

TRACING EMERGING MASTER NARRATIVE OF MODERN GEORGIANS: RECONSTRUCTION THROUGH INDIVIDUAL LIFE STORIES¹

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Abstract.

The paper presents the qualitative inquiry of individual life story narratives of ordinary Georgian citizens aiming to reconstruct generalized emerging master narrative, and illustrate through two case studies. First, generalized life story based on the life story interviews of adult Georgians was presented, and analyzed in theoretical framework of master narrative as well as the models of redemption, culture preservation, and generativity. Further, two groups and two different lines of narration were identified, for people who came to age in 80s (or earlier), and those who did this in 90s. Next, two illustrative cases were presented, analyzed and contrasted according thematic clustering (agency vs. communion), structure (redemption vs. contamination), and mode (generativity). Data show that historical, social, and political events of late soviet and post-soviet era strongly influenced the individual lives of research participants. Majority of those who came to age in 80s (or earlier) mark dissolution of Soviet Union as one of the major turning points in their lives. They follow more contamination sequence in narration, as illustrated in presented case, whilst those who came to age after the Soviet Union collapsed, tell more redemptive stories, as another case picture. Besides, people from younger generation report more agentic or mixture of agentic and communal stories, whilst stories of older generation are full of communion motifs. Also, as in illustrative cases, the mode of generativity is more explicitly articulated in the stories constructed by younger generation. However, this do not frame older generations as being focused only on interpersonal relationships and establishing/being in strong emotional connections, and non-generative at all.

Keywords: Master Narrative, Individual life stories, Identity.

1. Introduction

researchers of narrative identity (McLean and Syed, in prep.; Hammack, 2010) have become increasingly engaged in explorations of personal identities as psychosocial constructions (McAdams, 1993, 2009) situated in cultural context and being the product of person-culture complex relationship (Gregg, 2007). Personal identity is thought to be inseparable from the dominated cultural narratives or master narratives, which, in turn, can be reproduced by means of reconstruction of individual life stories (McAdams, 2006b). Hence, study of individual life stories is the way to shed light on master narratives.

The notion of one's life story as psychosocial construction implies that one who crafts one's life story is always placed in particular social-political, cultural and historical context, which interacts and influences the process of narrative engagement (Hammack, 2008). Moreover, culture virtually shapes one's personal life story by offering for one's disposal idealized and valuable script(s) of generalized life course that is widely accepted within the culture. This general idealized life models

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implicitly existing in the society in given time, are known as master narratives (Thorne & McLean, 2003).

The concept of master narrative (Thorne & McLean, 2003) is seen as consistent with the concept of “dominant discourse” employed by social scientists (cf. Hammack, 2008), life script (Berntsen & Rubin, 2004), dominated cultural script (McAdams, 2013), and life course (Runyan, 1984). Master narrative, in contrast to personal life story, doesn’t belong to any particular person and represents culturally shaped generalized story (McLean & Syed, in prep) that prevails in given culture, and reflects the idealized view of “good”, acceptable life course within it. Master narrative provides the themes, contents and images for the members of a culture for construction of their own life stories. Hence, as Hammack (2008) states, the interrelation of the two is tightly linked and extremely determined by the cultural context. This leads to the thoughts that master narratives are (a) culturally situated constructs, and (b) they vary across cultures in some aspects whilst remaining more stable in some others.

Master narrative represents a series of events that take place in a specific order and reflects prototypical life course within a certain culture. It consists of slots and requirements about what can fill the slots. The latter are culturally important transitional events that are expected to occur within a circumscribed age span in the life course of individual members of the culture (Rubin & Bernsten, 2003; Berntsen & Rubin, 2004). As McLean and Syed (in prep.) theorize, master narrative can be described through relatively stable characteristics. A narrative can be qualified as master narrative if it is ubiquitous, utilitarian, compulsory and monolithic, and not explicitly visible. These features thus define the master narrative and are theorized to be invariant cross-culturally.

Studies also show that there are some cross-cultural variations in the amount and type of the events, their preferred order and time of appearing in one’s life (Berntsen & Rubin, 2002, 2004). For example, Rubin and colleagues (2009) reported that Danes listed 35 events, whilst American sample named only 24, and the number of major life events for Turkish sample was 27. Further, Turkish participants (Erdogan, et. al., 2008) included army service in the list, whilst Americans and Danes did not. There are also cultural differences in the structure of master narrative. For instance, McAdams (1993, 2013) analyzes American identity and argues that Americans construct their individual life stories in accord to master narrative of redemption, i.e. bad things always are followed by good things, meaning almost all negatives can be redeemed. In contrast, Palestinian master narrative (Hammack, 2010) is saturated by the themes of loss/dispossession, existential insecurity, and resistance. It should be emphasized that very little research has been done on cross-cultural variations of master narratives. In general, studies on master narrative barely is gone outside the American culture (for exceptions see Gregg, 2007; Hammack, 2010).

2. Research Objectives

Georgia is the country with centuries’ long history of struggle for survival as the nation possessing unique features embodied in historical national identity, which is inseparable from historical Georgian master narrative of being strong in faith, sticking with mother-tongue and motherland tightly, and fighting against vast variety of conquistadors. This historical master narrative is still alive and continues to influence at least some part of the nation. In addition, due to all rapid social-political and economic changes and transitional periods occurred during last 25 years, Georgians still are in search of identity and struggle for survival as a nation. The ongoing debate whether Georgia belongs to European culture is one of the vivid illustrations of this very process. Further, current political circumstances (relationships with Russia, EU, USA, etc.), and being partly occupied by Russian troops (partly due to armed conflict, 2008, resulting in thousands of IDPs and traumatized people), created the threat for national identity, which fuels the process of identity search and presumably lessens the deviations of individual life stories from cultural or master narrative of the given group (Hammack, 2006; see also Gregg, 2007).

