IDENTITY AND VIOLENCE: CASES IN GEORGIA

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores the nexus between identity construction and the outbreak of violence. It focuses on the cases of violence in Georgia in the early 1990s, in particular – Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The author takes an historical, process-based approach to the question of *how* violence "came about" in Georgia. Using previously unpublished archival material and extensive, in-depth interviews, the author traces the process of the development of inter-ethnic relations in Georgia over the course of several decades and provides a detailed examination of how these relations evolved from tensions to violence. As the thesis demonstrates, ethnic fears and hostility between Georgians on the one hand and Abkhaz and Ossetians on the other – one of the important contributing factors to the outbreak of violence – were neither deep-rooted nor long-standing; rather, they were socially constructed. Still, despite its socially constructed nature, the author argues for bringing ethnicity back in the debate and proposes a more flexible, multi-layered analytical framework in order to integrate constructivist and primordialist views on ethnicity and ethnic group formation in the study of ethnic conflicts and violence. The result is a shift of analysis from self-centered manipulative elites to more "boundedly rational" actors who operate within a socially constructed reality shaped by Soviet nationality policies and historical and cultural narratives (embedded in myths and metaphors of ethnic groups concerned).

To my biggest critics:
My parents and my brother

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List of Abbreviations

ASSR – Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic

AO – Autonomous *Oblast*

CIS – Commonwealth of Independent States

COW – Correlates of War project

CPSU – Communist Party of the Soviet Union

CSCE – Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe

GFSIS – Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies

ICG – International Crisis Group

IDFI – Institute of Development of Freedom of Information

IDP – Internally Displaced Person

IIFFMCG – The Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia

KGB – *Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti* in Russian (Committee for State Security)

MIA – Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia (*Shinagan Sakmeta Saministro* (*ShSS*))

MVD – *Ministerstvo Vnutrennikh Del* in Russian (Ministry of Internal Affairs)

NKVD – *Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del* in Russian (People's Cpmmisariat for Internal Affairs)

OSCE – Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

RFE/RL – Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

RSDLP – Russian Social Democratic Labour Party

RSFSR – Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic

SSR – Soviet Socialist Republic

TDFR – Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic

TFSSR – Transcaucasian Federative Soviet Socialist Republic

TSU – Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University

UN – United Nations organisation

USSR – Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1. Research Context

In the early 1990s several violent conflicts erupted in the Balkans and the former Soviet Union. It was believed that the major driving forces behind them were the centuries-old ethnic antagonisms deeply ingrained among the warring parties. While such views were particularly widespread in media accounts of ethnic conflicts, this line of thinking – known as the "ancient hatreds" view – was also present within academia (Minogue and Williams, 1992, p.233). According to this view, much of what was often labelled as "ethnic conflict" was largely due to primordial ethnic hatreds that had existed between conflicting groups from time immemorial and which had been suppressed during the communist era. In this way, it was the communist system of controls that kept these ancient animosities from boiling over and, as soon as communist domination was over, long-standing bitterness among "the hate-filled, feuding ethnic groups" in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia immediately came to the surface and erupted with all its might (Fearon, 1995a, pp.1-2).

The "ancient hatreds" explanation of ethnic violence is based on a school of thought known as "primordialism" in the literature on ethnicity, nations and nationalism. The general understanding of primordialism is that it takes identities (whether ethnic, gender, sexual or other) for granted and treats different social categories as given (van den Berghe, 1978). Thus, according to this thinking, conflict between two ethnic groups becomes unavoidable because of the unchanging, essentialist nature of ethnic identities. Hostility and resentment of the out-group become an inherent characteristic of every ethnic group due to "received, immutable cultural differences",

and inter-ethnic relations are therefore bound to result in violence at some point (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, pp.849, 857).

Nowadays, however, hardly any scholar of ethnicity and nationalism in Western academia would subscribe to such essentialist explanations of inter-ethnic relations. Increasingly in the past few decades, such views have been vigorously challenged and significantly, if not fully, discredited by new approaches grouped under the umbrella term “constructivism” (Özkirimli, 2005, p.166; see also Lustick, 2001, p.22). This growing constructivist literature offers new and arguably more nuanced explanations of the dynamics of inter-ethnic relations (Tilley, 1997, p.511). Contrary to primordialist thinkers, constructivists maintain that ethnic identities are not fixed but socially constructed through different mechanisms of “framing and narrative encoding” in everyday life (Brubaker, 2002, p. 173). In other words, ethnic groups are not predisposed to view each other in negative terms; rather, the enemy image of the “other” and “the idea of threat” are the products of the processes of social construction (Kolstø, 2002, p.9; see Eide, 1997). Thus, according to this thinking, violence is due to antagonistically constructed ethnic identities rather than deep-rooted ethnic antipathies (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, pp.846, 853).

What the above discussion highlights is that the way scholars view the nature of “ethnicity”, the way they conceptualise “ethnic identities” has a significant impact on the way they study and analyse inter-ethnic behaviour and inter-ethnic conflict. Thus, the aim of this Ph.D thesis is to examine issues concerning ethnic identity and violence further and provide an in-depth study of the nexus between identity construction on the one hand and inter-ethnic violence on the other.

Even though some accounts (particularly in the media) of ethnic conflicts continue to present an almost caricaturist view of primordialism,[1] less radical versions of this approach have been quite sensitive towards the issues highlighted by constructivists. Many scholars associated with primordialism, for instance, have admitted the largely constructed nature of ethnic identities although they emphasise that the process of identity construction usually takes place "over relatively long periods of time" (Horowitz, 2004, p.78). Furthermore, these scholars have also pointed out that accepting this does not significantly change the overall picture – despite being socially constructed, for the most part ethnic identities remain largely fixed, since the only possible transformation for these identities, once formed, is towards further consolidation and hardening, which makes it even more difficult to reconstruct them (Van Evera, 2001, p.20).

The fact that identities are indeed difficult to reconstruct once formed is no news to constructivist scholars either, but it seems that hitherto constructivism has struggled to explain some of the difficult questions raised by its critics. If we concede that constructed identities, once formed, indeed become fixed, then it could be argued that the question of constructivism versus primordialism loses its relevance. Here Anatol Lieven's (1997, p.16) observation seems particularly timely:

> from a practical, non-academic point of view, it is of secondary importance where … [ethnic identities] … came from, how "genuine" or "artificial" they may be, or how recently they were generated. The real test is: do they work? … [D]o they succeed in mobilizing the people to which they appeal? Do they make them willing to fight and die?

[1] Some of the most recent examples of the "ancient animosities" views can be found in many of the journalistic accounts on recent developments in Ukraine (and in Crimea in particular). See among others BBC news reports (2014a; 2014b).

This provides one of the main points of criticism directed towards constructivists – so what if identities are socially constructed?; they still retain much of their power to mobilise. Thus, critics maintain that, despite much promise, constructivists rarely go beyond "bald assertion[s] of metaphysical possibility" and often fail to provide "an actual demonstration" of the process of social construction (Motyl, 2010, p.64; see also Lustick, 2001, p.23). In other words, as Rogers Brubaker and his colleagues (2006, p.7) point out, "*[t]hat* ethnicity and nationhood are constructed is a commonplace" but the real question is *how* is this construction achieved (emphasis original). And, more importantly, what does this mean for the study of ethnic conflicts?

James Fearon and David Laitin (2000) raise similar criticism, arguing that when it comes to explaining inter-ethnic conflicts, constructivist scholars have generally given insufficient attention to "theoretical … [and] … empirical connections between the social construction of ethnicity and violence". Coming from a more positivist tradition and a variable-centred social science approach to research, their particular concern is the lack of positive theory that would link "processes of social construction as independent variables to the occurrence of ethnic violence as a dependent variable" (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, p.847). While this is certainly true among what Valery Tishkov (1997, p.53) calls "hard practitioners of political science and sociology", scholars from a more interpretivist research tradition, including Tishkov himself, an ethnographer by training, have done some valuable research in this direction. Nevertheless, even though more than a decade has passed since the publication of their paper, some of the issues raised by Fearon and Laitin (2000) remain relevant today and still need to be adequately examined.

With its basis within the interpretivist tradition of thought, this Ph.D thesis explores the link between identity and violence by focusing on violent conflicts in Georgia in the early 1990s, in particular the cases of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (for an administrative map of Georgia, see Appendix 1, Map 1).

2. Why Is Georgia Interesting?

There are several reasons for choosing Georgia for study. First, throughout much of the 1990s, smaller-scale violent conflicts in Georgia and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union have been largely absent from most general studies of inter- and intra-ethnic violence. These studies mostly based their models on cases in the former Yugoslavia, Africa or the Asia-Pacific region, while instances of violence in the former Soviet Union were "viewed as more local issues of comparatively little concern to the outside world", at least until the outbreak of violence in Chechnya in 1994 (Birch, 1995, p.90; see also Cheterian, 2008, p.24). In contrast, large-scale violence in the Balkans attracted significant international attention and was "treated as a matter of great international concern" (Birch, 1995, p.90; see also Kemoklidze et al., 2012, pp.1614, 1617–8). However, as illustrated by the most recent outbreak of violence in Georgia – the August 2008 war between Georgia and Russia – conflicts in the Caucasus region are not simply matters of local (or regional) concern. This so-called Five Day War further indicated how fragile peace can be in a region of so many unsettled conflicts. Since the 1990s a lack of international attention and engagement with the conflicts in the Caucasus has been partially remedied. During the past decade or so there has also been an expansion of scholarly interest in conflicts in the Caucasus (Voell, 2011, pp.1, 5; see also Voell and Khutsishvili, 2013). Nevertheless, by revisiting the most violent period of Georgia's modern history, I hope to further raise awareness of these relatively

small-scale but equally destructive and, from a scholarly point of view, equally important conflicts.[2]

Second, Georgia was one of the first Soviet republics to see the establishment of dissident organisations and the emergence of national liberation movement. It was also one of the first republics to hold multi-party legislative and presidential elections, in October 1990 and May 1991 respectively. Refusing to participate in the All-Union referendum on the future of the Soviet Union held on 17 March 1991, Georgia was one of the first republics to hold its own referendum on the restoration of state sovereignty, on 31 March.[3] It was also at the forefront of declaring its independence from the Soviet Union in April 1991, months before the official demise of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) at the end of that year.[4] Furthermore, besides the Baltic republics, Georgia was the only republic not to join the newly created Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) on 21 December 1991 that unified 11 republics of the Soviet Union within a new regional organisational structure.[5]

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[2] Birch (1995, p.90) raises similar issues when comparing conflicts in the Caucasus region with the conflicts in the Balkans.

[3] 98.93% of participants in this referendum supported the idea of an independent Georgia; turnout was 90.53% of the 3.4-million electorate (RFE/RL, 19 April 1991, p.11; Toft, 2003, pp.97–8, 192–3). This number, however, does not include the ethnic Abkhaz and Ossetian populations of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, where an overwhelming majority of participants supported the idea of preserving the Soviet Union as a renewed federation of equal sovereign republics (RFE/RL, 29 March 1991, p.5). For more on the Union Treaty negotiations in the Caucasus and elsewhere in the Soviet Union, see National Security Archives (U.S.) (Doc. 6, 18 Dec. 1990).

[4] However, to be more accurate, this was declaration of the *restoration* of Georgia's independence, referring to the independence of the first Republic of Georgia in 1918–21 – although in reality the talk was more about the restoration of *sovereignty* rather than independence. At the time, acquiring sovereignty did not mean full independence, but it would give Union republics greater autonomy in conducting their internal affairs (Zürcher, 2007, p.33). The actual recognition of Georgia's independence did not come until later that year when, in December 1991, the United States recognised Georgia as an independent state (1 Arkhi TV, 17 Feb. 2011).

[5] Georgia eventually did join the organisation two years later, in December 1993, but officially withdrew its membership in August 2009 in the aftermath of the 2008 Georgian–Russian war.

Third, what makes Georgia a rather unique case among all the military confrontations in the former Soviet Union is that "none of the other post-Soviet republics has been riven by as many different violent conflicts as has Georgia" (Kaufman, 2001, p.85). Here the emphasis is on different *types* of violent conflict that emerged almost concurrently in different parts of Georgia, rather than the *scale* of violence, which was much higher in the conflicts in Nagorno (Mountainous) Karabakh and Chechnya. Indeed, in just a few years, Georgia turned from one of the more prosperous parts of the Soviet Union to one of "the least successful of the Soviet successor states" (Aves, 1996, p.167). It was the only republic in the former Soviet Union, where several military conflicts emerged simultaneously in different parts of the country between 1991 and 1993. The Georgian government engaged in violent military confrontation with two of the country's minority ethnic groups, in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Armed conflict in South Ossetia lasted roughly from 5 January 1991 to 24 June 1992 while a more large-scale violence in Abkhazia took place during the period of 14 August 1992 to 27 September 1993.[6] Georgia was also "the first republic to run its democratically elected president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia,[7] out of office by force" and establish a Military Council, which served as an interim government throughout much of 1992 (Diuk and Karatnycky, 1993, p.142). The Military Council was set up following the *coup d'état* in Tbilisi in the winter of 1991–92 that overthrew President Gamsakhurdia – fighting in Tbilisi lasted from 21 December 1991 until 6 January 1992. These events were accompanied by civil war among ethnic Georgians, mainly concentrated in the Samegrelo region in the west of the country between the state forces and supporters of ousted

[6] Active fighting ended in Abkhazia on 27 September 1993 with the fall of its capital, although the official ceasefire agreement was not signed until 14 May 1994.

[7] A philologist and a literary critic, Gamsakhurdia was the son of a prominent Georgian writer Konstantine Gamsakhurdia – considered by many as one of the most influential Georgian novelists of the 20th century.

President Gamsakhurdia in 1992-93.[8] The outcome was the international isolation of Georgia at the dawn of its independence. Georgia was the last of the former Soviet republics to be admitted to the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE)[9] and the United Nations (UN), on 31 July 1992.[10]

In addition, one of the main reasons for studying identity and violence in the context of Georgia in the early 1990s are the gaps in research in current scholarship on Georgia's conflicts. As many have pointed out, although rich with empirical data, much of the work conducted by local (Georgian, Abkhaz and Ossetian) as well as Russian scholars has often been tainted with ideological overtones[11] (Souleimanov, 2013, p.11–2). However, English-language scholarship produced in Western academia has not been completely free from bias either. After the end of the Cold War, the Caucasus-related issues, including inter-ethnic relations and ethnic conflicts, continued to be studied by the same circle of academics who specialised in the study of Soviet politics, now ex-Sovietologists.[12] In practice, this meant that Russia, as the successor state of the Soviet Union and the largest of its former republics, continued to dominate the field, and the remaining former republics, viewed as peripheries of the USSR, were largely approached through the lens of Russian studies (Kemoklidze et al., 2012, p.1615). Nevertheless, in the past decade or so, a number of scholars have produced authoritative accounts of conflicts in the former Soviet

[8] Gamsakhurdia's family originated from Samegrelo region.
[9] Since 1995 – the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) (Shapiro, 1995).
[10] The majority of the other former Soviet republics were admitted to the UN on 2 March 1992, with the exception of the three Baltic states (admitted on 17 September 1991) and Belarus and Ukraine (24 October 1945, as Byelorussian SSR and Ukrainian SSR respectively). For more on this see United Nations (2013).
[11] There are some notable exceptions, of course. Among Georgian scholars see, for instance Nodia (1992; 1996); Sabanadze (2009).
[12] For more on the state of Soviet studies in Western academia during the Soviet period, see Horowitz (1992, pp.10–1).

Union and have provided rich empirical and theoretical insights (Souleimanov, 2013, p.15). While not a comprehensive review of literature on the subject (which is outlined in more detail in Chapter 2), I highlight here some of the key arguments that feature continuously in the work of those scholars whose research also includes cases in Georgia.

