen in a particular moment in time. Its identity, its connection to memory and its place in national identity is intricately connected to the past traumatic event. This connection inhibits the ability to move past trauma, to develop new patterns of life or new identities within Georgian society. This includes the children living and growing within the memorial.

## 7. Conclusion

I have argued that the August 2008 War was a collective traumatic event. I have revealed some of the criteria which help us understand the nature of collective trauma. I have also analysed the responses of Georgian society to traumatic experience which helps understand the ways in which Georgia is both moving past the trauma and still living within it.

Looking at the criteria, we can say, that recognition of the 2008 August War as collective trauma is not only correct but also necessary. It is hard to recover from post-traumatic stress, but it is possible if people and societies' are able to identify the main signs of trauma and ways of moving past it.

Georgian society is making visible its trauma regarding lost people, its victims and heroes. The loss of people was commemorated by the creation of narratives, memorials and monuments about the war. The result of the territorial loss was the creation of refugee village situated close to the main highway. This kind of visibility however, enshrines, rather than moves past the loss and trauma. Trauma creates new system of values that will forge the Georgian future. Addressing and making visible, but not enshrining, that trauma will enable Georgian society to construct new values and patterns of behaviour that allow it to visibly move past trauma.

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