Current Georgian reality and little research on cross-cultural variation of master narratives leads to the thought that master narrative reflecting cultural values/priorities, which are distributed in personal life stories, is one of the most interesting and important topics for investigation in the field of identity studies, and at the same time the mean for helping understand and in some extent prompt the process of identity search.

The current study is set in social constructivist framework and takes purely interpretative approach. It was planned as exploratory endeavor aiming directly explore the life story narratives of participants, as they negotiate with larger cultural narrative. The paper aims to trace emerging modern Georgian master narrative, as it is depicted and negotiated in individual life stories of research participants, and suggests preliminary interpretations and possible sources of described routs.

3. Method

3.1. Justification of Methodology Choice

The study was planned as interpretative activity employing qualitative approach to data gathering and analyzing. Thus, given the social constructivist framework and the nature of research topic, research methodology reflects the interpretative paradigm of inquiry.

Scholars across the disciplines have rediscovered the narrative nature of human beings (Bruner, 1991). One of the disciplines that has focused on narrative inquiry is personality psychology, which is built on interpretative research and narrative models, which serves as the framework for this study. As psychosocial constructions, life stories are based on empirical facts, but they also go beyond facts. Consequently, they lie somewhere in between (McAdams, 2006). Since life story is personal subjective construction and the person is the one who knows best what to put in the story, the most typical, valuable and appropriate way to obtain information concerning a person's life story is structured interviews or open-ended written questionnaire. It is thus reasonable to be consistent and make methodology and methods choice in favor of interpretative scope.

3.2. Participants

100 participants (age 23-76; average age=32, SD=15, 70 women and 30 men) were recruited in base of simple probability sampling combined with available sampling in urban and rural areas of Georgia. Of them 71.6% were single, 24.7% were married and 3.7% widowed. Half of the group (50.6%) had higher education (BA and above), 45.7% were with uncompleted higher education and 3.7% had technical/special secondary education. Nearly one third (27.2%) of the group were senior/greduate students, 16% were employed in private and 24.7% in state sector, 4.9% were self-employed, 1.2% were housewives and 22.2% were unemployed. Besides, 1.2% were retired, 1.2% had seasonal jobs and 1.4 % were recorded as "other". As for place of residence, half of the participants (50%) were urban residents and other half inhabited in rural areas (buffer zones and IDPs' settlements).

Exclusion Criteria. Due to the purpose of this piece of study, after preliminary reading, almost 1/3 of recorded interviews were excluded from further close readings and thematic analysis. The only criteria for exclusion was the age of participants: All participants (all students and some others) below the age 30 were excluded and only interviews from participants who came to age in 90s or earlier were analyzed.

3.3. Field Work and Data Obtaining Method

Informed Consent. Individuals participated in the study only after reading and signing written informed consent. Research assistants answered all questions regarding research procedures,

withdrawal from the study, data ownership, anonymity and confidentiality, publishing, etc. The written form was piloted and tested in advance.

Life story interview, McAdams' (1993) protocol was administered. This is a semi-structured interview with open-ended written questions that identifies the life chapters, key episodes (high, low and turning points, positive and negative childhood experiences, vivid adult memory, and mystical/religious experience), challenges (major/life challenge; challenges associated with health, loss, failure, regret), main characters, future plots, an account of one's fundamental religious, ethical and political values and the ways they formed, and identifying of central theme.

After close reading, explaining and signing informed consent form, each participant received standardized general introductory oral prompt, as follow:

This is an interview about the story of your life. As a social scientist, I am interested in hearing your story, including parts of the past as you remember them and the future as you imagine it. The story is selective; it does not include everything that has ever happened to you. Instead, I will ask you to focus on a few key things in your life – a few key scenes, characters, and ideas. There are no right or wrong answers to my questions. Instead, your task is simply to tell me about some of the most important things that have happened in your life and how you imagine your life developing in the future. I will guide you through the interview so that we finish it all in about two hours or less.

Please know that my purpose in doing this interview is not to figure out what is wrong with you or to do some kind of deep clinical analysis! Nor should you think of this interview as a “therapy session” of some kind. The interview is for research purposes only, and its main goal is simply to hear your story. As social scientists, my colleagues and I collect people's life stories in order to understand the different ways in which people in our society and in others live their lives and the different ways in which they understand who they are. Everything you say is voluntary, anonymous, and confidential.

Next, more specific prompts followed regarding life chapters, key points of the life, challenges, values and future plans. All original English instructions, prompts and questions were translated into Georgian and pretested. The group of four graduate students were trained and experienced to work with participants using this protocol.

Place and Duration. The field work in Georgia was conducted at the convenience of the participants at their homes. Each session took in average 2-2.5 hours, including introduction, gathering demographic data, interview itself, and debriefing; however, some of them lasted only 25 minutes, whilst others ended up with up to three hours. The variations in the length of the interviews resulted from the general verbal skills of the participants, and ability (and will) to self-reflection and verbalizing one's own experiences in narrative mode.

Field work was conducted in two phases: (1) intensive field trips to rural areas that took two weeks, 12 full time business days. 50 people were interviewed in their living space; (2) 50 Participants living in urban areas were seen by research team members in the places of participants' convenient, mainly at homes. Several additional interviews were recorded with selected participants later on.

All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed.

4. Results and Interpretations

All recorded and transcribed interviews went under several close readings and thematic investigation. Obtained narratives undergone two-fold interpretation and analysis process: (a) common pattern of narrating the life events situated in existing Soviet and post-Soviet Georgian reality was traced, and generalized story and view of life span was reconstructed based on individual narratives; (b) selected cases were closely scrutinized, summarized and interpreted as illustrations of individual instances of described generalized story.

Hence, the results and interpretations are presented in three sections. First, entirely reconstructed generalized narrative is presented, quotes from participants are included. Next, two

broad groups are identified; and finally, two corresponding cases are summarized, interpreted and contrasted to each other. It should be mentioned that presented cases encompass more than only assumed master narrative elements, and are based on verbal accounts of these particular research participants.