In this literature, scholars usually identify several key factors that contribute to the outbreak of violence and significantly increase its likelihood. Among these factors, weakness and/or failure of the state is often given the most importance. The main argument for this is that the dissolution of the political and institutional structures of the state, generally accompanied by "the collapse of the formal economy", sets in motion the processes that create desirable conditions for violence (Glinkina and Rosenberg, 2003, pp.513–4). Thus, in the case of Georgia, it was state failure – the collapse of the Soviet Union – and institutional weakness in the emerging newly-independent state of Georgia, that were the major contributors to the outbreak of violence.[13] In other words, the dissolution of the Soviet Union provided conflicting groups with the means and opportunities to rebel. However, while most (if not all) scholars would recognise state failure and weakness as *necessary* factors in the outbreak of violence, they also admit that these factors alone cannot be accountable for violence. After all, despite the collapse of the Soviet institutional structures, only a relatively small number of the former Union republics experienced some level of violence during (or immediately after) the break-up of the USSR.[14]

[13] See, for instance: Wheatley (2005); Zürcher (2007, p.8); Cheterian (2008, pp.31, 33).

[14] Other than Georgia, inter-ethnic violence erupted in the Autonomous *Oblast* (region/district) of Nagorno Karabakh in Azerbaijan, developing into inter-state warfare between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Violence broke out in the North Caucasus within the Russian Federation between North Ossetia and Ingushetia, and between Russia and Chechnya. Inter-ethnic violence also took place in Transdnistria within Moldova, in the Ferghana Valley in Uzbekistan and in southern Kyrgyzstan among ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks; while Tajikistan's transition to independent statehood was accompanied by civil war among ethnic Tajiks (Hughes and Sasse, 2002, p.xiii; see also Cheterian, 2008, p.165).

Another factor that features prominently in the scholarly work on post-Soviet conflicts is the role of institutional arrangements and, in particular, the existence of territorial autonomies within state boundaries. Most scholars writing on Georgia recognise that autonomous territorial arrangements for Abkhazia and South Ossetia played a considerable role in the development of inter-ethnic conflicts there. In this way, they often view autonomy as a resource of mobilisation.[15] Among others, Svante Cornell (2002), for instance, has argued that autonomous status has equipped the Abkhaz and Ossetians with material and human resources necessary for the mobilisation of the masses – it has provided state-like institutions and counter-elites, both playing important roles in the mobilisation process. However, the author admits that his study "has not been able to isolate autonomy as a clearly exceptional factor" (Cornell, 2002, pp.127, 227, 229–31). As demonstrated by the case of Adjara, another autonomous territory within Georgia, as well as other cases in the former Soviet Union, autonomous status in itself is insufficient to explain violence.

Yet another important factor that scholars point out is the role of the elites – or, more specifically, the role of radical leadership – in triggering violence.[16] Jack Snyder's (2000) "elite persuasion" theory has been particularly influential in the context of the post-communist Caucasus. In his *From Voting to Violence* Snyder discusses the dangers associated with the processes of democratisation and argues that regime change and democratic transitions enable elites better to manipulate public opinion and use inexperienced masses as a "marketplace" for their nationalist

[15] See, for instance: Aves (1991, pp.52–3); Nodia (1996, p.9); Cornell (2001; 2002); Zürcher (2007, p.10); Cheterian (2008, p.299).

[16] See, for instance: Aves (1991, pp.52–3); Laitin (1995, pp.26–32); Tishkov (1997); Snyder (2000, p.32); Kaufman (2001, p.46); Cornell (2002, pp.227, 229); Glinkina and Rosenberg (2003); Wheatley (2005, pp.60–1); Zürcher (2007, pp.1, 8, 39); Cheterian (2008, p.299).

ideas (see also Snyder and Ballentine, 1996, p.5).[17] In many of these accounts elites are portrayed merely as "cynical careerists and manipulators" (Kolstø, 2002, p.9) who use nationalist sentiments to advance their own agendas. However, while their role in prompting conflicts in Georgia is indeed undeniable, an equally important question to consider is whether elites are simply "responding to structural change and mass emotion rather than shaping it" (Petersen, 2002, pp.4, 35; see also Kaufman, 2001; Wheatley, 2005, pp.60–1).

Several other factors also feature frequently in the works on Georgia. Among these are a previous history of violence between different ethnic groups (Cheterian, 2008, p.308), the importance of existing ethnic fears (Kaufman, 2001, p.32; Cornell, 2001, p.164), and the role of external players – in Georgia's case, Russia (Nodia, 1996, p.9; Cornell, 2002, pp.228, 231).

While some of this scholarly work on Georgia makes a significant contribution to understanding the general dynamics of conflict in this region, it also leaves some gaps that need further research and analysis. Building upon this existing scholarship, I therefore seek to fill in some of these gaps and offer new directions for researching violent conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

I recognise (as do almost all the scholars mentioned above) that the above-outlined factors all play an important role in the outbreak of violence – some a more important one than others. However, one of the key issues in the literature is that, while identifying the *factors* that might trigger violence, relatively little is said about the actual *processes* of how these factors lead to

[17] On the role of democratisation in the outbreak of ethnic violence in the former Soviet Union, see also: d'Encausse (1993); Cornel (2001, p.164); Wheatley (2005).

violence (Zürcher, 2007, p.43). It is one thing to argue the importance of state weakness and failure in setting off violence, or to highlight the role of territorial autonomies and the elites; but exactly *how* these factors contributed to the outbreak of wars in certain parts of Georgia but not others is sometimes unclear. State weakness (failure) and territorial autonomies had different affects in Abkhazia and South Ossetia on the one hand and in Adjara on the other, which remained largely peaceful while the other two regions were engulfed in war. Similarly, nationalist elites found “a perceptive audience” (Kolstø, 2002, pp.9–10) in Abkhazia and South Ossetia but not in Adjara.

In order to address some of these issues scholars have increasingly called for more process-based sociological research on ethnic conflicts (Neumann, 2010; Souleimanov, 2013). With their focus on “the processes that lead to the escalation of conflict” and with the use of qualitative methods, sociological approaches provide much more nuanced, case-specific explanations of the outbreak of war (Zürcher, 2007, pp.43–4; see also Cordell and Wolff, 2010, pp.2, 17). In constructivist language this means “a more process-oriented understanding of how the representations of self and other are actually forged” (Neumann, 2010, p.7) and how they contribute to violence. In this way, as Iver Neumann (2010, p.2) has noted, the question of *how* the outbreak of violence is possible becomes more enlightening.[18]

3. Research Questions

The main aim of this thesis is to address some of these above-mentioned issues. Thus, the general

[18] For a similar point, see also Doty (1993; 1996) and Moore (2010).

overarching framework for this study is the question of *how* violence "came to happen"[19] in Georgia. There is no doubt that the question of *how* violence breaks out is very much related to the question of *why* it does. In fact, as some have pointed out, the so-called *how* questions often lead back to the *why* questions (Carr, 1963, p.115). However, while the two are closely "tied together" (Cross, 1991) and it is often difficult to find clear boundaries between them, there are also some differences that are worth considering. According to Charles Cross (1991), the main difference is in the type of a question rather than the nature of a question – like *why*-questions, *how*-questions are also explanatory in nature but of a different type. As he argues, "[i]n answering how we usually take as our explanandum not an *event* but a *process* … we say how the process works" (Cross, 1991, pp.244, 246, 248, emphasis original). Here Cross (1991, p.246) uses the term "process" in a broad sense – like "the coming about of an event" or "the evolution of a social institution". In this way, "to say *how* an event happened is to say how it *came about*" (Cross, 1991, p.258, emphasis original; see also Carr, 1963, p.115). This is the understanding of *how* questions that I adopt in this thesis.

I recognise that for the possibility of violence to emerge a range of different factors need to be present. These span across broader categories of motives, means and opportunities. Without the motivation there would be no reason to fight, and groups need an opportunity to engage in large-scale violence as well as the means to fight it. However, while most scholars would agree that for violence to happen a combination of factors from all three categories need to be present (Cordell and Wolff, 2010), some nevertheless favour either motives or means and opportunities in their explanations of violence.

[19] I borrow this phrase from Cross (1991).

In the earlier literature on ethnic conflicts, scholars focused mainly on the issue of motivation as the main driver for violence (Horowitz, [1985] 2000; Gurr, 1993). However, in the past two decades or so, questions have been increasingly asked about why some of the most aggrieved groups never take up arms (Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Danny and Walter, 2014). As a result, the focus of the literature on ethnic violence has shifted towards the issues concerning means and opportunities to mobilise for violence (Hegre et al., 2001; Collier and Hoeffler, 2001; 2004; Fearon and Laitin, 2003).[20] In the literature on Georgia, most scholars (whether implicitly or explicitly) seem to favour opportunities over motives in their analysis and argue that the former play a much more important role in the explanation of ethnic violence (Zürcher, 2007).

On the contrary, I attribute equal importance to motives on the one hand and means and opportunities on the other and argue that in the absence of any one of those, the likelihood of violence decreases significantly. However, my main concern in this thesis remains the issue of motivation. W*hat motivated people to support violence* and *what made violence socially acceptable* are key questions considered here. The rationale for this is that motivation provides the basis for mobilisation; it needs to be in place before groups resort to organisation of violence and "exploit" available resources and opportunities in order to wage a war. More importantly, without properly understanding the motivations of the people who support, or are directly involved in, violence, any future (long-term) reconciliation between the conflicting sides will be difficult to achieve.

[20] For the most recent general outline of various trends in the literature on ethnic conflicts, see Denny and Walter (2014).

I examine the cases of violence in Georgia in relation to the main constructivist stance on this issue that “ethnic violence [is] a result of processes of ethnic identity construction” (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, p.857). I probe the question of *how were antagonistic ethnic identities formed in Georgia* by looking at identity-formation on three different levels: a structural/institutional level (“structural constructivism”); a discourse level (“discourse constructivism”) and an actor level (“elite constructivism”). I do so by posing the following questions:

- How did institutional structures influence identities?
- How did historical and cultural discourses influence identities?
- How did actors (whether elites or the masses) influence, and were influenced by, these institutional structures and discourses?

As the cases in Georgia demonstrate, ethnic fears (concerning physical *and* cultural security of the groups involved) played a decisive role in the mobilisation of the masses – a necessary condition for the subsequent outbreak of violence. My research findings further validate constructivist claims that rather than being an innate characteristic of ethnic groups, fear of the “other” is socially constructed. In other words, ethnic groups are not inherently prone to violence; rather, inter-group conflict is largely due to the construction of antagonistic group identities.

When analysing ethnic mobilisation in the former Soviet space, the starting point for much of the literature is the late 1980s and early 1990s.[21] It is largely within this time-period that most scholars seek to identify “a set of conditions under which *sudden* transformations in identity occur” (de Figueiredo and Weingast, 1999, p.293, emphasis added). In other words, in these accounts construction of new (conflicting) identities occurs over a short period of time. In

[21] See, for instance Toft (2005, p.12); Wheatley (2005); George (2009, p.45); Zürcher (2007, p.9).

contrast, however, I argue that rather than being the outcome of the late 1980s only, the making of conflicting group identities in Georgia was a relatively long-term project, spanning over several decades. The late 1980s provided the opportunity – the political space necessary to mobilise the masses amidst the disintegration of the Soviet Union – but as I argue, by that time, the grounds for the mobilisation had already largely been prepared. In this way, there is a need for a longer-term, more historical approach to the study of ethnic violence. Thus, I start my analysis much earlier, by looking at the development of inter-ethnic relations between Georgians and Abkhaz and Ossetians throughout much of the twentieth century and trace the process of *how ethnic differences evolved in Georgia over time and how did they contribute to violence*?

As I argue, the construction of group identities was taking place at all three levels in Georgia. It was this "*triadic nexus*" between institutional structures, historical and cultural discourses and elites that played the key role in mobilising the masses. Thus, the developments of the late 1980s and early 1990s cannot be explained without considering the interaction between these three factors. However, while most scholars would agree with this statement, nevertheless, opinions diverge significantly over how much agency is attributed to each one of those factors. In other words, who are the *primary* agents in the processes of identity formation?

In most accounts of ethnic violence, it is usually the actors – generally understood as political, military, or cultural elites – who construct "new identities for their citizens" (de Figueiredo and Weingast, 1999, p.293). Moreover, in many of these accounts, actors' motivations are often viewed in instrumental terms – it is argued that ethnic conflicts are largely orchestrated by elites, who use ethnicity to manipulate the masses into violence in order to maintain or obtain power

and other material resources (Brass, 1991). In this way, elites are portrayed as "*instrumentally* rational" actors.[22] Undoubtedly, most, if not all scholars recognise that these elites cannot simply "induce fear at will" (de Figueiredo and Weingast, 1999, p.292) and create identities out of nothing (Jeffrey, 1994, pp.14–5). They do acknowledge the constraining effects of historical and cultural resources of a given group; nevertheless, most of them fail to give adequate explanatory "weight" to these factors (Hutchinson, 2008, p.22).

On the contrary, while not denying the role of self-interest and instrumental calculations in guiding human action, I problematize rather than assume actors' rationality and emphasise its "bounded" (as opposed to "instrumental") nature. In other words, I view actors as "boundedly rational"[23] whose interests are not only "constrained" by institutional and historical and cultural context of their societies, but are also "constituted" by them.[24]

4. Locating the Study

The primary goal of the present study is to explain a certain phenomenon (ethnic violence) in a certain area (Georgia). Some of the empirical material presented in this thesis is largely based on previously unpublished archival sources. As such, this study contributes to the fields of Post-Soviet Studies and in particular, to Caucasus Studies. However, this is not to say that it only

[22] I borrow the term "instrumental rationality" from DiMaggio and Powell (1991). This term has also been widely applied within political science and International Relations literature, among others, see Fearon and Wendt (2002); Checkel (2011); Sanin and Wood (2014, p.223).

[23] I borrow this term from Scharpf (1997) who uses it in the context of "actor-centred institutionalism" in the field of public policy.

[24] Brubaker (1996, p.24) makes a similar argument when he talks about both "constraining" and "constitutive" effects of Soviet institutions in his discussion of "nationhood" and "nationality" in the Soviet Union. More generally, this is also one of the main points raised by the so-called neo-institutionalist ("new institutionalism") school of thought in social sciences. For more on this, see DiMaggio and Powell (1991); Brinton and Nee (2001).

enhances our empirical knowledge of the geographic area concerned. Through the cases in Georgia, I examine the mechanisms identified by constructivist scholars that link identity construction and ethnic violence. The results of this study will therefore also have theoretical and analytical value, contributing to the debate around identity and violence in general.

Many of the key themes explored in this thesis also form part of multidisciplinary fields of ethnic conflict studies (civil war studies) and nationalism studies, adding to a growing volume of work on ethnicity, nationalism and ethnic violence. The prevailing position within the field of ethnic conflict studies has generally been occupied by political scientists (especially from its subfields of comparative politics and International Relations). University course syllabuses[25] on ethnic civil wars and conflict theory are overwhelmingly dominated by theories and approaches derived mainly from political science (International Relations fields) and are often based on positivist and largely quantitative research agendas.[26] On the other hand, nationalism studies literature (with its roots in sociology), has had relatively little direct engagement with the field of ethnic conflict studies and literature on civil wars, and has been predominantly concerned with the study of the emergence of nations and nationalism. Within their research realm, however, nationalism studies scholars have also paid particular attention to the study of ethnicity and ethnic group formation and can, therefore, offer significant contributions to the study of inter-ethnic relations and shed more light on some of the conditions under which these relations might turn violent. Thus, this

[25] Among others, see <http://aix1.uottawa.ca/~czurcher/czurcher/Teaching.html>

[26] See, for instance, the so-called grand theories of ethnic violence by Posen (1993); Fearon (1998); Fearon and Laitin (2003). "Grand theory" is a term used by Christoph Zürcher that refers to seminal works in the study of ethnic conflicts whose findings had a significant impact within the field. One of the few exceptions among these "grand theories" is work by economist Paul Collier (Collier and Hoeffler, 1998; 2001).

thesis is also an attempt to better integrate nationalism studies literature within the field of ethnic conflict studies.