Ethical considerations. Research participants were assigned numbers for easy identification, and securing confidentiality and anonymity. Each quotation in the text is followed (in round brackets) by corresponding number of the participant, her or his age, and gender. In regard of detailed cases, in order to keep confidentiality and anonymity of participants, no entire account is summarized; all names and locations are eliminated, names of protagonists are artificial, and only part of the story is presented. Besides, informed consent from participants was additionally obtained for qualitative presentation of the cases.

4.1. Generalized Story: Summing up the Thematic Line

Although research participants didn't speak explicitly about historical roots and heritage of the nation, strong national stand was presented in narrated life stories, especially in the stories of rural inhabitants and in life accounts of older participants (who are in their late 40s and older). One participant even complained that there were no enough room left for questions (in the interview protocol) addressing issues covering attitudes towards one's homeland ("samshoblo") and national history and heritage; interrelation of citizens and their homeland, their feelings, emotions and devotion, since "this is the cornerstone of all lives here and there, the basis for living proper and fruitful life" (N17, 50, female).

As thematic analysis revealed, participants living their adult years in Soviet Republic of Georgia, described those years as the period resulted in degradation or, be precise, restructuring in a way national (Georgian) identity that mainly operated in forms of ritualized customs without going deeper into meaning and history of the activities, so called underground movements and gatherings, and in some cases wearing Georgian national clothing in public places. Here the role of Georgian Language should be mentioned as one of the strong and influential ingredients of national identity in Soviet era. As one participant puts it: "Those days were the time of national integration, renovation, and waking up from long deep sleep. We were really scared since felt the threat of losing the crucial piece of our identity" (N29, 49, female). Participant recalled the movement for keeping Georgian Language as official state language in 1978 when Soviet government was about to abolish and replace it by Russian Language. Having only Russian Language as official language in the country meant to gradually lessen Georgian native speakers and starting the slow and unreversible process of assimilation to Russian culture/mindset as it happened in Central Asia, for instance.² Rising voice against introducing the Russian Language as only official language in the country was the only instance of reconsolidation of state officials and public movements in the history of Soviet Georgia.

The country lived as the part of the Soviet Union exactly 70 years which marked with stagnation, simplicity and ubiquitous pressure, as one participant (N17, 50, female) puts it, "environment was constraining and inhibiting but in general life was easier", meaning less responsibilities, straightforwardness, and highly structured environment as well as the lives. However, that was not only case, the "easier" life showed its dark side to some people, who spent their years "in fear and pressure" (N25, 49, female). The very same participant describes the transition to new era:

² Even now, 25 years after dissolution of the Soviet Union, people in Central Asian countries speak Russian as their first language and even new generations (children and adolescents) identified themselves more with Russian language than with their historical (Uzbek, Kazakh, or whatever) languages.

In comparison, the time of studentship which was a different period, yes, well, I graduated in 1989 when the “rebuilding” (“perestroika”) was in the process in the country and it suddenly became warmer than during the soviets and I felt more freedom, personality... as there was no more resistance, and at least I realized that nobody was going to punish anybody.

The late 80s is marked with rapid dramatic changes. Mass demonstrations and rallies resulted in vivid turning point in the newest history of Georgia and the national identity, when Soviet troops killed several people and wounded hundreds³. This followed by dissolution of Soviet Union and declaration of independent of the State, first presidential elections, bloody coup and short-term civil war in the capital. All these took only three years (1989-1992), even though forced people to follow and search for new identities, new ideology and values to lean on. These events turned to be the major turning point for people who lived their adult years in Soviet period, as one of the research participants (N30, 69, female) goes on:

Dissolution of Soviet Union was the major turning point in my life and you know, basically... Well established life... I earned good money, we lived in wealth, and... When they introduced those Coupons⁴ and my monthly income turned to be nothing⁵... And I realized that this was the nightmare, terrible reality.

This passage vividly illustrates what McLean and Syed (in prep.) call “episodic” master narrative, meaning that there are particular episodic stories in given culture that are told extensively and heavily influences individual lives, such as for instance dissolution of the Soviet Union. It should be noted that this particular event appeared in life stories almost all participants, even in stories narrated by younger generation, in particular those who came to age in 2000s (participants under 30).

The decade of hardship and darkness started, informally known as “dark 90s”. Years when people run without electricity, heating, transportation, jobs, and money. Crime and corruption was flourishing and none of social and security issues were settled down. Besides, Georgia lost the war to Russia in Abkhazia (1991) and thousands of people were killed, disappeared, and displaced from the region.

In 90s there was no clear structure in society, country was in transition in any possible sense. Time was messy, vague, people tended to and were forced to search for something valuable to stick on in order to feel secure and intact. Church, paramilitaries, being former president’s supporter, criminal, and going abroad in search of job⁶ or to find something new and original for oneself were the available options. This was the decade when traditional national master narrative encompassing themes of Orthodoxy, Motherland and associated national feelings came out on the national stage, and thousands of people found relief and hope in this centuries old domains.⁷ It can be argued that preservation mechanism was in action, as Sullivan (2006) theorizes. In either case individuals struggled to find some axis, something reliable to lean on and to make their lives meaningful, and

³ The day is known as Tragedy of April 9. Officially, it is state mourning day.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/April_9_tragedy (Last seen 5.16.2015)

⁴ Transitional currency from Soviet/Russian Rubles to Georgian Lari.

⁵ From 450 Rubles to 20 (in coupons).

⁶ During 90s big amount of women went to work abroad (USA, Turkey, and Greece) and men stay home. These women maintain families and were breadwinners for their families in Georgia. They worked (and still work) on low pay jobs that was/is somehow embarrassing for men and even for those women in their home country but was/is abroad.