In this way, the study undertaken in this thesis is an interdisciplinary project. It forms part of a broader conversation about identity and violence across a number of disciplines and fields of study and seeks to communicate the results back to these fields.

5. Overview of the Chapters

The thesis is divided into five core chapters, framed by an Introduction (Chapter 1) and Conclusion (Chapter 7). Chapter 2 provides a more detailed outline of the conceptual and theoretical underpinnings of the study, by defining analytical concepts I use throughout the thesis and providing a survey of theories and approaches that I find most insightful for the research undertaken. I also further outline some of the main arguments of the thesis.

In Chapter 3 I examine the research design of this study and discuss my methodology and methods of enquiry. I present the fieldwork undertaken throughout the research process: the types of interviews conducted and people interviewed, as well as outlining various archival and other sources used for generating data. I also discuss the ethical issues that arose during the research process.

Chapter 4 is the first of three empirical chapters in which I provide an in-depth examination of three "routes" to identity formation identified above. In this chapter, I consider institutional structures as lead actors in the construction of conflicting ethnic identities. I start out by

providing background information on the cases under review. However, the main focus of the chapter is on various aspects of Soviet nationality policies and their impact on different segments of Georgian society. One of the particularly interesting facets of these policies is the linkage of ethnic and linguistic identities to a certain territory, as reflected in the ethno-federal structure of the Soviet Union. As I show, territorialisation of ethnicity in this manner played a particularly decisive role in the production and reproduction of ethnic group boundaries. It created an institutional system in which group status and associated privileges were intrinsically linked to ethno-federal and ethno-linguistic hierarchy and prepared the ground for further politicisation of ethnicity. In this way, the institutional set-up of the Soviet Union enabled a particular course of action by significantly shaping, and constraining, elite choices and mass behaviour.

Chapter 5 focuses on the role of "discourses" – understood broadly as historical and cultural narratives embedded in ethnic myths, symbols, and metaphors – in the construction of conflicting group identities. In this chapter I provide a detailed examination of inter-ethnic relations in Soviet-era Georgia based on previously unpublished archival sources. I outline competing and at times mutually exclusive narratives on the history of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as viewed by the Georgians, Abkhaz and Ossetians. I examine the sources of these narratives by tracing the process of their development over several decades. I argue that deeply-embedded historical and cultural narratives, such as indigenous myths of origin and the so-called guest–host metaphor, played a decisive role in the formation of antagonistic identities and legitimised violence against members of the out-group in the name of, and in defence of, the in-group identity.

Chapter 6 further outlines the role of the elites and the masses in the formation of conflicting group identities. I show how these various actors influenced, and were influenced by, institutional structures and discourses outlined in the previous chapters. I address the question of whether elites led the masses in Georgia or were led by them, and argue that there was, in fact, a shared discourse between the two – elites and the masses. In other words, they shared the same "moral universe" (Shore, 2002), were constrained *and* constituted by the same discourses and institutional structures, and were motivated by the same ideas (and ideals) – more specifically, by the ideas of independent Georgia and its territorial integrity.

In the concluding Chapter 7, I provide a brief outline of the thesis and summarise its main findings. I also discuss theoretical implications of this study and suggest some of the ways in which future research on this subject might develop.

Chapter 2 – Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

1. Introduction

There is a tendency among scholars studying ethnic violence to come up with an all-encompassing "theory" that can explain most, if not all, occurrences of violence (Kaufman, 2001). However, as Cordell and Wolff (2010, p.2) have indicated, "it is empirically unlikely" that a single theory can explain all forms of ethnic violence.[27] They call instead for the integration of various theories and approaches into a multi-layered analytical framework that can be utilised in the analysis of individual cases, as well as serve as a general point of reference for scholars working on the issues concerning inter-ethnic conflict (Cordell and Wolff, 2010, p.2). I take a similar approach. The aim of this thesis is not to formulate yet another new theory. Rather, I revisit existing theories and approaches, weigh their strengths and weaknesses and point out how they can be integrated into a joint interpretive framework, to provide better understanding and analysis of inter-ethnic violence. The framework I propose, however, is that of identity-formation rather than ethnic violence per se. While the concern of this thesis is with ethnic violence in Georgia, it is examined through the prism of how particular constructions of ethnic identity contribute to the outbreak of violence. In other words, the main focus remains on the link between (ethnic) identity construction and violence.

The various theories and approaches I consider, representing different schools of thought, are often portrayed in literature on ethnicity and ethnic violence as competing views with irreconcilable differences. However, this is not necessarily the case. As Virginia Tilley (1997,

[27] See also Brubaker and Laitin (1998, p.447); Souleimanov (2013, p.20).

p.499) argues, many of these approaches can, in fact, be mutually complementary. While constructivist thinking might be the dominant academic discourse (in Western academia, at least) at present, in different ways many other approaches also provide important insights into the nature and characteristics of ethnicity and ethnic violence (Cordell and Wolff, 2010, p.14).

In the sections that follow I begin by defining the concept of "ethnicity" and related terms that will be used extensively throughout this thesis. I then examine relevant approaches to ethnicity vis-à-vis various theories of ethnic violence. I do so due to the understanding that the way scholars approach inter-ethnic conflict often depends on the way they view ethnicity and relations between different ethnic groups in the first place (Cordell and Wolff, 2010, p.18–9). There has been a tendency within academia to over-rationalise inter-ethnic violence. In these accounts of ethnic conflicts, scholars try to reduce the "ethnic" dimension of inter-group conflicts to purely rationalist sentiments. Thus, "ethnicity" is often dismissed as a "cover-up" while the *real* intentions of both elites and their followers lie elsewhere. While many such accounts do acknowledge that ethnic symbols are often used to mobilise the masses, the general understanding is that this is done only "for instrumental or decorative rather than substantive purposes" (Hutchinson, 2005, p.2).

In contrast, I argue that ethnic identity played a significant role in Georgia's conflicts. Ethnic symbols provided powerful mobilisation tools and not only served "instrumental or decorative purposes" (Hutchinson, 2005) but shaped the very beliefs and preferences of the actors involved. This is not to say, of course, that I see ethnicity as the main source of group conflict or that I claim ethnicity to be the only explanatory variable. Taking ethnicity as the starting point of my

research does not mean I take this concept for granted – as something *a priori* "given" or "natural". I do acknowledge the socially constructed nature of ethnicity. However, I am also aware that inter-ethnic conflicts not only in Georgia but in other parts of the world as well, often do happen in the *name of* ethnic groups. In other words, as Cordell and Wolff (2010, p.4) point out, ethnicity is often an important part of a puzzle in inter-group conflicts and therefore, needs to be taken seriously (see also Zürcher, 2007, pp.40, 54).

2. Defining Key Concepts

2.1. Ethnicity

It is widely acknowledged within academia that the term "ethnicity", derived from the Greek word *ethnos* (meaning "people"), first emerged as an analytical term within the disciplinary boundaries of sociology and anthropology, although there is no consensus among scholars on when exactly the application of the term in its modern sense began (Laponce, 1986, p.484; Bulmer, 2001, p.70). Nevertheless, since its emergence as an analytical concept, "ethnicity" has become "a kind of catch-all term" which has been stretched significantly "to cover a rapidly widening range of ideas" (Tilley, 1997, p.498). Nowadays, "ethnicity" and various other terms closely associated with it, such as "ethnic identity", "ethnic group", etc. are not only analytical terms actively used in various social science fields, but have become familiar terms of everyday practice too (Fenton, 1999, p.1; Brubaker and Cooper, 2000, p.1).

Despite its frequent usage, however, explaining what exactly "ethnicity" means in any analytical

or theoretical terms is not so straightforward (Bulmer, 2001, p.70; see also Smith, 1992, p.46).[28] According to Tilley (1997, p.498), "ethnicity" has turned into "a term which can be bandied about for days at conferences" without ever resolving its "labyrinthine debate" – an observation that can easily be applied to almost all the other terms discussed in this thesis. Below I explain my understanding of the nature of this concept by discussing in more detail some of the closely related terms and main theories of ethnicity.

2.1.1. Ethnic Group

Scholarly understanding of "ethnicity" as an analytical concept is closely linked to the understanding of what constitutes an "ethnic group" (or "ethnic community"). In this thesis I take as a starting point Anthony Smith's (1992) definition of an "ethnic group", shared by many other scholars in the field. According to Smith, this term generally refers to a large or small collectivity within a society that is united by a common name and memories of a shared historical past (whether real or imagined); belief in the myths of common ancestry and culture; and a strong sense of belonging to a particular territory and a community (Smith, 1992, p.50).[29] The last point is of particular importance here since "ethnic belonging" serves as the essence of "ethnic groups". For Michael Ignatieff (1993, p.7), to *belong* to a particular community means "to understand tacit codes of the people you live with; it is to know that you will be understood without having to explain yourself. People, in short, 'speak your language'" (see also Esman, 1994, p.27).

[28] "Ethnicity" is often associated with, and occasionally even used interchangeably with, "race", although not in the context of the conflicts in the Caucasus. However, these two concepts are rather different as "race" generally refers to physical or any other *visible* difference such as colour of one's skin, for instance (Fenton, 1999, p.3; see also *Encyclopaedia of Nationalism*, 2001, p.70).

[29] Many scholars share most, if not all aspects of Smith's definition of "ethnic group" ("ethnic community"). Among others, see Brass (1991, p.70); Esman (1994, pp. 26–7); Renan ([1882] 1996, pp.52–3); Fenton (1999, pp.4, 6; 2010, pp.12–23); Bulmer (2001, p.69); Taras and Ganguly (2006, p.1).

A particularly important aspect of this "belonging" is a belief in shared "culture" – itself "one of the least concrete and most elusive" concepts in social sciences (Tilley, 1997, p.498). At its broadest, "culture" refers to "material culture", such as artefacts and other concrete objects. However, it is the *symbolic* meaning of "culture" that remains the principal reference of this term in relation to "ethnicity" – a meaning that may include language, religion, regional origin, kinship patterns, styles and ways of life of a particular group (Fenton, 1999, p.8).[30] It is through these cultural elements that members of an ethnic group identify with one another and it is in the context of these symbolic cultural characteristics that the term "ethnic identity" is generally used (Fenton, 1999, pp.6, 8–9; see also Esman, 1994, p.27).

However, as Steve Fenton (1999) points out, there is more to ethnicity and that is its "*relational nature*" – in other words, ethnic groups are not static categories with fixed cultural traits; rather, they are "social relationships in which people distinguish themselves from others".[31] Fenton maintains that "for ethnicity to spring to life it is necessary that *real or perceived [cultural] differences ... are mobilised in social transactions*" (Fenton, 1999, p.6, emphasis in original).[32] In this way, his definition of "ethnicity" implies that membership in an ethnic group necessarily involves ethnic mobilisation and hence, some form of conflicting relationship with the "other" (see also Esman, 1994, p.13–4). However, while I agree that distinguishing one's self or one's group from the external "other" is an important element of ethnic group belonging, I disagree that this distinction inevitably leads to ethnic mobilisation per se, which is considered a necessary pre-

[30] For more on "ethnicity" and "culture", see also Tilley (1997, p.498); Bulmer (2001, p.70); Taras and Ganguly (2006, p.1). Some scholars consider language and religion as separate from culture. Fenton (1999, p.6), for instance, points towards ancestry, culture, *and* language as the defining characteristics of ethnic groups.
[31] For a similar argument, see also Barth (1969); Esman (1994, p.13); Calhoun (2003, p.548); Zürcher (2007, p.55).
[32] For a similar argument, see also Gellner (1983, p.7); Esman (1994, p.13–4).

condition for the outbreak of violence. Most people, most of the time, live peacefully side by side, while also being aware of the (real or perceived) cultural differences that distinguishes them from other members of a society. Thus, ethnicity in itself is not a source of conflict and inter-ethnic interactions do not in themselves lead to violence. Rather, it is only under certain circumstances that ethnic differences are mobilised and the potential of violence arises (Cordell and Wolff, 2010, p.16).

2.1.2. The Soviet Understanding of a "Nation"[33]

In the case of Georgia, these circumstances were fundamentally shaped by the so-called Soviet nationality policies. Described as "the system of theoretical assumptions, established practices, and institutional arrangements", the main aim of these policies was to regulate inter-ethnic relations in the Soviet Union (Zaslavsky, 1992, p.98). Many aspects of nationality policies, including the ethno-federal structure of the Soviet Union, were strongly shaped by Joseph Stalin's linkage of ethnicity, language, territory and political administration (Zaslavsky, 1992, p.99). Stalin ([1914] 1942, p.12) saw a nation as "an historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture". According to him, if any one of these four defining components were missing the nation would cease to exist. In this way, his understanding of a nation was that of a "territorialised language community" (Grosby, 2001, p.122–3).

[33] There is a vast amount of literature in nationalism studies field on the distinction between analytical concepts of an "ethnic group" and a "nation" (Smith, 1986, pp.21-32, 135-52). I further discuss different terms used by Soviet authorities to differentiate between "nations", "nationalities", and "ethnic groups" in more detail in chapter 4. However, when it comes to Stalin's above definition, the difference between a "nation" and a "nationality" does not seem to be central (Brubaker, 1996, p.26).

A further important aspect of the Soviet understanding of a nation, however, was the differentiation between the so-called historic and non-historic (or “backward”) nations. The former was understood as “peoples with statehood” (Smith, 1992, p.58). On the other hand, nations that did not possess “an independent political history” were labelled as “non-historic” (Brubaker, 1996, p.35). In this way, having an historical state became one of the central markers in the hierarchical categorisation of ethno-linguistic groups in the Soviet Union. As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, those groups that could demonstrate continuous historical presence on a particular territory and a long history of statehood occupied higher positions and were entitled to more privileges. This played a decisive role in the construction of mutually exclusive ethnic identities in Georgia as Georgians, Abkhaz and Ossetians all aspired for higher positions in the ethno-federal and ethno-linguistic hierarchies of the Soviet institutional structures.

2.2. Ethnic Conflict and Violence

Other terms in need of further clarification are “ethnic conflict” and “violence”. When scholars talk about “ethnic conflict” they generally mean inter-ethnic conflict (as opposed to the intra-ethnic variety). Here I adopt Cordell and Wolff’s (2010, p.5) definition of “ethnic conflict” as “a form of group conflict” when one or more sides in conflicting situations is organised around ethnic identity and uses various tactics (including violence) to achieve its goals, which are also defined in ethnic terms.[34] For some scholars, this term only implies a relationship involving some

[34] Other scholars have used other terms to refer to the same phenomenon, such as “ethnic warfare” (“ethnic war”) (Beissinger, 2001, pp.849, 852; Kaufman, 2001, p.16).

sort of "open or overt hostility" that includes inflicting injury on people and/or their property (Kolstø, 2002, p.5).

I, on the other hand, differentiate between violent and non-violent conflicts. In other words, "conflict" per se need not necessarily involve physical aggression. The relationships between different groups can always turn conflictual, but it is only when these relationships break down that conflicts turn violent (Brubaker and Laitin, 1998). Hence, throughout the thesis I use the term "ethnic conflict" in a broader sense and employ the term "ethnic violence" when referring to violent episodes of ethnic conflict specifically.[35]

The cases of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are examples of violent ethnic conflict, i.e. "ethnic violence" – the term, which is not immune to confusion and misunderstanding either (Beissinger, 2001). Violence can be large-scale or small-scale (or limited) and, as some have argued, it seems incompatible for one term to cover "both street brawls among youth groups, on the one hand, and civil wars claiming thousands of deaths, on the other" (Kolstø, 2002, p.5). My definition of "violence", however, is not limited to the number of casualties (although it does involve casualties). Thus, while I am aware of the different nature, and magnitude, of violent confrontations in Georgia, I use the term "violent conflict" to cover a wide range of events including the crackdown on demonstrations in Tbilisi by the Soviet Army and Interior Ministry troops on 9 April 1989, which resulted in the death of 20 civilians;[36] street brawls in Sokhumi

[35] In the cases in Georgia one could argue that inter-ethnic violence was, in fact, ethno-nationalist in nature since one of the sides in the conflict was represented by the state (Brubaker and Laitin, 1998, p.428; Kaufman, 2001, p.16).