⁷ Georgian Orthodox Church (suppressed and ideologized under Soviets) became extremely popular among Georgians and still exerts its influence on individual lives and value systems as well as on the society (and even on state politics in some cases) in general. After the collapse of the Soviet Union those who found themselves without strong ideological stance, easily replaced one ideology with another, and this alternative was religion. Even now up to 92% of population identifies themselves as Greek Orthodox (Kekelia, et. al., 2013).

construct (those who came to age in 90s) or reconstruct (those who came to age in 80s or earlier) their identities.

As research participant (N17, 50, female) says:

The country lost its face, became messy, coldness, starving, death, war... It was terrible and the worst time. You might be ok in your family but if you were healthy and normal person, you couldn't live normal life, there were such a mess outside, so many bad things were happening, sad and tragic things around. So many dear people passed away.

People were forced to start changing dramatically; to search for new life styles, new occupations, new ideology, and consequently, new identities.⁸ Some succeeded and some did not. They could not. It was not easy to find new way of living when one had decades behind one's shoulders in a very well structured and more or less safe conditions, which just blow up in a moment and only chaotic and messy reality is left out there. So, people had to struggle.

But you have to overcome this nightmare, right? How can do this? I coped with situation in a way... I returned to my studies. I coped through education. I started courses... I always had private students⁹. I worked on candle light and heating with old fashioned kerosene heater. ... And I realized I have to take care on my family, my aging mother, teenage daughter... There was no way back. That was not an option. Hence, I had to, by myself, on my own... (N30, 69, female)

But not all succeeded unfortunately. As two (out of many others) participants (age 49 and 45, females) noted: "by the way, you know we are called 'the lost generation'. Those were emerging adults who could not manage to rebuilt their lives; who failed to follow the rapid changes and to adapt their life scripts to new challenging reality; New chaotic, unplanned, unstructured, and messy reality, which demanded self-definition and bold choices of new and unexplored identity.

As Georgians themselves and those being familiar with Georgian culture and history is aware, this is the country of centuries' long history of struggle for survival as the nation possessing unique features well-expressed in historical national identity, which is tied very closely with historical Georgian master narrative of being strong in faith, sticking with mother-tongue and motherland tightly, and fighting against vast variety of conquistadors. This historical master narrative is still alive and continues to influence at least some part of the nation. As close readings of life narratives showed, elements of national identity and spirit is vividly present in life accounts, especially in those stories told by people who came to age in late 80s and early 90s, when political turmoils formed the core of country's existence. It served as the turning point in national self-reflection, and flourishing and renovation of national feelings. Being in the age of emerging adulthood (McAdams, 2013) played the crucial role in engraining national aspects in peoples' individual identities. As one participant (N29, 39, male) puts it: "It had not gone somewhere. All those events and experiences stayed with me, inside me as part of myself, and they defined me, as I am here and now".

In addition, resulted from the sharp social-political and economic changes and transitional periods occurred during last 25 years, Georgians still are in search of identity and struggle for survival as a nation. The ongoing debate whether Georgia belongs to European culture, is one of the well-known illustrations of the process. Further, current political status quo of the country and being partly occupied by Russian troops, created the threat for national identity, which, as Hammack (2006) argues, provides the nation with drive to identity searching and presumably decreases the deviations of individual life stories from cultural or master narrative of the given group (see also Gregg, 2007).

Past experience of the country, including last 25 years after dissolution of the Soviet Union, is full of multiple losses (territories – Abkhazia in 1991 and Samachablo in 2008, and people –

⁸ As McAdams (1988) puts it, ideological setting is inseparable part of the identity.

⁹ She specialized in one of the western European languages.

paramilitaries, militaries and ordinary citizens) that also activates more traditional scripts in order to preserve, at least symbolically, what was lost. As Sullivan (2006) argues, when one loses something or someone dear to her/him, one holds on even more tightly to what is left behind. One seeks to conserve those things, ideas, feelings, experiences, communities, and institutions that link one to the past, and to what one has lost. This mechanism may be the one of the causal explanations for strong movement initiated by Georgian Orthodox Church aiming to restore monarchy as state's political order. Alongside this line, if nation's cultural memory is taken into account in which strong, independent and expanded Georgian State is represented only as Kingdom of Georgia ruled by the strong and powerful King, it seems more-or-less understandable this strive for "going back" or "moving backward". These also might thought to be the prerequisite for having more traditional master narrative distributed in modern Georgians' life stories. Furthermore, this parallels to interpretation by McAdams (2011), targeting G. W. Bush's personality, namely connection of his conservative worldviews, at one hand, and his striving to symbolically restore the "childhood heaven" of Midland as the ideal state of existence, at another hand.¹⁰,

4.2. Emerging Adults in 80s and 90s

It can be argued that above mentioned is not the case for all Georgians and for Georgians of all generations. Based on narrative accounts, it may be suggested that there are the cross-generational variations in master narrative as it is presented in individual life stories due to the dramatic differences of the context when they came to age, as late adolescence and early adulthood are known as the most formative in terms of identity (McLean, et. al., 2010). Consequently, two broad groups among participants can be identified: individuals who came to age in 80s (or earlier) and those in 90s.

80s generation had to redefine themselves. They had to deconstruct their identities and construct new one due to dissolution of the Soviet Union that was the demarcation line between old and new worlds. But the difficulty was in that that the new reality, the new world was not so clear and well-structured. Be precise, there was no structure at all. People were thrown in darkness and chaos. People who lived quite simple, predefined and in general happy lives before; who had their routines, secured jobs and incomes, left without all these properties and were told that everything they believed in was just farce, lie, illusion, and there is the other world beyond the Iron Curtin. It turned out that the whole world is not so dangerous and bad as they were told. So, they had to find new Selves in new messy and dramatically changing reality. They had to find new values and ideologies.