[36] 16 people died during the attack on the night of 9 April, 3 died of their injuries shortly after being hospitalised and one person was killed later during the Martial law imposed after the actual incident. Of these, there were 4 men and

(Sukhum)[37] between Georgians and Abkhaz on 15–16 July 1989, which saw 15 civilians killed (*Komunisti,* 18 July 1989, pp.1, 3);[38] and the *coup d'état* in Tbilisi in winter 1991–92, which caused the death of 113 people (1 Arkhi TV, 17 February 2011);[39] as well as the death of thousands more as a result of large-scale military confrontations in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. However, there is still the question of what exactly makes violence (or conflict in general) "ethnic".

Scholars have increasingly raised concerns that all too often conflicts are pre-labelled as "ethnic" (either in media reports or by parties concerned) or the term is applied retrospectively without further scrutiny of its applicability to a particular conflict situation. It is argued that, even when conflicting sides belong to different ethnic groups, this does not necessarily constitute "ethnic" conflict. In fact, full-blown ethnic wars are often sparked by trivial issues that have very little to do with the ethnic belonging of the individuals involved, such as a dispute over the price of fruit in a market (Kolstø, 2002, p.6).[40]

It would be too simplistic to argue, of course, that the reasons behind the outbreak of violence in Abkhazia or South Ossetia were such trivial incidents but there is equally no doubt that what was

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16 women. According to Georgian sources up to 1,400 people are still being treated as a result of the poison gas used during the attack, of which 350 are considered to be permanently disabled (Rustavi2 TV, 9 April 2002).

[37] "Sokhumi" is a Georgian version of the name of the capital of Abkhazia, "i" being an ending in Georgian language. The Russian version of the word would be "Sukhum(i)", which is also used in Abkhaz sources. In order to take account of this highly contentious and sensitive issue I decided to use both versions throughout the thesis – "Sokhumi (Sukhum)".

[38] According to official Georgian sources, among the casualties there were 9 ethnic Georgians and 6 ethnic Abkhaz. By 18 July 1989 a further 137 people were hospitalised as a result of inter-ethnic clashes (*Komunisti,* 18 July 1989, p.1; 1 Arkhi TV, 23 April 2010).

[39] Further 400 people were wounded (1 Arkhi TV, 17 February 2011).

[40] Most scholars in ethnic conflict studies literature would acknowledge this fact. Among others, see also Brass (1997, p.96); Brubaker and Laitin (1998, pp.425–6); Fearon and Laitin (2000, p.869); Beissinger (2001, p.867).

often no more than a brawl between drunken neighbourhood youths was labelled as "ethnic conflict", often too readily and too easily.[41] However, what must be emphasised here is that, "ethnic conflicts" may, in fact, be sparked by non-ethnic incidents, or conflicts may turn into "ethnic conflicts" over the course of events rather than starting out as such. In this case, the most important thing is not what really happened, but how this reality is "*perceived* by the actors" involved in conflicts (Kolstø, 2002, p.7, emphasis in original). In other words, it no longer matters if the initial spark of the conflict might have been "non-ethnic" – if it was *interpreted* in ethnic terms, it can be classified as "ethnic conflict" (Kolstø, 2002, p.7; see also Brubaker and Laitin, 1998, pp.426, 444). In this way, as Donald Horowitz (1991, p.2) points out, "ethnic conflicts" are often as much about "the nature of the conflict" itself as anything else.[42]

This, too, is well manifested in the cases in Georgia, where each side involved in (and affected by) the conflicts has a different view of the kind of conflict they were engaged in. While the term "ethnic conflict" is still widely used when speaking about these conflicts in general terms, in the interviews I conducted many of my ethnic Georgian respondents emphasised that these conflicts were "political" rather than "ethnic" per se. The argument was that there was no ethnic animosity between people on the ground – ordinary citizens had nothing to fight about. Rather, these were political conflicts instigated mainly by self-interested Abkhaz and Ossetian elites and, most importantly, by an external power (i.e. Russia). Indeed, as we shall see in the coming chapters, for the Georgian side, conflicts with minorities were closely intertwined and were almost inseparable from the conflict with the Kremlin. The Abkhaz and Ossetian sides, on the other

[41] In South Ossetia, for instance, I personally witnessed such street brawls, often between drunken youths, in the late 1980s in the northern town of Java.

[42] Horowitz (1991, pp.1–2) has termed this phenomenon a "metaconflict" or "conflict about the conflict".

hand, have a significantly different view. They argue that by denying the “ethnic” nature of these conflicts and blaming them solely on the political machinations of the Soviet Union (and later Russia) and Abkhaz and Ossetian elites, the Georgian side is also denying the authenticity of Abkhaz and Ossetian grievances and the legitimacy of their claims.

Another defining characteristic of the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia that needs emphasising is that these were cases of *secessionist* conflicts. In other words, the goal of one of the conflicting sides (Abkhaz and Ossetians) was to secede from the existing state (Georgian SSR)[43] rather than to capture the central state apparatus in Tbilisi.[44] This is different from intra-ethnic conflict among ethnic Georgians during the winter 1991–92 *coup d’état* and the continuation, or rather spillover, of violence in western Georgia. In the latter case the goal of both conflicting sides was to (re)capture state institutions of the newly independent Republic of Georgia. I therefore refer to intra-ethnic violence in Georgia as a “civil war” in order to differentiate between inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic group conflicts.[45]

3. Theories of Ethnicity and Ethnic Violence

Having defined some of the concepts most used throughout this thesis, I now turn to outlining theoretical approaches to the study of ethnicity and ethnic violence. As mentioned above, the way scholars conceptualise ethnicity and the way they view inter-group relations is intrinsically linked

[43] Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR).

[44] This is why, in Georgian political and academic discourse, Abkhazia’s and South Ossetia’s quest for separation from Georgia is most often referred to as “separatist movements”, which effectively means “secessionist movements”. For more on the issue of secession, see Heraclides (1991, p.1); Bishai (1998, p.93; 2004). For more on secessionist conflicts, see Kaufmann (1998, p.125).

[45] The influential Correlates of War Project (COW) considers all internal armed conflicts that meet certain requirements, including 1,000 battlefield deaths or more per year, as “civil wars”. In this way, “ethnic conflicts” are also classified as “ethnic civil wars” (Sambanis, 2004, p.816; see also Gleditsch et al., 2002).

to the way they explain the breakdown of these relations and the outbreak of violence. Thus, I start with the discussion of theories of ethnicity and how they influence various theories and approaches to ethnic conflict and violence.

Different scholars provide different classifications of the theories of ethnicity and ethnic group formation, which closely resemble classifications of the theories of nations and nationalism. The two are very much interrelated and have significant overlaps – indeed it is sometimes very hard, if not impossible, to draw a line between the two sets of theories. In his comprehensive treatment of nations and nationalism Umut O□zkirimli (2000; 2010), for instance, argues that primordialist accounts of nationalism cannot be considered independently from accounts of ethnicity. In fact, according to him, primordialist accounts are, first and foremost, “formulated to explain the origins and strength of ethnic identities” (O□zkirimli, 2000, pp.65–6). The same could also be said about ethno-symbolist approaches that place ethnicity at the centre of their inquiry (Smith, 2009, p.18).

On the other hand, others suggest that theories of nationalism and ethnicity are two different debates – the former, between “perennialists”[46] and “modernists”,[47] concerning the origins and the antiquity of nations and nationalism, and the latter, between “primordialists” and

[46] Some scholars group perennialist accounts under primordialism (O□zkirimli, 2010, p.50). Others, however, differentiate between the two. Generally, perennialists believe in the antiquity of nations and ethnic communities; however, this does not necessarily mean that they also believe in the naturalness of these categories and take them for granted. This is why Smith (1998, p.159) identifies it as a separate approach.
[47] Modernist school of thought within nationalism studies literature emphasises the modernity of nations and nationalism (Smith, 1998; O□zkirimli, 2010).

“instrumentalists”,[48] over the nature of ethnicity and ethnic group origins (Smith, 1994, p.376; 1998, p.159). Since the main issues discussed in this thesis are largely related to ethnicity and ethnic identity, theories outlined below will refer, unless otherwise stated, to the theories of ethnicity rather than nationalism, although most of the scholars and their approaches discussed below form part of the wider literature within the nationalism studies field.

The classification of the theories I provide here is somewhat different from the one proposed by Smith (1998). I group these various theories and approaches in three main traditions or schools of thought – the primordialist, the instrumentalist and the constructivist.[49] None of these is a theory on its own; rather, each is used as an “umbrella” term in order to describe different sets of approaches and concerns to the study of ethnicity. There is much disagreement, almost a kind of “terminological chaos” (Bacova, 1998, p.29) in the literature, about whether or not constructivism is some form of instrumentalism. While some maintain that this is one of the widespread misconceptions about constructivism (O□zkirimli, 2005, p.164), others use these terms interchangeably in the context of the primordialist–constructivist debate about the nature of ethnicity and ethnic violence (Hale, 2004, p.459). While I also refer to this debate as the primordialist–constructivist, I nevertheless discuss instrumentalism and constructivism separately and outline further what exactly sets these schools of thought apart. In addition to these three categories, I discuss ethno-symbolist approaches separately. While closely related to culturalist

[48] It is interesting to note that O□zkirimli (2010, p.88), for instance, identifies instrumentalism as part of modernist school of thought.
[49] For a similar classification, see also Tilley (1997, p.499); Taras and Ganguly (2006, p.11). For alternative classifications see Esman (1994, pp.9–16); Cordell and Wolff (2010, p.14).

accounts within the primordialist school of thought, ethno-symbolism is generally considered as the middle ground between primordialism and instrumentalism.

The outline I provide here is that of ideal-typical versions of these theories and approaches but as I show, despite much disagreement, many of them do have certain overlaps and can even complement one another. The discussion of constructivism is a particularly good demonstration of this point.

3.1. Primordialism

Sociologist Edward Shils is generally believed to have coined the term “primordialism” in the context of family and kin relations. In Shils’ (1957, p.142) understanding, the strength of the attachment one feels for one’s family members “is not just a function of [social] interaction … it is because a certain ineffable significance is attributed to the tie of blood”. It is this emphasis on “the tie of blood” that has become a defining aspect in primordialist thinking.

Like other schools of thought, primordialism[50] is not a monolithic category (Voell, 2011, pp.16–7). Within the primordialist school of thought scholars further differentiate between socio-biological and cultural approaches. Although they share some common characteristics, these approaches offer rather different perspectives on ethnicity (Özkirimli, 2000, pp.64, 66). In fact, as Tilley correctly points out, it is inattention to these differences that has resulted in much of the confusion and misunderstanding about what constitutes “primordialism”. As a result, this term is

[50] Sometimes also referred to as “essentialism”.

arguably one of "the most … ill-defined term[s]" in the field of ethnic studies (Tilley, 1997, p.500).

3.1.1. Socio-Biological Approaches

Socio-biological approaches are generally considered the most extreme version of primordialism, and sociologist Pierre van den Berghe is viewed as the leading exponent of this approach. According to van den Berghe (1978), human kinship has both socio-cultural *and* biological roots, although his main concern in his writings is predominantly the latter. He argues that social interaction between humans can be largely explained by so-called kin selection – the idea that biologically determined natural selection favours one's own kin over others. In this way, he views ethnicity as an "extension of the idiom of kinship" and ethnic sentiments "as an extended and attenuated form of kin selection" (van den Berghe, 1978, pp.402–3).

At the time, van den Berghe's ideas on the "primordiality" of ethnicity and ethnic sentiments were largely interpreted to mean "that one must share some genetic link – some portion of 'blood' – with a group, in order to truly 'understand' it or 'belong' to it" (Tilley, 1997, p.500; see Eller and Coughlan, 1993). In fact, it was this understanding of "primordiality" that became the defining characteristic not only of socio-biological approaches but of the entire primordialist school of thought (Brubaker, 1996, p.15). Due to clear evidence to the contrary (provided by numerous cases of adoption, for instance), primordialist approaches have seldom been taken seriously among Western scholars and have often been discarded without any further consideration (Tilley, 1997, p.500).

In the last decade or so, however, some scholars have proposed a different reading of van den Berghe's work and have argued that his initial ideas were largely misunderstood by many in academia and were hijacked by nationalists who gave it a much more naturalist interpretation than originally intended (Tilley, 1997, p.500; Smith, 1995, pp.31–2). In fact, van den Berghe's (1995) views expressed in his more recent writings would also resonate among many constructivists who have criticised his views. As he argues,

> [e]thnicity or race cannot be invented or imagined out of nothing. It can be manipulated, used, exploited, stressed, fused or subdivided, but it must correlate with a pre-existing population bound by preferential endogamy and a common historical experience. Ethnicity is *both* primordial *and* instrumental. (van den Berghe, 1995, p.361, emphasis in original)

In other words, van den Berghe maintains that there are limits to the social construction of ethnic identities – a view that would be shared by primordialists and constructivists alike (Smith, 1998, p.149). However, proponents of primordialist approaches continue to emphasise that even though identities might not be biologically given and may well be socially constructed, "their continued vitality" over time and space means that, once constructed, they remain largely "fixed" and therefore can be treated as such (Van Evera, 2001, p.20). In other words, the "so what?" questions are still relevant – so what if identities are constructed, they still retain their mobilisational power and drive people to collective action (van den Berghe, 1978, p.404; Lieven, 1997, p.16). These arguments are often used as the main line of criticism directed towards constructivists, not only by primordialists but also by some constructivists (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000, p.1).

3.1.2. Cultural Approaches

Unlike socio-biological approaches, cultural approaches have often been completely omitted in the discussion of primordialism (O□zkirimli, 2010, p.55). These approaches, also referred to as "cultural primordialism" (Smith, 1998, p.157), are generally associated with the works of Edward Shils and anthropologist Clifford Geertz. The lack of acknowledgement of cultural primordialism may be partly due to the fact that, for a significant period, works by both Shils and Geertz were interpreted within the prism of socio-biological primordialism (Tilley, 1997, pp.501–3). In this way, Eller and Coughlan's (1993) criticism of primordialist approaches has played a particularly influential role in discrediting much of the primordialist writings on ethnicity, including cultural primordialism. However, since then many have challenged this orthodox interpretation of primordialism and have convincingly argued that the meaning of "primordial" in cultural approaches has been subject to much misinterpretation (Tilley, 1997, pp.501–3; Smith, 1998, pp.151–8; O□zkirimli, 2010, pp.55–8; Voell, 2011, pp.16–7).

It is now widely believed that, contrary to Eller and Coughlan's (1993, p.187) reading, many cultural primordialists talk about "primordial" ethnic sentiments not as *a priori* "given", or "natural", but as "*assumed*" to be "given" and "natural" by individuals involved. As Geertz (1963, pp.109–10) argues, "[b]y a primordial attachment is meant one that stems from the 'givens' – or, more precisely, as culture is inevitably involved in such matters, the *assumed* 'givens' – of social existence" (emphasis added). Here Geertz describes the power of what

Anthony Smith has termed a "participant's primordialism".[51] In other words, Geertz highlights people's *beliefs in* the primordiality of ethnic attachments, rather than arguing that they constitute "an objective primordial reality" (Smith, 1998, p.158). In his understanding, certain practices symbolise and evoke such deeply ingrained emotions in people and are so taken for granted that they indeed may come across as "givens" (Tilley, 1997, p.506). As will be discussed in the coming chapters, the cases in Georgia demonstrate this point well.