90s generation, in turn, had no need to redefine themselves. They had what they had as the only reality. Their identity search started in post-soviet era; i.e. they had no crystalized identity before. Hence there was no need to deconstruct and reconstruct oneself. And this seems somehow easier than starting over again due to sharp changes in outside world. However, they faced different challenges.

Basically, these dramatic changes made the shift in values and attitudes toward outer world, which triggered reformation of inner world, if follow the model of identity as psychosocial construction (McAdams, 2006). What had changed, indeed, were very basic, core values that are seen as inseparable part of the identity. As a consequence, value changing stimulated identity redefinition. As one participant (N34, 73, male) put in question: "if everything I believed in Soviet era was false and lie, then all my life was kind of wrong?" And another participant (N30, 69, Female) added: "if I'm about to find and stick to new values and life style, hence I'm on my way towards new identity based upon these new stuff, right?" That was the salient transition people forced to go through. It should be noted that only older generation faces these circumstances. They

¹⁰ For more detailed discussion of the issues, see McAdams, D. P. (2011). *George W. Bush and the Redemptive Dream*.

lost their happy past, as they often described their idealized past (childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood) experiences despite living in Soviet regimen, (probably) because they had easier and more stable lives (or may be just because they were younger!). If the story of the whole generation could be treated as one generalized life story, the sequence of developing of the events can be described as contamination (McAdams, 1993, 2009) script, i. e. there was a good, bright and pleasurable state, which was ruined by something bad (happy childhood gave way to cruel real world). In other words, all good turns to bad. In what follows, the case of Mary illustrates this mode of structuring personal life story.

Second group, younger generation faced different challenges. They had only reality when they came to age – messy, dark 90s when there was no clear structure and ideology, when country was in the process of finding itself, it was falling apart, and in shortage of everything. Emerging adults of this generation had only option – to find their way by their own. This presumably made them (as data show) more achievement oriented, full of agency, more redemptive, searching for one's place in life and society, striving for finding their own social niche. This nicely corresponds to McAdams's notion of redemption sequence, i. e. all bad turns good,¹¹ and is well illustrated by the case of Nina. All these themes of redemption and achievement orientation are less expressed in life accounts of older generations.

As illustrations of above mentioned differences between two generations (those who came to age in 80s and 90s) two cases are presented and contrasted.

4.3. Illustrative Cases

Mary: The story of love and death

Mary is 49 years old female, Georgian Language and Literature teacher with graduate education, married, no own kids, had raised her step-daughter; currently nurturing grandchildren. Her story is penetrated by the themes of death and love, as she explicitly puts at the end of the interview. She describes her childhood and teenage years spent in Soviet period as the happiest period without any shadow thrown on it. She drafted some kind of idealized life with strong stress on being “the center of the universe”, surrounded by love, nurture, warmth, and wealth. Those years are like lost Eden for her that is gone forever and the cruel reality took its place, when death entered in her life. This sequence completely corresponds to what McAdams (1993, 2013) calls contamination narrative. Narrator starts with colorful, happy existence, and then something terrible happens and ruins this heaven on the earth. Something negative, bad and dark contaminates positive, good and light. If we look on generalized story of the generation she belongs, her story structure resembles the structure of generalized story line of contamination: there were stable and structured life, which was ruined by dramatic changes of political order, and chaos took its place.

In the beginning Mary speaks of loss of the “many dear people” during messy years when war was going on, and refers on herself as representative of “lost generation”. Later she speaks of her own personal life and looking “at death's eyes”. First time it was the tragic death of two friends when she was 19, followed by passing away her parents when she was 30.

Basically, all important moments in her life are somehow connected either to death or love. She makes a frequent use of the word “tragedy”, and at the same time, admits that she is very romantic. She seems like some mixture of tragedy and romance, as she looks kind of heavy and dramatic, who enjoys this drama in a sense. Accordingly, all episodes she narrates, follow more contamination sequence as she goes into similar story over and over again. The life is more or less okay, and then something bad happens and everything is ruined; and she has to start again on and on.

Mary speaks of her parents' death as low point, and her experience of car accident at age 14, when she barely stayed alive as negative childhood memory. All positive memories, being this a positive childhood memory or high point, turning point or loss, speaks of love in its different

¹¹ For detailed discussion of the concepts of redemption and contamination see McAdams, 1993, 2009, 2013.

manifestations, starting from love towards relatives, grandparents, parents and grandchildren to her husband and to her homeland. Her stories are saturated with theme of communion, as Bakan (1966) puts it or, as McAdams (1988) names it, with intimacy motive. Her husband is one of the silent themes. Mary goes into details how she heard of this man first time and how they met. Also, she narrated lengthy story about her coworkers who tried to help her to find some right man, and fix her marriage. As Mary reported, she and her friends/coworkers thought it was right time for her to get married: she was well educated 28 years old young lady with stable job and income. Here, negotiation with master narrative is in action. There is the proper age, be precise, the most appropriate period in life when one should get married in any given culture (Berntsen & Rubin, 2004).

Mary is deeply in love with her husband, even though he entered her life with lots of problems, such as the daughter living with him from previous marriage, and living outside the capital, though she had to move in other city. Episode when she tells how she met her future spouse and what followed next, again, repeats contamination-like sequence: she speaks of encounter in a very romantic and bright terms, full of positive emotions but their marriage, regardless their strong feelings to each other, brought full range of problems and difficulties in different areas of living.

The love towards her homeland is another important line under the love theme. Mary even complains that she was not asked the questions about the issue and goes in details why and how people should appreciate their homeland and what does it mean to love truly one's homeland. Should one love one's homeland, she argues, one cares one's house, neighborhood, community, etc. And willing to leave the country is the worst what one can do in order to harm and destroy everything, she states. This echoes to purely traditional historical master narrative mentioned above, focusing on homeland (and to devote oneself to it).