Thus, unlike socio-biological primordialists, cultural primordialists emphasise the socio-cultural rather than biological aspects of "primordial" attachments and sentiments. As a result, some scholars have even argued that Geertz could, in fact, be considered a constructivist (Tilley, 1997, pp.501, 506). The quote below seems to support this point:

> Believing, with Max Weber, that man [*sic*] is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. (Geertz, 1973, p.5)

In other words, for Geertz, culture is seen as "webs of meaning" socially constructed by people themselves, and in order to study it one needs to take due notice not only of law-like (i.e. observable) elements but also "less visible elements of those [cultural] webs" (Tilley, 1997, p.502). In this way, if the meaning of "primordial" is understood in a Geertzian sense, it dramatically changes the way primordialism is viewed (and treated) in academia. Moreover, it changes how the scholarly community approaches such matters as studying the causes of ethnic violence or finding solutions to ethnic conflicts (Tilley, 1997, p.506; Horowitz, 2004, p.78). In

[51] Several other terms are also used by other scholars to describe a similar phenomenon: "intuitive essentialism" (Gil-White, 2001, p.528); "everyday primordialism" (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, p.848); and "folk reifications" (Baumann and Sunier, 1995, p.6).

fact, as I argue in this thesis, there is a need to revisit the Geertzian understanding of "primordiality". As the cases in Georgia demonstrate, any theory of ethnicity or ethnic violence that fails to take these "primordial" ethnic sentiments into account is likely to be destined to fail.

3.2. Ethnic Hatreds: Ancient or Modern?[52]

Derived from the (socio-biological) primordialist approaches to ethnicity is the "ancient hatreds" view of ethnic violence. The rationale behind this view is that, if ethnic identities and cultural differences are natural in-built traits of every ethnic group, then so are the antagonisms towards the out-group. Thus, inter-group conflict is inevitable and inter-ethnic relations are bound to descend into violence at some point when different ethnic groups come into close proximity. While widely referred to in academic literature, especially throughout the 1990s, most of the actual statements of the "ancient hatreds" view can be found either in the nationalist rhetoric of politicians and members of the intelligentsia, or journalistic accounts of ethnic conflicts (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, pp.849, 857). The most cited work in this regard by far – *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey through History* – is, in fact, a travel book written by the journalist Robert Kaplan (1993), rather than a piece of scholarly writing. However, this did not prevent the book gaining popularity, even among academics and policy-makers. Moreover, the book became notorious for being cited by the United States administration to justify their non-intervention in the Balkans during the outbreak of violence there in the early 1990s. President Bill Clinton (in office 1993–2001) reportedly read it and concluded that since the bloodshed in the region was a result of ancient animosities between different ethnic groups, international humanitarian intervention

[52] The classification of the theories of ethnic conflicts and violence I provide here is in line with the ones outlined by Kaufman (2001, p.17); Cordell and Wolff (2010, pp.16, 25). For various other classifications see also Brubaker and Laitin (1998); Beissinger (2001); Kolstø (2002).

would be pointless. Kaplan (1999) himself later argued that *Balkan Ghosts* was meant only to be a "travel book on a region in its last moments of obscurity" and that he had never imagined that it would be read – or, rather, misread – as "a policy tract".

However, as with (socio-biological) primordialism, it is now very rare to find any supporters of the "ancient hatreds" view in Western academic scholarship (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, p.849). Over the years, many scholars have effectively demonstrated that, in most cases, the roots of ethnic violence lie in modern times, generally dating back to the events of the twentieth century rather than mediaeval or "ancient" times (Cornell, 2001; Kaufman, 2001). Furthermore, another claim of the "ancient hatreds" view not substantiated by empirical evidence is that inter-ethnic hostility is not only *ancient* but also *continuous* (Kaufman, 2001, p.4).

Historical records show that groups have often lived side by side peacefully for significant periods of time and have even fought side by side as allies in many battles over the centuries (Malcolm, 1998, p.xxix–xxx; Hardin, 1995, p.148). In other words, inter-ethnic "friendships are [often] as 'ancient' as hatreds" (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1993, p.25). In fact, research findings suggest that ethnic heterogeneity does not necessarily lead to violence and that, despite many tensions, inter-ethnic relations are more likely to result in "peaceful and cooperative relations" than large-scale violence (Fearon and Laitin, 1996, p.715).[53]

[53] It has to be pointed out though that there is some evidence to suggest that this is only the case when the largest ethnic group in the state makes up less than 45% of the overall population. According to this research, if the percentage of a single ethnic group is between 45 and 90%, then the likelihood of inter-ethnic violence increases. In this case, the group is more likely to dominate over and discriminate against other, smaller ethnic groups leading to further accumulation of grievances and increase of inter-ethnic tensions (see Collier and Hoeffler, 2004, p.568; Zürcher, 2007, pp.52–3).

Similarly, in the case of Georgia, the relationship between Georgians and Abkhaz and Ossetians has not always been hostile; in fact, it has largely been characterised by relatively high rates of inter-marriage. This was particularly true in the case of South Ossetia, where reportedly about half of families were of mixed Georgian–Ossetian origin (Zverev, 1996; Cheterian, 2008, p.171). In Abkhazia too, the highest rate of inter-marriages between ethnic Abkhaz and other nationalities were with ethnic Georgians.[54]

3.3. Instrumentalism

Another prominent school of thought on ethnicity and nationalism that plays an important role in how scholars view inter-ethnic relations and analyse ethnic conflicts is instrumentalism.[55] Instrumentalism stands in stark opposition to primordialist approaches. As the name suggests, first and foremost, its proponents emphasise "the 'instrumental' nature of ethnicity" (Özkirimli, 2010, p.88; see also Devotta, 2005, p.145). Political scientist Paul Brass is often considered a classic example of this position (Özkirimli, 2010, p.89). For Brass (1991, p.8), ethnicity and nationalism are social and political constructs that are used by various elite groups as instruments to mobilise the masses in order to gain or maintain power. This remains a classic statement of instrumentalist reasoning. In the instrumentalist literature, elites are often referred to as ethnic (or political) "entrepreneurs" – a term that already suggests "a kind of commerce: … a commerce of identity" (Tilley, 1997, p.507). Through this "commerce of identity", ethnic mythologies are

[54] While there are no official statistics regarding this issue, it was mentioned in many of the interviews I have conducted. See, for instance author's interviews with a historian Giorgi (Gia) Anchabadze, who is himself from such a mixed Georgian–Abkhaz family; a Georgian filmmaker Giorgi (Goga) Khaindrava. This information was also conveyed by ethnic Georgian internally displaced persons (IDPs) Tsitso Lomaia-Dadiani and Zizi Dadiani; Nino Ninidze and Tsitso Lobzhanidze.

[55] Sometimes also referred to as "circumstantialism" or "constructivism" (Gil-White, 2001, p.516; Lustick, 2001, p.22), although some scholars differentiate between these terms (Hempel, 2004, p.254–8; Özkirimli, 2005, p.164–6). I also discuss constructivism separately and outline it in more detail below.

created, traditions are invented and are later "sold" to the masses "in the political market-place as an 'identity' to which economic and political interests can be ascribed" (Tilley, 1997, p.507).[56] According to this thinking, the study of ethnicity is the study of elite manipulation in which rational actors choose certain aspects of a group's culture, "attach new value and meaning to them, and use them as symbols to mobilise the group, to defend its interests, and to compete with other groups" (Brass, 1991, p.75; 1979, pp.40–1; see also Brown, 2004, p.281).

3.4. Rational Choice Theories of Ethnic Violence

Instrumentalist approaches to the study of ethnicity provide the starting point for rational choice theories of ethnic conflict and violence, largely based within International Relations field (Fearon, 1995b, p.380). As the name suggests, rational choice theories maintain that, while individual motivations to join the fighting may vary, they are almost always based on "rational cost–benefit calculations" (Cordell and Wolff, 2010, p.30). In line with the general claims of instrumentalism, rational choice theories argue that ethnic violence is an outcome of intentional elite machinations whose main goals are to acquire, maintain and/or further strengthen their political power.[57] In this way, elites often exaggerate the threat posed by the opposing group(s) and deliberately provoke violent incidents, later categorising such acts of violence as "ethnic". The rationale behind this is that violence often breeds violence and "has the effect … of constructing group identities in more antagonistic and rigid ways" (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, pp.846, 853; see Brass, 1991; 1997). In other words, in these accounts actors are treated as

[56] For more on the conceptualisation of instrumentalism, see also Gurr (2000, p.4); Taras and Ganguly (2006, p.12); O□zkirimli (2010, pp.88–93). For a further example of an instrumentalis statement, see, for instance Lake and Rothchild (1998, p.5).
[57] See, for instance Snyder (1993); Gagnon (1994–1995); Hardin (1995, p.143); Brown (1996); David (1997); de Figueiredo and Weingast (1999); Jones (1999, pp.117–8); Laitin (1999, p.153); Snyder and Jervis (1999, p.23); Walter (1999, p.9).

"instrumentally rational individuals" and violence is viewed as both a "means" and a "by-product" of the choices that these individuals make and the actions they take (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, p.853).

One of the main questions that arise here is – why do the public follow? If violence, instigated by elites, serves only the interests of these elites rather than the general public, then, as Fearon and Laitin (2000, p.854) inquire, "what explains popular ethnic antipathies?"; why would people support leaders who favour violence? Depending on the answers they provide to these questions and the motivating factors they outline for participation in violence, rational choice theories can be further subdivided into two main approaches – security-oriented and economic-oriented – which I discuss below in relation to the cases in Georgia.

3.4.1. (In)security Approaches

One of the most prominent rational choice theories of violence is the "security dilemma" approach that emphasises the security aspect of inter-ethnic relations. This approach has its roots in the realist school of International Relations theory and in particular the work of Robert Jervis (1978) and Kenneth Waltz (1979). In the 1990s it was further examined (and popularised) by political scientist Barry Posen (1993) in the context of ethnic conflicts.

The security dilemma approach as outlined by Posen (1993) applies one of the key International Relations concepts – "anarchy" (i.e. lack of central authority to police relations among states) – to domestic politics within states and tries to explain intra-state violence in this context. According to this view, in the midst of the breakdown of central state authority, as was the case in the former

Soviet space, the anarchy that characterises the international state system also emerges at a sub-state (domestic) level. "Domestic anarchy" first and foremost means political and economic instability, which further increases groups' feelings of insecurity about the intentions of the out-group and uncertainty about the future. In this way, people start preparing for the worst and begin arming in order to defend themselves and their group from potential future attacks. These actions, however, are most likely to be understood by their opponents as hostile, posing an imminent threat to their safety and, as a result, they might choose to attack pre-emptively in order to defend themselves. This is the security dilemma – the situation in which the fear of the possibility that the opposing group will attack first is likely to drive people to violence (Hardin, 1995, p.143; Lake and Rothchild, 1996b, pp.41, 52; Walter, 1999, pp.1–2, 5). During the security dilemma and its accompanying "spiraling behavior", war is seen as the best (and only) option to defend one's own group, becoming "a rational response" to the "fear of [potential] victimisation" (de Figueiredo and Weingast, 1999, p.294; see also Bowen, 1996, pp.8–9; Woodward, 1999, p.80).

Since the publication of Posen's work, the security dilemma approach has attracted much scholarly attention and has given way to the emergence of other security-related approaches (Cordell and Wolff, 2010, p.27). Political scientist James Fearon (1995a; 1995b; 1998), for instance, identifies other "strategic dilemmas" that may lead to violence, such as the problems of "credible commitment" – the so-called commitment problem approach. According to this, one of the main reasons ethnic groups opt for violence is the inability of either side in the conflict to convince its opponent that, in the case of a negotiated agreement (e.g. a ceasefire) requiring mutual adherence, it will not breach its terms and will credibly commit to its implementation (Fearon, 1995b, p.381; Hardin, 1995, p.143; Lake and Rothchild, 1996b, p.48).

Yet another security approach focuses on the problem of "asymmetric information" outlined by de Figueiredo and Weingast (1999). According to this view, when there is a lack of information (or contradictory information or deliberate misinformation), people cannot tell whose story to believe and whose side to take. When the stakes (i.e. the cost paid for making the wrong choice) are high, members of the group align themselves with the leadership of their own group rather than try to consider the rightfulness of competing claims. In this way, due to the uncertainty that generally characterises asymmetric information, elites are able to manipulate people's beliefs to their advantage (de Figueiredo and Weingast, 1999, pp.291, 294; see also Fearon and Laitin, 1996, p.719; Lake and Rothchild, 1996b, p.46).

Undoubtedly some of these approaches concerning security (or, rather, insecurity) issues of groups, do offer valuable insights into inter-ethnic violence. They provide an understanding of how the domestic environment in which competing groups operate, shapes actors' political behaviour and their decisions on whether to negotiate or fight. In particular, these approaches are concerned with how the political uncertainty might generate ethnic fears and lead to violence (Walter, 1999, p.2). Nevertheless, these approaches have been criticised on multiple grounds (Kaufman, 2001, pp.19–22; Cordell and Wolff, 2010, pp.26–32).

One of the problems with the security approaches is that they cannot adequately explain cases where violence is absent. For instance, why did the strategic dilemmas outlined above lead to violence in two regions of Georgia – Abkhazia and South Ossetia, while another region – Adjara, with similar institutional set-up, remained largely peaceful? Arguably, the same structural

conditions – the "emerging anarchy" (Posen, 1993) – should have had equal effect on all groups across the country.

Another criticism directed towards these approaches is that they view all matters related to inter-group relations through a "rational" lens which leaves little room, if any, for exploring other, "non-rational" elements (like myths, symbols, metaphors) that often invoke strong emotions among conflicting groups. Even though one particular emotion – fear – has occupied an important place within the security studies field, it too has "rational" roots (de Figueiredo and Weingast, 1999). In other words, proponents of the security approaches seldom search for "non-rational" sources of ethnic fears and insecurities. Lake and Rothchild (1996a; 1996b) are among the few rational choice theorists who have tried to apply these "non-rational factors" to the study of ethnic violence and consider myths and symbols as potential sources of ethnic fears. However, even though they admit that the polarisation of a society is often also due to political and historical memories, myths and emotions, they do not go into any further examination of why this might be the case. In this way, they consider these factors as secondary to more rationalist, strategic explanations (Lake and Rothchild, 1996b, pp.44, 53, 55).

Yet another major challenge faced by the security approaches is that they operate on the assumption that domestic anarchy comes first and is followed by the security dilemma. This is not always the case, however. As Stuart Kaufman (2001, p.20) argues, these approaches "have the causal chain backwards" – in ethnic conflicts it is often the security dilemma that causes anarchy, not vice versa. In the case of Georgia (and the Soviet Union in general), there is no consensus among scholars about which came first. However, evidence seems to suggest that, in

the case of Abkhazia in particular, signs of the security dilemma understood in a broad sense as the situation "in which moves on each side motivated partly by insecurity create insecurity on the other side" (Kaufman, 2006, p.55), were visible well before any indication of domestic anarchy. John Cotter (1999, p.1) calls this phenomenon "cultural security dilemma" and argues that with their emphasis on "weak states, armaments, demographics and geography" much of the security studies literature largely disregards "the 'cultural' aspects of security to ethnic groups, such as the preservation of native languages, histories and group identities". Indeed, by focusing on structural conditions that might cause or aggravate the security dilemma, many scholars impose a rather narrow time frame on their study of inter-ethnic conflicts and start their analysis from the period immediately preceding the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the outbreak of violence, i.e. from the late 1980s. In this way, they largely ignore inter-ethnic relations (and tensions) in Georgia throughout much of the twentieth century – a period that played an important role in the unfolding of Georgia's ethnic sagas.

While I agree with the proponents of the above-outlined security approaches that the fear of the "other" indeed plays a crucial role in mobilising the masses, I argue that by the late 1980s, fears and insecurities among conflicting ethnic groups in Georgia were already well established. While to many outside observers it may seem that violence often breaks out quickly and somewhat unexpectedly, this was hardly the case in Georgia. Ethnic fears and insecurities did not arise overnight – the roots of Georgia's inter-ethnic conflicts may not be "ancient", but neither are they the result only of events in the latter half of the 1980s. Security studies experts are right in pointing out that in order to address the conflicting situation one needs to consider carefully the structural conditions that create fertile grounds for the security dilemma to emerge (Woodward,

1999, p.74). However, while I share this view, I take a longer-term approach to the study of these structural conditions. In other words, I take a closer look at the *long-term processes* leading up to the events of the late 1980s and the subsequent outbreak of violence in the early 1990s in Georgia and examine inter-ethnic relations and the development of the security dilemma in a time frame of a few decades as opposed to few years.

3.4.2. Economic Approaches

According to the second set of rational choice theories, economic concerns are the primary driving force behind ethnic violence. However, there is no consensus among scholars on the "motivational structures" of why people might engage in violence for economic reasons. This has given rise to the so-called greed-versus–grievance debate within economic approaches. The former supports the idea that ethnic conflicts happen when opportunity arises and when there is an availability of material resources, while the latter argues that the main motivational factor for violence is grievance-based largely driven by economic inequalities (Zürcher, 2007, pp.45–6).

One version of the grievance-based approach sees distribution of economic resources as the main source of conflict. Statistical findings based on large-*N* cross-case comparative studies support conclusions that the poorer a society, the more likely it is to engage in violent confrontation, while wealthier societies are generally less prone to violence (Collier and Hoeffler, 1998; Fearon and Laitin, 2003). Thus, according to this approach, at a sub-state level, those regions that are poorer than average and suffer from low levels of economic development often feel disadvantaged by the centre and are more likely to seek separation – and hence to engage in violent confrontation with the state (Horowitz, 1985, pp.116–24; Zürcher, 2007, pp.45–7).

In the cases in Georgia, economic grievances featured in both the South Ossetian and Abkhazian campaigns for secession from Georgia. Some have argued that economic grievances were, in fact, the main driving force behind South Ossetia's campaign for unification with North Ossetia in the RSFSR[58] (RFE/RL, 21 December 1990, p.9). According to the South Ossetian side, dividing the small Ossetian population into two administrative units (South Ossetia in Georgia and North Ossetia in Russia) was "politically and economically absurd" in the first place (*Literaturuli Sakartvelo*, 20 October 1989, p.6). Ossetians further complained that while the budget of the Georgian SSR was increasing annually by 8–9% by the end of the 1980s, that of the South Ossetian Autonomous *Oblast* remained the same, and that living standards in the region were much lower than in the rest of Georgia (RFE/RL, 21 December 1990, p.9).

The Abkhaz grievances in this regard were rather similar. They received financial resources through the central authorities of the Georgian SSR as well and argued that they too were being economically disadvantaged by the centre. One of the often-voiced complaints was that per capita investment in Abkhazia, at only 40% of the average, was far lower than in other regions of Georgia (Zürcher, 2007, p.120). As a result, many industrial enterprises had to rely on outdated equipment which further reflected on productivity and workers' wages (Slider, 1985, pp.53–9; Shnirelman, 2001, pp.211–2). However, as Zürcher (2007, p.120) points out, while these claims were factually correct, they were "incorrectly interpreted as ethnic discrimination since Georgians were the largest ethnic group in Abkhazia and would thus be the main victims of a discriminatory policy". Although the Abkhaz maintained that ethnic Abkhaz-populated areas of

[58] Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic.

the autonomous republic were disproportionately affected by these economic disadvantages (Slider, 1985; Shnirelman, 2001).

A lengthy article that appeared in *Pravda*, the leading Soviet newspaper, in 1980, for instance, outlined some of these social and economic problems that continued to affect the "indigenous [*korennyi*] population" (i.e. ethnic Abkhaz) in Abkhazia at the time. The author maintained that part of the problem was that in a number of regions in Abkhazia, "almost half of the able-bodied population" was without permanent employment. It was argued that while the situation in the capital was improving, not much was being done to deal with unemployment among the miners in other former industrial centres in Abkhazia, where many had lost their jobs due to the decline of the coal-mining industry. As a result, they were more susceptible to the ideas of "national deviationists" and "demagogue orators", argued the author (*Pravda,* 16 August 1980, pp.2–3; see also RFE/RL, 20 August 1980, p.3). Despite these economic problems, however, Abkhazia remained one of the wealthier places, with far higher standards of living than any other region in the Georgian SSR. It served as a major resort destination (*kurort*), visited by some two million people annually, as well as a major export of citrus, tea and tobacco in the Soviet Union (RFE/RL, 20 August 1980, p.5; Zürcher, 2007, pp.47, 120–1). Thus, while South Ossetia fits the scenario outlined by grievance-based economic approaches, Abkhazia does not.

Without a doubt, economic issues were important and certainly played some role in mobilising people in both of these regions but as I argue in the coming chapters, they were by no means the most decisive factor – the view shared by other critics of these approaches too. As Anthony Smith (1992, p.62) maintains, "there is little evidence that such [economic] inequalities do

anything more than exacerbate pre-existing grievances, antagonisms, and tensions". In other words, there is little evidence that economic issues were the main driving force behind Abkhazian and South Ossetian call for secession from Georgia.

By the late 1990s a new trend appeared within the literature on economic approaches as some scholars challenged the more conventional understanding of ethnic violence as grievance-based. These approaches now made "greed" the main focus of their research.[59] Collier and Hoeffler's (1998; 2004; 2005) work has been particularly influential in refocusing scholarly attention from grievances to greed. In the earlier version of this approach, "greed" was treated more as a motivational factor. According to this view, rebel groups were motivated to engage in violence by material gains they were to receive through profiteering, for instance (Collier, 2000). In its later versions, however, "greed" was understood more as an opportunity factor and a material resource that helped to finance wars (Collier and Hoeffler, 2005). In other words, it was now believed that violent conflicts happened because people found resources to start and keep fighting (Aspinall, 2007, pp.950–1).

In the case of Abkhazia, some have argued that, while Abkhaz protests in the 1970s were "couched in terms of the need to protect Abkhaz culture," the real motivations may have been largely based on economic self-interest (RFE/RL, 26 June 1978, p.9). At the time there was a ban on exporting products grown on private plots beyond the boundaries of the Georgian SSR,[60]

[59] For more on the discussion of the "greed–versus–grievance" debate, see Aspinall (2007, p.950); Cordell and Wolff (2010, p.32).

[60] As a result, the cost for citrus in Georgia amounted to only 7 *kopeks* per kilogram, while if sold outside the Union republic the price could have been as high as 3 *rubles* – some 40 times as much (100 *kopek* = 1 *ruble*) (*Zarya*

which especially disadvantaged those whose livelihood depended on selling privately grown products. Thus, some have speculated that there might have been economic incentives at play to have Abkhazia transferred from relatively small Georgian SSR to the RSFSR where the market would have been considerably larger and more lucrative (RFE/RL, 26 June 1978, p.9). However, while it is certainly a possibility that these were motivations of some of the people involved in Abkhaz protests, it still does not explain why people would opt for violence and support something that is bound to bring more economic damage than gain. After all, as Kaufman (2001, p.19) points out, "virtually everyone in the … South Caucasus (except for a few profiteers and looters) lost [out] economically from war by every measure".

Furthermore, as will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters, while there is some evidence to suggest that many members of the paramilitary organisations that emerged in Georgia towards the end of the 1980s and early 1990s were motivated by material gain and were often engaged in profiteering and looting, an important distinction needs to be made. Many joined these groups only *after* the fighting had already begun. The so-called greed approaches therefore are better at explaining how violence is *sustained* than how it *starts*. The mobilising factor for the greater part of the masses, before violence erupted in Georgia, has not been economy-based. It would have been hard to rally people to violence only on the basis of being economically disadvantaged or around the potential material gain that the fighting might have brought in the future. After all, as illustrated by Kaufman's (2001, p.19) above-mentioned quote, the number of

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Vostoka, 23 January 1976, p.5; Derluguian, 1998, p.272). For more on this, see also author's interview with Rapiel Gelantia – mathematics schoolteacher and an IDP from Gali, Abkhazia. At the time of the interview Gelantia worked at the Parliament of Georgia in Tbilisi.

those who directly benefited from violence was relatively small compared to the number of people who lost everything they owned due to subsequent violence.

3.5. The Ethno-Symbolist Corrective?

There are some scholars who have tried to find the middle ground between primordialists and instrumentalists (“ancient hatreds” views and rational choice approaches) while raising awareness of the role of subjective elements such as myths, symbols, historical memories and emotions in the study of ethnicity, inter-ethnic relations and ethnic violence. One of the best-known approaches to have taken up this challenge is ethno-symbolism. Within nationalism studies literature its theoretical foundations can be traced back to the work of Crawford Young (1976), although its most prominent formulation has been offered by sociologist Anthony Smith (1986). While its contributions to the study of ethnicity and nationalism are widely recognised, scholars are less certain about where exactly ethno-symbolism stands in the classification of different theories and approaches. Some consider it a variation of (cultural) primordialism. In fact, in his most recent formulation of this approach, Smith (2009) also identifies it as “a cultural approach”. Others refer to it as “neo-primordialist” (Rogers, 2005, p.14), yet others cast it as a separate school of thought altogether (Özkirimli, 2010, p.143). Since it does not fit “neatly” in any one of the other schools of thought, I follow Özkirimli (2010) and place it as a separate approach, although I do recognise its close association with cultural primordialism.

Ethno-Symbolism and Violence

Ethno-symbolists reject radical primordialist views that hostility and resentment towards the “other” is inherent in ethnic groups; however, at the same time they argue against overtly

“instrumental” treatment of ethnicity, which plays a key role in their analysis. According to Smith (2009), “ethnicity … provides a vital entrée into the ‘inner world’ of the participants [in the conflicts]”. Without its study it would be impossible to understand the strong emotive power and “the often intense devotion” that ethnic belonging invokes (Smith, 2009, p.18; see also Kapferer, 1988, p.22; Ross, 2001, p.162). Thus, according to ethno-symbolist accounts, in order to explain various dimensions of inter-group relations, we need to unpack “cultural and symbolic elements of myth, value, memory and symbol” – elements which often form strong bases of ethnic identities and belonging (Smith, 2009, p.18; see also Suny, 2006, p.3).

In political science discipline, ethno-symbolist ideas feature in the closely related symbolic politics theory formulated by Murray Edelman (1964; 1971). More recently Stuart Kaufman’s (2001; 2006) work has been particularly influential in incorporating some ethno-symbolist ideas into the study of ethnic wars. While still largely operating within the realm of the security studies approaches to violence, Kaufman (2001) has applied the symbolic politics theory to the cases of violence in the post-Soviet space and has further challenged purely rationalist approaches to ethnic violence. In his now classic reading *The Modern Hatreds,* he also discusses Georgia as one of his case studies. Despite some of the criticism I outline below, the arguments I advance in this thesis are largely in line with Kaufman’s overall findings.

In the case of Georgia, Kaufman identifies ethnic mythology that justified hostility and invoked fears towards the out-group as the main source of Georgian chauvinism – which ultimately led to the outbreak of violence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In his view, Georgian myths, with their emphasis on ethnic pride – viewing Christian Georgia as “defender of the faith” in a

predominantly Muslim region, a long history of statehood and prejudice towards Abkhaz and Ossetians – are what mobilised the masses (Kaufman, 2001, pp.90–2). In other words, each side in the conflict viewed the other based on the prejudices and negative reading of intentions and past actions encoded in their groups' "myth-symbol complex". The latter is considered by ethno-symbolists as one of the main constitutive elements of an ethnic identity and refers to "the combination of ethnic myths, memories, values, and symbols [of a given group]" (Kaufman, 2001, pp.20, 25).[61]

Kaufman's emphasis on emotions and the incorporation of ethnic myths and symbols in his theoretical framework is undoubtedly a welcome sign in the field of political science that has traditionally favoured more rationalist explanations of ethnic warfare. However, when it comes to conflicts in Georgia, Kaufman's empirical analysis seems rather ambiguous and at times even misguided. One of the problems is the lack of critical engagement with Georgia's "myth-symbol complex". Kaufman is unclear about how exactly the myths he identifies as hostile prompted violence in Georgia. The development of common myths of origin and descent is an important part of any nation-building process, and various themes – such as antiquity, golden age, cultural superiority, periods of national stagnation, and national heroes – feature in most national mythologies (Smith, [1989] 1996, p.109; 2005, p.98; Özkirimli, 2010, pp.51–2). In other words, Kaufman takes the concept of "myth-symbol complex" for granted and does not examine the origins of this complicated phenomenon, never really confronting the questions of what was so peculiar about Georgian myths of antiquity and what were the sources of these hostile myths?

[61] Coined by an ethno-symbolist scholar John Armstrong (1982), the term was later taken up and developed by Anthony Smith (1986; Smith, 2009, p.25) who added two additional elements to this definition – ritual and tradition.

Simply arguing that hostile attitudes among ethnic Georgians towards ethnic minorities are "encoded" in their culture gives his explanation more of a (socio-biological) primordialist flavour (Kaufman, 2001, p.10; see Fearon and Laitin, 2000, p.861).

Neither does Kaufman really acknowledge the role of Soviet nationality policies in Georgia's conflicts – probably the single most important factor, and one that cannot be omitted from any analysis of the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In fact, as I argue, Soviet nationality policies are the "missing link" in Kaufman's analysis that further heightened conflicting groups' "myth-symbol complex" in Georgia. This is not to say that these policies were the sole source of ethnic myths that warranted prejudice and hostility towards the out-group. However, ethno-linguistic and ethno-federal hierarchy that was symptomatic to these policies certainly intensified ethnic fears among different nationalities and created "fertile soil" for the flourishing of such myths.

3.6. Constructivism

As mentioned above, in the literature on ethnicity and nationalism the main debate over the nature of ethnic identities has traditionally been centred around the two opposing scholarly camps – "primordialists" and "instrumentalists" (Smith, 1994, p.376; Özkirimli, 2010, p.50). Since the 1990s, however, with the proliferation of the constructivist talk in Western academia, increasingly the term "constructivism" has substituted, or has been used almost interchangeably, with "instrumentalism". In this thesis I discuss it as a separate school of thought, outlining what exactly constructivism is and how is it different from instrumentalism.

It is believed that "constructivism" first emerged within the disciplinary field of developmental and cognitive psychology (Young and Collin, 2004, p.378).[62] From the 1960s onwards, however, it gradually established itself as a theoretical perspective among a variety of humanities and social sciences disciplines, including sociology (Burr, 1995, p.9). Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's (1966) *The Social Construction of Reality*, emphasising the social aspects of meaning-making, has been particularly influential in this regard, considered by many as a major constructivist contribution from the field of sociology and "[t]he very first book to have the word 'social construction' in the title" (Hacking, 2000, p.24; see also Burr, 1995, p.10).

Depending on the field of study, scholarly views diverge significantly on whether "constructivism" should be considered an ontological (Fearon and Wendt, 2002; Grix, 2004) or an epistemological position (Crotty, 1998; O□zkirimli, 2005; Checkel, 2011), a general social theory (O□zkirimli, 2005; Jackson and Sørensen, 2007), or a substantive theory (Jackson and Sørensen, 2007), an analytical tool (Fearon and Wendt, 2002) or all of the above. While there is no consensus on this issue, most scholars seem to agree that there is no single "constructivist theory" as such (Fearon and Wendt, 2002). Rather, it is more appropriate to talk about constructivism as "a shared consciousness" (Gergen, 1985, p.266), and "a kind of 'family resemblance'" (Burr, 1995, p.2) that link different constructivist perspectives together. The starting point for almost all constructivist writings is the following: "the existence or character of *X* is not determined by the nature of things. *X* is not inevitable. *X* was brought into existence or shaped by social events, forces, history, all of which could well have been different" (Hacking,

[62] In this field, scholars further differentiate between constructi*vism* and social constructi*onism* depending on "whether construction is an individual cognitive or a social process" (Young and Collin, 2004, pp.375, 378). However, some authors also use these terms interchangeably (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 2009).