So called dark 90s featured in her story as well. Mary went in length describing her and society's life in those years. As she noted, the worst time for the country turned out to be the happiest period of her life, since she found her true love and got married in early 90s. She contrasted and linked these two realities together. They (herself and her husband, and some friends) were happy, outgoing, wishing to hang out and parting, however, it was impossible to lead such life, due to ongoing situation in the country. As she puts it: "We had everything, all possibilities, money, etc. but one couldn't live happy life because such terrible things were happening out there."

One of the central themes of her story is her regret that she couldn't give birth to her own child and this makes her life meaningless, as she puts it. She lived full life with ups and downs, she enjoyed a lot and she suffered a lot. She has job she likes and husband she odors. She has good friends and grandchildren she takes care of but she still thinks that her life is empty and purposeless without her own kids. Here she rose and clearly stated the challenged generativity which is or should be the central issue for the person in her age (Erikson, 1963; McAdams, 2013). It should be noted, that all her account is more self-centered and shows less generativity and involvement in community/public life in general, although she leads quite active life, loves her husband, has job, and odors her grandchildren, as she states, this very life is senseless and meaningless because of not having own children.

When Mary was asked to summarize the main message or theme of her life story, she doubtlessly and without hesitation answered: "love and death, that's it! This is all my life all around and about these two themes".

Nina: The story of contrasts and being needed

Nina is 38 years old divorced mother of two, medical doctor, pediatrician. She belongs to the generation who came to age in 90s, got married in 1992 when she was 16 and divorced at age 33. Her entire story reflects clear distinction of I vs. Others. She even defines herself in contrasts, against others be this her ex-husband, colleagues, so called others, community, viewers as she denotes, and society in general. Her stories mainly focus on emotions, feelings, sensations, and then

behaviors. She rarely speaks of thoughts, even though she is asked to do so. She is highly nuanced when it comes both to her own emotions or/and those of others.

Majority of her memories are specific and situated rather than general, contrary to Mary's. She goes into details when it comes to important events in her life as turning points, and situations connected to her job.

She seems very redemptive in any possible sense, and generative in terms of agency as well as communion. She had no memories of death even though she is medical doctor working in emergency department with children, and no memories of death narrated in personal life either. She never mentioned her parents and other immediate relatives but her grandmother, two children and ex-husband.

She is completely opposite to Mary: no tragedy in narration. Nina doesn't speak of politics and related issues at all. She never mentioned dark 90s or some other period. Only once when she recalled her engagement but this is only to be precise about the time period without mentioning any political or social issues. She makes frequent use of words "happy", "happiness", "honesty", and this is "the color scheme" of her story, as she goes on: "to make people happier around me".

There are several explicit topics/axis in her life story: her grandma who provided her with basic values and defined her as pediatrician; her ex-husband who vastly defined her personality and gave her the life full of wide range of emotional experiences and two great children (note, Nina got married at age 16, the most formative period in life in terms of self-definition and identity formation), and her job which provides her with the sense of fullness and satisfaction. Her whole life story can be seen as reconstructed around these axis and clearly articulating two major themes: being important for others and being defined against outside world, e. i. self-construction in dichotomy I vs. Others.

Nina recalls herself in elementary school (at age 9) having strong feelings towards classmate who turned to be her true love and husband later on, and how passionate was she in striving to be next to him. Getting married is high point in her life story. She persuaded her parents and other people around her that this was the only way she wanted to continue her life, and she got their approval even though they were only 16 years old. At this point of Nina's story negotiation with cultural master narrative can be traced. In this passage she speaks of compromising the social norms (first get married and then have sex) and at the same time violating the very same norms (getting married in teenage years). Traditional culturally expected sequence of major life transitions, at least in late 20th century, involved (a) first to finish the school and then think of marriage, and (b) no sex (for females) before marriage. In other words, it is not right time to get married in 16 but it is also wrong to have sex if female is not legally married. In Nina's case, getting married in 16 was really deviation from common rule. However, having sex without the wedding ring on the finger was even larger deviation in those years. Hence, Nina found the solution and she got married. She violated first but obeyed second statement, which was more socially valuable regulation than former. As she stated, she didn't care the society and she got married but at the same time she obeyed the same society in terms of being officially married in order to be in intimate relationships with her partner.

The low point is also connected to her ex-husband. This is car accident. The event triggered her conscious doubts whether this was the right man to be with. As she recalls, car accident happened due to her husband's inattentive and careless driving. It was early morning and three of them were in the car: herself in backseat, her drunk husband, and driver sitting on right-front seat who was not rejected to drive them home. When clash had happened, she found herself lying inattentive from her husband's side and only driver was worrying and asking how was she feeling herself. Her husband was preoccupied by getting out from the car and he even didn't look at her side. This was the low point when she put the question openly. This resulted in divorce three years later, and as she reports this was liberation for her and setting free. This is clear example of redemption through liberation (McAdams, 2013). At the same time, this is one of the many instances in Nina's life story of clear redemption and general redemptive attitude towards life.

She recalled two turning points both connected to her ex-husband: when they got married and have children and when they separated. First is marked by the emotions of happiness, joy, excitement, and the latter was full of feelings of disappointment, sorrow, emptiness and regret for wasted time. She speaks of these two episodes as one broader experience, discussing two sides of the coin without extra emotions and worries. She constructs two different versions of her married life: at one side, she was happy, full of joy and mercy, deeply in love and devoted to her husband, and at other hand, she lives miserable life full of lie, betrayal, disappointment, and sorrow. She is truly ambivalent about the entire family life experience but concludes that all in all everything was for good. Despite all negative memories and experiences, she idealizes her only romantic relationship. She's got "two excellent children", happy memories and personal strength that was impossible to gain without that man in her life, she argues. Besides, she regards her divorce as act of liberation which enabled her to devote herself to her profession and succeed as medical doctor, since she was more in family matters before. As she says no one set boundaries for her career but this was mandatory choice, since she was the wife and mother of two. Here again is clear redemptive reconstruction and again the showcase when she follows traditional female master narrative, being mother and wife and have family on the first place, and giving up career of pediatrician. The act of liberation (divorce), however, opened the way of occupational success and growth.

As for her childhood, both positive and negative memories are connected to her personal achievements and qualities, as distinguished and especially outstanding kid, who strove for being like grown up adult, clever and wise. Despite all achievements in those years, Nina didn't report that she felt herself as "the center of universe", and she does not have idealized reconstruction of her childhood, contrary to Mary. She concentrates more on emerging adulthood and adult years. Even childhood memories are linked to later and current life.

All her memories, topics, episodes can be clustered in two broad thematic lines: (a) being important for her grandma, ex-husband, her children, and for her patients and their parents, and (b) define herself/life in contrasts, be this family vs. work, good vs. bad events in personal life, family life vs. professional success, herself vs. others/viewers, etc. The first line is explicitly well declared in her major life theme: "to bring happiness and kindness in other people's life", and runs in literary all episodes and situations she recalls.

Mary vs. Nina

There are numerous ways to compare and contrast these two cases, however, only three broad variables are picked up and traced due to the illustrative function of the comparison. In particular, the thematic clustering, the structure, and the mode of the narratives are summarized and analyzed. Thematic clustering refers to the thematic lines of agency and communion (Bakan, 1966; McAdams, 1988) in life stories. The structure denotes sequencing events in the narrative, and it is described as redemption vs. contamination (McAdams, 2013); and the mode of narration refers to the degree of generativity (McAdams, 1993, 2013) expressed in one's life story.

General observation. Even preliminary reading of the two cases show salient differences between these two women. They grow up and emerged as adults in different socio-economic, political, and ideological settings (80s and 90s, respectively), which presumably left its blueprint on their values, orientations, goals, strivings, and priorities in life. This difference is well reflected in their general attitudes and philosophy of life. Mary seems having more traditional views on life, relationships and values than Nina. If Sullivan's (2006) model (see above) serves as interpretive framework for this difference, traditionalism is reasonable and expected in Mary's case, since she, contrary to Nina, lived through much more losses and deaths in her personal life. As for Nina, she didn't report such experiences neither in her private nor occupational life.

Thematic clustering or thematic lines are general motifs which appear again and again in a life story. The number of personality and social researchers (cf. Freud, Rank, Angyal, Bakan,

McAdams) pursue the thematic dualism in lives. This dualism is couched in the terms of agency and communion following David Bakan (1966). As he argued, two fundamental “modalities” exist in all living forms. The first, agency, refers to the separation of the individual from others and from context; the second, communion, refers to the coming together of individuals and a merger with context. As McAdams (1988) reformulates, human being strives to get ahead and get along other people, meaning be an agent, to assert oneself without regard to the integrity of the surroundings and in so doing to master one’s environment and make it her or his own. In healthy living, however, communion mitigates agency. The individual is embedded in a larger context. Hence, communion emphasizes contact, openness, union, cooperation, and a sense of being at one with other, i. e. be in close and stable relationships with other(s).

If two cases are seen from the point of thematic dualism of agency and communion, Mary is featured as one who is driven by communal motives: she speaks a lot of the importance of connections between human beings, stresses interpersonal relationships in her personal life, be this either close emotional bonds with her husband, or tender feelings towards deceased parents, or her care and worries because of her uncle’s health condition. She tells no strivings for being expanded and self-expressed in occupation domain. She has no stories of being satisfied with her job, she even has no stories connected to her job, contrary to Nina, who tells numerous stories about her occupation, job, and related issues. She explicitly states that although she was married for a long time and had two beautiful children, she felt fully satisfied and happy, when she succeeded in professional area. She thus, seems more agentic, and balancing between communal and agentic themes, or as McAdams refers, intimacy and power motives is easily traces in her life story. She also reports a degree of tension between these two thematic lines or motifs in her life, which, as McAdams (2013) theorize, reflects her generative stance, as it should be in her age (Erikson, 1963, McAdams, 2009, 2013).

The difference in prevailing thematic clustering is vivid in these two life stories: the striving for being in close, stable, and strong emotional bond with people is the central issue in Mary’s life. She speaks a lot of love towards her husband, grandchildren, parents, relatives, friends, and native land, whilst Nina goes into detail when speaking of her professional life, self-fulfillment, expression, and upward mobility on work place, as well as in interpersonal relationships. However, if Mary strives for having bonds with other people, Nina’s main pursuit is to care, tender, and support other people around her (“to make people around me happier”).

Structure. As summarized cases illustrate, they even have different attitudes towards their childhood experience. Mary idealizes her childhood, describing herself as “being the center of the universe”, whilst Nina focuses less on these years, and refers to herself as child, as trying to be more alike an adult. As stated above, Mary structures the majority of her stories according contamination sequence, when something good give its place to something bad (she found her true love but he brought numerous problems in her life; she was perfectly happy as child but this happiness was gone when her friends died), whilst Nina puts all stories in other way around: bad events are redeemed by good things (she divorced but had two great children, and she succeeded as pediatrician).