2000, pp.6–7). In the field of ethnicity, constructivists have argued against the notion of fixed identities and have emphasised that "the content and membership of taken-for-granted categories", such as ethnic groups, often changes and that they are constantly made and remade through various processes of social interaction (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, pp.848–9). It is this general understanding of constructivism that I employ in this thesis and discuss it in the context of identity-formation within the framework of the primordialist–constructivist debate.

How Are Identities Formed?: Constructivist Views

The main constructivist stance on the issue of ethnic violence is that it is largely due to the construction of conflicting group identities. In other words, the fear of the "other" is not an in-built characteristic of ethnicity; rather, it is socially constructed through various mechanisms (Brubaker, 2002, p. 173). I follow the footsteps of Fearon and Laitin (2000) and recognise three such mechanisms. When it comes to identity-formation, these scholars give one of the best and most concise outlines of different forms that social constructivist approaches may take. Their outline is rather unique in the sense that it transcends epistemological and methodological boundaries that often segregate different theories and approaches and instead focuses on the issues that *unite* them. In this way, what the discussion below highlights is that different constructivist approaches often significantly overlap and rely on many aspects of what are often considered its "rival" theories and approaches.

First, Fearon and Laitin (2000, p.851) identify broad structural forces – different social, economic and historical processes – as agents of social construction (see also Devotta, 2005). This approach is also referred to as "structural constructivism" in the literature (Gil-White, 1999, p.805). In the

nationalism studies field it is largely associated with the work of Benedict Anderson ([1983] 1991), Ernest Gellner (1983), Eric Hobsbawm (1983) and others, who are considered under the umbrella term of "modernism" rather than "constructivism" per se (Özkirimli, 2010). Their focus is how nations and nationalism came about and their views certainly have some constructivist basis (Tilley, 1997, p.507; Levinger and Lytle, 2001, p.176). For these authors, first came nationalism – an ideology and movement – and then a nation. In their view, like nationalism, nations are also purely modern phenomena. Forces of modernisation – processes of industrialisation, the development of "print capitalism", secular education in vernacular languages – are what created the necessary conditions for the "imagining" (Anderson, [1983] 1991) and the "invention" (Hobsbawm, 1983) of nations.

When it comes to explaining the nexus between social construction of ethnic identities and violence, however, Fearon and Laitin are quick to discard this approach. They argue that other than providing some "necessary conditions" for identity formation, these broad structural forces cannot really account for the occurrence of violence between different groups (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, p.851).

In contrast, my understanding of "structural constructivism" in this thesis and its role in the construction of (antagonistic) group identities is different. By shifting focus to institutional structures instead and in particular, Soviet nationality policies, I show just how ethno-federal structure of the Soviet Union and ethno-linguistic hierarchies inherent in the nationality policies, influenced identities in Georgia. In fact, one could argue that Soviet nationality policies were also

part of the larger processes that were to modernise the multiple and diverse societies of the Soviet Union.

Fearon and Laitin further identify "discourses" as agents of social construction. Scholarly understanding of the term "discourse" is mostly associated with "discourse analysis" in the field of International Relations, largely concerned with "the complex structures and mechanisms of socially situated language-use" (Cameron, 2001, p.7). In Fearon and Laitin's "discourse constructivism", however, "discourses" are used broadly to refer to "supra-individual things … like symbolic or cultural systems" (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, p.851). My understanding of this term is similar, and "discourses" in this thesis refer broadly to historical and cultural narratives and include ethnic myths, symbols, metaphors and memories. In this way, the understanding of this term stands close to ethno-symbolist concept of "myth-symbol complex" outlined above.

According to "discourse constructivism", identity formation is a product of the discourses that exist independently within society. Here individuals have no, or little agency and are constrained in their actions by the "inner logic" of these readily available discourses that "can set one group in opposition to another or predispose them to see the other as a threat or natural subject for violence, independent of any more material basis for hostility" (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, pp. 846, 851–2, 861).[63] However, as Fearon and Laitin emphasise, these approaches are nevertheless *constructivist* views in that they do not treat culture as "bounded", "internally coherent" or "static" and therefore, intrinsically prone to violence. As the proponents of these views argue,

[63] Due to its close association with culturalist accounts, this view is sometimes also referred to as "constructivist culturalism" (Fearon and Laitin, 2000).

discourses *can* be changed – they are essential but *malleable* properties of ethnic groups (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, pp.853, 863; see Ross, 2001, pp.166, 174). In this thesis I consider ethno-symbolist approaches under the banner of "discourse constructivism". In fact, as some have argued, even Geertzian cultural primordialism has much in common with this approach (Tilley, 1997).

In line with ethno-symbolists, I argue that one of the key factors in the construction of conflicting group identities in Georgia was the availability of certain discourses in the "cultural toolkit" of Georgians, Abkhaz, and Ossetians.[64] Indigenous myths of origin and the "guest–host" metaphor proved to be particularly conducive to violence in this regard. As I argue, these discourses significantly shaped, and constrained, the course of action both of elites and of the masses.

Fearon and Laitin also sketch out a constructivist argument with "individuals as agents of construction". Within this view, they further differentiate between "strategic action by elites" (or "elite constructivism")[65] and "strategic action 'on the ground'". According to the former, it is political, military, or cultural elites that play the key role in the construction of ethnic identities. Proponents of the latter view, on the other hand, maintain that for engendering identities individuals need not be elites, and that these identities are just as easily "produced and reproduced through the everyday actions of ordinary folk, that is, 'on the ground'" (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, p.855; see also Hempel, 2004, p.256). While there are some scholars who support

[64] I borrow the term "cultural toolkit" from Edward Aspinall (2007, p.951), who makes a similar argument in regard to the conflict in Aceh, Indonesia.
[65] As Fearon and Laitin (2000, p. 853) note, in "the pre-constructivist literature", these theories were, in fact, labelled as "elite theories of ethnic violence".

the latter view (Deng, 1995; Brass, 1997), much of the literature on ethnic conflicts remains overwhelmingly elite-centred. Individuals involved in the processes of identity construction are thus generally understood to be elites who impose newly constructed (conflicting) identities upon the masses at will (O□zkirimli, 2005, p.191; see Brass, 1991).

When the terms instrumentalism and constructivism are used interchangeably, it is largely to this actor-centred constructivist perspective that scholars refer to (Hale, 2004, p.459). Indeed, the lines between instrumentalism and elite-constructivism in particular are rather blurred. Fearon and Laitin's above-definition further highlights this point; the usage of the adjective "strategic" suggests that identity construction in this view is understood as a deliberate and conscious act (i.e., an individual rational choice). As these authors point out, "[i]n this approach [i.e., elite constructivism], the insights of a 'constructivist' approach merge with, or become hard to distinguish from, a rationalist or strategic choice approach" (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, p. 853). In this way, rationalism (instrumentalism) and (actor-centred) constructivism – the two approaches often considered to hold irreconcilable epistemological and methodological positions, especially in the International Relations field – "often yield *similar*, or at least complementary, accounts of [identity formation]" (Fearon and Wendt, 2002, p.53, emphasis in original). Generally, it is this understanding of "constructivism" as "actor-centred" that is the target of much of the primordialist and ethno-symbolist criticism.

4. Main Arguments of the Thesis

As mentioned above, by the end of the 1990s the term "primordialism" had already developed somewhat negative connotations and it was hard to imagine any scholar educated in Western

academia standing up and saying they shared primordialist views on ethnicity (Hacking, 1999, p.17).[66] In fact, many have argued that primordialist and the related "ancient hatreds" views on ethnicity and ethnic violence have been so discredited over the past few decades that the "debate" as such between primordialists and constructivists no longer even exists. Rather, as Ian Lustick (2001, p.23) maintains, what is left is a "ritualised beating of primordialist and essentialist dead horses" (see also Brubaker, 1996, p.15). In other words, despite some scholars revisiting primordialist approaches and offering new reading of it, the general mood within academia about primordialism seems to be that its views are outdated and there is simply nothing new to add in its defence (Tilley, 1997, p.500; Cordell and Wolff, 2010, p.14; Voell, 2011, p.16). In contrast, over the past two decades or so constructivism has enjoyed a "nearly hegemonic" position within the social sciences – it has become an academic "conventional wisdom" and the embodiment of "academic respectability" (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, p.847; Lustick, 2001, p.23; Brubaker, 2006, p.7).

There is little doubt that constructivist theorising has made an enormous contribution to the scholarship on ethnicity and ethnic violence. Most scholars, even van den Berghe (1995) – arguably the most radical of primordialists – now concede that ethnic identities are indeed socially constructed. "Ancient hatreds" are, in fact, often modern (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1993; Kaufman, 2001), and conflicts too are often socially constructed as "ethnic" (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, p.868). So should we be talking about primordialism at all when there are allegedly no primordialists left? Or is it time to find a new target for a renewed debate? (Gil-White, 2001, p.516; see also Lustick, 2001, p.23).

[66] See also Fischer (1999, p.473); Gil-White (2001, p.516); Phillips (2010, p.47).

As I argue, current academic scholarship might be too quick to discard all primordialist approaches as outdated. Less radical versions of primordialism (such as Geertzian cultural primordialism) give interesting insights about ethnic group formation and inter-ethnic relations. Ethno-symbolist approaches in particular (that take roots from cultural primordialism), have much to offer to the study of ethnic violence with their emphasis on myths, symbols and memories.

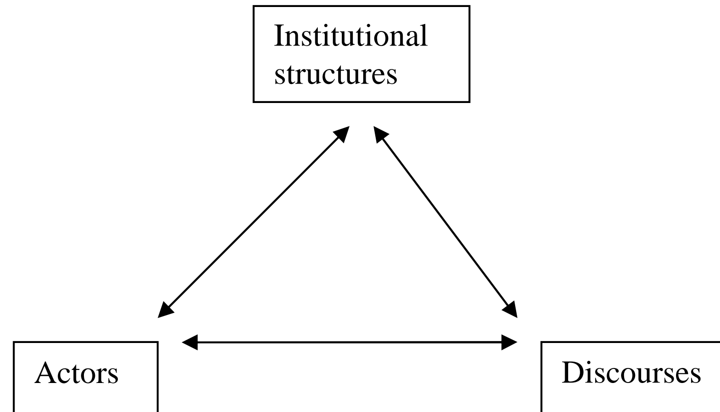
More importantly, however, it needs to be emphasised that people on the ground, directly involved in inter-ethnic relationships and affected by inter-ethnic tensions, are often themselves (socio-biological) primordialists and perceive their ethnicity and culture as natural – fixed in time and space (Gil-White, 2001, p.515).[67] In this way, as Francisco Gil-White (2001, p.515) eloquently points out, while constructivism may have established "the ontological fact" that identities are socially constructed, it may also have undermined our judgement of "local epistemologies". According to the logic of these, while constructivists may underline the fluctuating nature of "Georgian", "Abkhaz" and "Ossetian" as ethnic categories, the majority of the people who actually consider themselves as belonging to these "groups" do not view them as "free-floating social constructs" (Luczewski, 2005, p.5). Rather, for them these concepts represent "a social reality" that changes very slowly (Luczewski, 2005, p.5; see also Calhoun, 2003, pp.536, 546).

[67] For a similar argument, see also Baumann and Sunier (1995, p.6); Fischer (1999, p.473); Phillips (2007, pp.51–2; 2010, p.48).

This is a particularly important point that has been continuously overlooked in the study of ethnicity and ethnic violence. Just because ethnic identities are socially constructed does not mean they lose relevance and cannot act as powerful motivating forces to mobilise the masses. However, while most scholars would acknowledge the role of ethnicity in the mobilisation process, they seldom explore in detail the question of how exactly particular constructions of ethnic identity matter? How they contribute to the outbreak of violence? Similarly, while many scholars would recognise the role of discourses (myths, symbols, metaphors) that form important part of the "local epistemologies" (Gil-White, 2001), they are usually acknowledged either only in passing or are considered as secondary factors. For many of these scholars, to take these "primordial cultural elements" seriously would mean to accept groups' claims to "ethnic uniqueness and special needs" as valid and to study them further would mean to reinforce them and fall victim to nationalist manipulation (Tilley, 1997, p.507).

My research validates arguments that ethnic fears and hostility towards the "other", which play a significant role in the mobilisation of the masses and the eventual outbreak of violence, is not inherent in ethnic groups; rather, they are products of the processes of social construction, as argued by constructivists. As the cases of Abkhazia and South Ossetia demonstrate construction of conflicting group identities was taking place at all three levels – structural, discourse and actor. Thus, ethnic mobilisation in Georgia in the late 1980s and early 1990s cannot be explained without considering the "*relational nexus*" between all these three factors (see Figure 2).

Figure 1: Framework of Identity Formation



I consider Soviet nationality policies as playing a particularly decisive role in the construction of conflicting group identities. As I argue, the ethno-federal structure of the Soviet Union, its politicisation and institutionalisation of ethnicity laid the ground on which inter-ethnic relations played out in Georgia over much of the twentieth century. Furthermore, it was within this institutional context that rival myths of origin and competing "guest–host" metaphors operated. The interaction between these two factors – institutions and discourses – led to creation of a particular "social reality" in Georgia in which groups were largely defined in (socio-biological) primordialist terms.[68] In this way, "the choice-set of actors"[69] involved in the processes of identity construction was intrinsically shaped by what Gil-White (1999, p.815) calls "a psychology of primordially defined ethnicity". Moreover, institutional and discursive structures not only limited actors' choices but also *constituted* their very beliefs by "creating the lenses through which actors view[ed] the world" (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991, p.13).

[68] For a general constructivist view within International Relations field on the role of institutions and discourses in the construction of "social reality", see Checkel (2011, pp.10–11, 16).
[69] I borrow this term from Nee (2001).

In other words, in my analysis elites are "*boundedly*", as opposed to "*instrumentally*" rational – they identify with this "primordially defined" social reality rather than only use it instrumentally (Fearon and Wendt, 2002, p.61).[70] The concept of "instrumental rationality", on the other hand, plays a central role in rational choice explanations of ethnic violence that remain dominant in the field of ethnic conflict studies. In these accounts, actors' motivations are often taken for granted and are assumed to be guided by "self-interest". In this way, as Fearon and Wendt (2002) point out, rationalist accounts remain "agnostic" about the question of where exactly do actors' preferences come from? Thus, the underlying assumption in these approaches is that elites use ethnicity and ethnic symbols for mobilisation purposes "only because (and when) it is useful to do so" (Fearon and Wendt, 2002, pp.59, 61).

In addition, what sets the present study apart from other works on Georgia's conflicts is its historical approach to the study of these conflicts. In contrast to much of the literature on Georgia, I start my analysis from the 1950s as opposed to late 1980s or early 1990s. The "critical juncture"[71] in my analysis is the tragic events of March 1956 when demonstrators in Tbilisi were violently dispersed by Soviet troops, resulting in civilian casualties. As I argue, this incident serves as a major turning point in the development of inter-ethnic relations and plays a significant role in the construction of conflicting group identities in Georgia. In this way, the process of identity construction in my analysis is a relatively long-term process, taking place over several decades.

[70] For more on "bounded" versus "instrumental" rationality, see also Checkel (2011).
[71] I borrow the term "critical juncture" from Wimmer (2008). In the case of Georgia, scholars have also used similar terms such as "critical phase" (Wheatley, 2005) or "turning point" (Slider, 1991).

Establishing the link between identity construction and violence, however, does not signal the existence of a single constructivist *theory* of ethnic violence. Rather, as I argue, it is more appropriate (and useful) to talk about an integrated analytic *framework*, which draws upon different (even, at times, opposing) perspectives and approaches across various disciplines and fields of study, including ethno-symbolist and (cultural) primordialist approaches of ethnicity and nationalism; as well as instrumentalist and rational choice theories within nationalism studies and political science literature. As Fritz Scharpf (1997, p.37) explains, unlike "theories", "frameworks" "only provide [general] guidelines for the search for explanations". In other words, they offer "a metatheoretic language" for comparing the findings of various theories and approaches (Ostrom, 1996, pp.4–5, cited in Scharpf, 1997, p.30).[72] In this way, "frameworks" enable a researcher to make the most of the existing approaches that have much to contribute to the wider debate on identity and violence.