The clear distinction in the structuring of two life stories can be seen as illustrations of generalized stories of generations these two women belong. The prototypical story for generation who came to age in 80s follows more contamination sequence: there was stable, simple, and structured life (although under Soviets), which was ruined by dissolution of Soviet Union, and consequently resulted in chaos, darkness, and emptiness of 90s. As for those who came to age in 90s (Nina and her generation), prototypical story begins with this very same chaos, darkness, and emptiness, where

people had to find themselves and their ways in life. The decade of poverty and chaos gave its way to new era, revolution, and introduction of new structure later on.¹²

Mode. If all stories told by the two women are summarized, clear mode differences can be traced: Nina's life story bears more generative attitude towards world and living, in general. Generativity refers to taking care of business and of people (Erikson, 1963, McAdams, 2013). Although the term comes from writings of Erik Erikson, and Kotre (1984) suggested classification of the ways through which generativity can be achieved, McAdams and his colleagues (cf. McAdams & Aubin, 1992, 1998) offered¹³ broader and more comprehensive theoretical framework, which describes it as biological impulse for self-reproduction, care for others and instinctively be in need to be needed for others, striving for transcendental and symbolic immortality, as the sign of maturity and mental health, and social demand to find and hold productive social niche in society. It can be expressed through behaviors (e.g. child rearing), motives and values (to preserve what is good and to improve the rest), and general attitude towards the world (see oneself in broader context of the sequence of generations). Above mentioned theoretical model of generativity describes the configuration of seven different psychological characteristics (demand, desire, concern, belief, commitment, action, and narration), each of them focusing on care for personal and societal goals.¹⁴

If compare, Mary's constructed life is less generative. As she goes: "it is senseless, purposeless, and empty, since I don't have my own kids". She describes explicitly none of above mentioned characteristics for generative adult. Only when she was asked to tell about the next chapter in her life story, she put a sentence about her step-grandchildren: "maybe I'll care for their future education". Contrary to her, Nina reports stories full of generative pursuits: "I care to others, all those children and their parents, they are in need of me, and this is even part of my job and myself at the same time, to help them, to support them, ...and make people happier in general".

5. Conclusions and Highlights

Thus, reconstructed generalized life story based on the life story interviews of adult Georgians was presented, and analyzed in theoretical framework of master narrative as well as the models of redemption, culture preservation, and generativity. Further, two groups and two different lines of narration were identified, for people who came to age in 80s (or earlier), and those who did this in 90s. Next, two illustrative cases were presented, analyzed and contrasted according thematic clustering (agency vs. communion), structure (redemption vs. contamination), and mode (generativity).

As data show, historical, social, and political events of late soviet and post-soviet era made strong impact on individual lives of research participants. Majority of those who came to age in 80s (or earlier) name dissolution of Soviet Union as one of the major turning points in their lives (episodic master narrative by McLean and Syed). This generation follows more contamination sequence of narration, as illustrated in Mary's case, whilst those who came to age after the Soviet Union collapsed, tell more redemptive stories, as Nina does. Besides, people representing the younger generation report more agentic narratives or mixture of agentic and communal stories, whilst stories of older generation are more saturated with themes of communion. At the same time, as in Nina's case, contrary to Mary, the mode of generativity is more salient in the stories constructed by younger generation. However, this do not frame older generations as being focused

¹² I don't intend to go into political assessments of the historical events, such as Rose Revolution, etc. Regardless political assessment and points of views of different parties, it should be admitted that events of early 2000s marked beginning of new era in the newest history of Georgia.

¹³ They presented and validated self-report measures for generativity dimension. See link

¹⁴ For detailed discussion of the model see McAdams, 2013. For Georgian description and summary see Khechuashvili, in press.

only on interpersonal relationships and establishing/being in strong emotional connections, and non-generative at all.

Hence, clear influence of cultural, historical, and political setting on individual life stories was depicted. Elements of dominating master narrative or prototypical life were traced in stories told by research participants of different ages and backgrounds. It follows that, as theory and existing empirical data suggest (cf. Gregg, 2007; Hammack, 2008, 2010; McAdams, 1993, 2009, 2013; McLean & Syed, in prep.), cultural setting imprinted in master narrative shapes individual live narratives, which, in turn, reshape and subjectively reconstruct existing dominated scripts of living within given culture, in this case in contemporary Georgia.

6. Limitations of the Study

Presented reconstruction and analysis has several limitations, which can be divided into two groups: limitations connected with generalized story reconstruction and those associated with illustrative cases. Here are the most salient and important problems and limitations of the study: the data used for presented reconstructed generalized life story are gathered through the life story interview of 60 adults of different ages, living in urban and rural areas, and having different backgrounds and experiences. Surely, this is not representative sample of all adult Georgian citizens, and can't be said that all Georgians fit in this generalized story more-or-less perfectly. Besides, research participants were not asked directly to tell about their experiences connected to any historical event. This was left upon their own choice. Further exploration for fuller reconstruction of generalized story (or master narrative) is planned with modified life story interview prompts (McAdams, 2013, McLean, personal communication) targeting life experiences explicitly connected with historical events in given society, which closely fit in master narrative types identified by McLean and Syed (in prep.).

As for illustrative cases, first of all, Mary and Nina are individuals with their own individual life stories. It is, thus, impossible and incorrect to generalize their cases upon whole generations they belong (those who came to age in 80s and 90s, respectively). These are only illustrative exemplars as they tell their life stories in their narratives and negotiate with cultural script or master narrative. Hence, for instance, although Nina is far more generative and redemptive than Mary, it can't be claimed that the entire generation of those who came to age in 90s are more generative and redemptive as well.

Furthermore, the way these two women tell their stories, and the content and thematic underpinnings they convey in their narratives, are determined not only by the historical circumstances, socio-economic situation, their immediate (or larger) environment, and past experiences. The determination should be thought to be multilayered, including dispositional traits and characteristic adaptations (i.e. motivation, wishes, strivings, etc.) (McAdams & Olson, 2010). This leads to the suggestion that when determining factors for these particular structure, mode, and thematic clustering of narratives to be listed, micro- and macro contexts in 80s and 90s of 20th century should be regarded as one out of many other factors, rather than the only factors which set the context for the two life stories. The discussion of the possible determinants of the given reconstruction, should not to develop towards oversimplification and exaggeration of the role of historical settings and/or periods.

And one more: the data analyzed and interpreted in the paper were collected via one time life story interview. There were no further follow ups or series of interviews with individual participants. This, again, limits the scope of the information gathered in the study, and narrows the frame of interpretation and generalization.

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