Before discussing empirical findings of this research in more depth, however, I turn to the discussion of the research design of this thesis and provide a detailed outline of my methodology and methods of enquiry in the next chapter.

[72] For a similar argument regarding the use and utility of "analytic models" ("frameworks") in the field of International Relations, see Singer (1961). For more on the discussion of a better analytical utility of "frameworks" as opposed to "theories" in the field of ethnic conflict studies, see Cordell and Wolff (2010, pp.2, 6, 44).

Chapter 3 – Methodology and Methods of Enquiry

1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the research design of the thesis, discussing in some depth the methodology and methods of inquiry used. It also addresses some of the ethical issues encountered during various stages of the research. Before proceeding any further, however, it needs to be explained how "methodology" and "methods" are understood in the first place. These two terms are often mistaken to mean the same thing while, in fact, they refer to two distinct phenomena (Jackson, 2008, p.131). "Methods" are generally understood as various tools that researchers use for gathering and analysing data (Bryman, 1984, pp.75–6). "Methodology", on the other hand, is about how researchers go about selecting these different tools (Jackson, 2011, p.26). In this way, research methodology is intrinsically linked to the question of epistemology. How researchers select their tools of inquiry largely depends on their epistemological position and the philosophical underpinnings of their research (Bryman, 1984, pp.75–6).

In general, two broad epistemological and methodological positions can be identified within the social sciences – positivism and interpretivism. The former has generally been associated with quantitative research methods, while the latter often provides the basis for a more qualitative research agenda.[73] Positivist approaches are based on the principles of objectivity and scientific method. Their philosophical views on how to conduct social science research resemble those of most natural sciences. In other words, according to positivist thinking, a researcher is to observe

[73] Thus, quantitative research methods are often dubbed as "positivist", while qualitative methods are referred to as "interpretive" (Wilkinson, 2006). On the other hand, some scholars use the terms "quantitative" and "qualitative methodologies" instead of "positivist" or "interpretive" (Bryman, 1984, p.77).

an event or an object of their study from the outside with minimal interference. There is little reference to what these observations might mean to the actors involved. By contrast, interpretive approaches reject the idea that the scientific empiricism of natural sciences can be transferred directly into the social world and take actors' perspectives as the point of departure for their research (Bryman, 1984, p.78; see also Schatz, 2009, pp.12–14). With its basis in the latter tradition of thought, this thesis outlines a largely interpretive research agenda and its main tools for generating and analysing data are qualitative in nature.

The term "qualitative" has generally been perceived as "non-scientific" or inherently "inferior" to "quantitative" research in social sciences, and I have often been reminded of this at various conferences and workshops I have presented throughout my PhD research process. How was I to "measure" something as elusive as identities or the impact of myths and symbols, and the emotions they evoked? These were some of the most-often posed questions. At various research-training courses, I was also offered a number of solutions to this problem, from employing quasi-experiments to using statistical analysis.[74]

These attitudes, however, are by no means surprising. As Edward Schatz (2009, p.1) has pointed out, in the field of political science, as well as in many other social science disciplines, much of the scholarship continues to suffer from a rather narrow definition of what constitutes "legitimate research methodology". It is widely believed that quantitative methods are less susceptible to "ideological indoctrination, political preferences, and personal bias" (Souleimanov, 2013, p.18)

[74] For more on quasi-experiments, see Yin (2009).

and should therefore be regarded as "superior", generating better-quality data and producing better analysis.

Within the political science discipline, the study of causality, for instance, has generally been relegated to the comparative politics subfield, relying heavily on large-*N* cross-country datasets. The main aim of this research has been to test the effect an independent variable (in this case construction of identities) has on a dependent variable (occurrence of inter-ethnic violence) using quantitative, mainly statistical analysis. In fact, it seems that, even when scholars acknowledge the scientific "value" of qualitative methods, they use them for "the purposes of a 'quantitative worldview'", generating data that can later be "reduced to quantities and subjected to statistical tests" (Schatz, 2009, p.2).[75] However, it is this point that also serves as one of the main problems of statistical approaches – they do require a certain degree of reductionism in order to statistically measure and compare the objects of their study (in this case identity construction and violence). In so doing, while statistical analysis may be able to point out a linkage between a given factor and an outcome, it is generally unable to shed more light on the mechanisms that would explain this linkage itself. In other words, it is less clear about *how* a particular factor matters as it fails to highlight exactly "which mechanisms actually cause this outcome" (Zürcher, 2007, pp.43–4).[76]

In this way, quantitative approaches are not particularly helpful if we were to take an historical, process-based approach to the question of *how* violence "came about" in Georgia and provide an in-depth examination of the development of inter-ethnic relations over the course of several

[75] For one of the most recent examples of this work, see a review article by Toft (2014).
[76] For a similar criticism of this type of research, see also Suny (2006, p.3); Schatz (2009, p.2); Cordell and Wolff (2010, p.35); Souleimanov (2013, pp.18-19).

decades, as is the aim of this thesis. Thus, I use qualitative methods, such as interviews, archival work, political ethnography and historical process-tracing that offer a more nuanced, case-specific context and provide a fuller picture of the issues under investigation (Schatz, 2009, p.2; see also de Vaus, 2001, p.231).

2. Case Studies

Due to the nature of the research undertaken, case study was chosen as the most appropriate research design for this study. Generally, case studies provide a researcher with an opportunity to engage fully with the above-mentioned qualitative methods. Most importantly, however, they enable a researcher to access people directly involved in the events under consideration (Yin, 2009, p.11).

One question that is often raised when dealing with case study research is what exactly is meant by a "case". According to de Vaus, a "case" usually refers to the object or a phenomenon under investigation. "It is the unit of analysis … about which we collect information … [and] … that we seek to understand as a whole" (de Vaus, 2001, p.220). Robert Yin (2009) further differentiates between "holistic" and "embedded" case study research designs to distinguish between cases as a whole and cases that consist of multiple levels (or components) respectively. In this way, the current study can be considered an embedded case study with two sets of units of analysis being the cases of violence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia in the early 1990s that form

the constituent elements (or “embedded units”)[77] of a larger unit – the case of violence in Georgia.

3. Historical Process Tracing

Within the case study research design, I employ historical process tracing as one of the main analytical tools to address the overall question of this study – how violence came to happen in Georgia – and to explain the mechanisms that link construction of conflicting group identities to the outbreak of violence. My main concern is the issue of motivation: how were groups mobilised for violence? What made violence socially acceptable? In other words, to use the constructivist language, how was a motivation for violence constructed? These are some of the questions posed in this thesis, and answering them entails tracing the process of how Georgian–Abkhaz and Georgian–Ossetian relations developed over the course of several decades.

Increasingly scholars have turned to process tracing in order to observe and analyse “trajectories of change and causality”, providing a detailed description of a particular event or a situation at every step of this trajectory (Collier, 2011, p.823; see also Checkel, 2008, p.115). While I am not the first to pose the foregoing questions or use process tracing in order to examine them,[78] the research I undertake differs from the previous body of work by focusing on the *historical* aspect of “process tracing”. The time period I investigate and over which I trace the process of the development of inter-ethnic relations is considerably longer than in much of the scholarship on Georgia. Most scholars start tracing the process of group mobilisation only from the mid- or late-

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[77] The term used by de Vaus (2001, p.220).

[78] See among others Kaufman (2001); Zürcher (2007).

1980s. However, by this time, I argue, the groups have already been mobilised and conflicting identities are already largely in place. By contrast, the historical process tracing I employ helps reconstruct the mechanisms of mobilisation among conflicting groups in the post-Stalinist era in Georgia (i.e., over the course of several decades). Using various sources outlined below, I try to map out how actors' views and choices unfolded within the institutional structures of the Soviet Union and how these structural factors "both empowered and constrained them" (Kubik, 2009, p.32).[79]

The rather ahistorical approach to ethnic violence, however, is symptomatic of much of the political science literature. Those few who make use of history, on the other hand, do so by converting it into what Francis Lieber ([1858] 1993, p.23) has called "continuous statistik" (cited in Oren, 2006, p.217). Indeed, over the past few decades, scholars have developed large data sets on inter- and intra-state wars, such as the Correlates of War (COW) project, which started in 1963, largely based on data gathered from historical sources on inter-state conflicts since 1815.[80] However, as Ido Oren (2006) correctly points out, the use of history in these cases is rather instrumental and serves the purpose of producing a multitude of quantitative data and analysis on the causes and consequences of war. In this way, by "systematically quantifying" historical facts and events and by turning them into "brute data", many within the political science field believe that they can be rid of subjectivity and use "these data to verify 'empirical laws'" (Oren, 2006, pp.217, 226).

[79] Petersen (2001) uses a similar method to study the patterns of resistance across Eastern Europe.
[80] For more on COW see Singer and Small (1972).

Thus, one of the aspects that sets the current study apart from other writing on the same subject is its “qualitative” and “ethnographic” use of history.

4. Political Ethnography

Alongside a historical approach, this study also differs from others on Georgia’s conflicts by using what interpretive scholars have labelled “political ethnography”. In general, ethnographic approaches have been associated with the field of anthropology, where it has almost exclusively been linked to participant observation. At its most basic, participant observation means “immersion in a community”, the understanding behind it being that “one must be ‘neck-deep’ in a research context to generate knowledge based on that context” (Schatz, 2009, p.5). However, in this thesis I employ a second, less common understanding of the term, according to which ethnography is viewed as

> a *sensibility* that goes beyond face-to-face contact. It is an approach that cares – with the possible emotional engagement that implies – to glean the meanings that the people under study attribute to their social and political reality. Thus, while some scholars equate ethnography with participant observation, one may nonetheless abstract *from* participant-observation qualities that inform a more general ethnographic sensibility. (Schatz, 2009, p.5, emphasis original)

It is this “broad sensibility” towards the subject(s) of the investigation and the awareness of the socio-political and cultural setting in which research takes place that provide the building blocks of political ethnography. In this way, political ethnography goes beyond artificially imposed boundaries that often exist between different phases and sites of research, such as the “fieldwork” phase (the “data collection” phase) or the “writing-up” phase (the “data analysis” phase) (Schatz, 2009, pp.6, 16; Wilkinson, 2013, p.391). Sensibility and awareness are not restricted “to the

process of on-site data collection" only (Schatz, 2009, p.6, emphasis original). In other words, practising political ethnography implies more than using certain tools of inquiry; first and foremost, it means incorporating certain epistemological commitments in one's research agenda (Schatz, 2009; Walsh, 2009; Yanow, 2009).

In the case of the current study, these epistemological-methodological commitments are intrinsically rooted in interpretivism. For interpretivists, "letting the subjects speak" is part and parcel of the research inquiry (Hopf, 2002, p.23). In order to understand how violence became possible in Georgia, and how institutional structures and discourses (whether myths, symbols or metaphors) shaped group preferences, elite decision-making, and mass political behaviour, we need to listen to what various actors in Georgia's conflicts have to say about these processes. How elites and ordinary citizens explain and make sense of these conflicts and justify their actions both to themselves and to outsiders can reveal a great deal about the deeply held cultural and historical narratives of a group that may favour a certain course of action, including support for violence (Ross, 2001, pp.165–6).[81]

In order to "uncover" these group narratives I generate and analyse data from a number of primary sources including ethnographic interviews, news and documentary film footage, public speeches, various textual sources such as newspapers, memoirs, diaries and letters, archival

[81] Ted Hopf (2002) calls this endeavour "sampling of identities". Although he uses various textual and other sources, unlike this thesis, ethnographic interviews do not play an important role in his research. In this way, it seems more appropriate in his case to talk about uncovering identities rather than narratives per se (see Hopf, 2002, pp.33–7). Others have also used other terms, such as "measuring identities". See among others, Abdelal et al. (2009); Brady and Kaplan (2009); Sylvan and Metskas (2009).

documents and official government records, as well as diplomatic correspondence from the Soviet period.

Since much of the current study concerns the examination of past events detailing the history of inter-ethnic relations in Georgia, the use of political ethnography also applies to the study of these historical events. Indeed, analysing group narratives does require "immersion" in a group's history and culture. In this way, historical process tracing and political ethnography work in tandem and could even be combined into what Jan Kubik (2009, pp.31–2) calls an "ethno-historical" approach.

5. Interviews

One of the main primary sources for gathering empirical data for this research is ethnographic interviews conducted during various field trips to Georgia over more than eight months. Initial preliminary fieldwork was conducted in August–October 2010, followed by the main phase of field research in August 2011 to January 2012 and a number of follow-up field trips in August 2012 and April 2013. During this period up to 50 interviews were conducted.[82] I also use data generated from five telephone interviews conducted over the summer of 2006 during previous research carried out at the University of Edinburgh[83] (for a detailed list of all the interviews, see Appendix 2).

[82] In one case, a respondent preferred to answer a set of 14 semi-structured questions in writing instead.
[83] In one case, a respondent submitted answers to five semi-structured questions in writing (via e-mail). Of these five interviewees, three were interviewed again in person in 2010 and 2011.

During the preliminary fieldwork in 2010 a list of potential respondents was created, which subsequently grew significantly and towards the end numbered over 250 people (excluding IDPs). The fact that fieldwork was conducted in my hometown of Tbilisi meant that I already had a significant network, which helped greatly in identifying and contacting relevant respondents. Snowball sampling was recognised as the most effective means of gaining access and was used as the main means of developing a research sample; however, every effort was made to include among these samples members from different segments of society. Other than few exceptions, it was I who made the initial contact with potential respondents, inquiring about the possibility of interviewing them. In other cases, I was introduced by someone they knew and trusted.

A significant number of interviews were with the political and military elites – people who were directly and actively involved in the national movement of Georgia and political developments in the country in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as well as military personnel directly engaged in violent conflicts in the early 1990s. Since much of the scholarly analysis on the conflicts in Georgia is based mostly on official or elite sources, I made every effort to include among the respondents not only top-level political and military decision-makers but also a wide range of people from across society. Among these were members of the intelligentsia, mid-level government officials, military commanders and officers, student activists who participated in the national movement, journalists who covered these conflicts at the time, and IDPs. Expert interviews were also conducted with several Georgian and foreign academics and political analysts working on the issues concerning ethnic conflicts and inter-ethnic relations in Georgia.

As Darren Lilleker (2003, p.210) points out, one of the most important, and challenging, aspects of interviewing was "to gain the trust of the interviewee[s] and encourage them to talk freely and openly". I therefore did my best to ensure that the respondents were comfortable in the surroundings and felt safe to express their views. Almost all the interviews were conducted in a private setting, either at respondents' homes or in their offices.[84] With a few exceptions, interviews were one-on-one. In the case of the IDPs, interviews were often conducted with several members of their family present. In addition, there were three instances in which I conducted interviews with more than one respondent at a time.

Every interview started with a general introduction explaining my work, its purpose, why the particular respondent was important to the research and how the interview material would be used afterwards. Respondents were made aware of issues concerning confidentiality and permission was sought in relation to disclosing their identities. In the early stages of interviewing, I noticed that many respondents inquired about who I had already interviewed. I therefore started incorporating this information in subsequent interviews, mentioning in the introduction that I was interviewing people across the political and social spectrum. In her work on civil war in El Salvador, Elisabeth Wood (2003, p.40) justifies using the same strategy, arguing that this information was important for respondents' informed consent since it helped them make judgements about the information they shared with the researcher. In my case, an additional rationale for doing this was to avoid coming across as favouring one side or the other.[85] My

[84] Only on two occasions were interviews recorded in public places.

[85] Since my respondents were representing the Georgian side of the conflict, this concerned more the intra-group violence in Georgia in the early 1990s between supporters of President Zviad Gamsakhurdia and the Military Council that came to power after his ousting.

willingness to talk to and listen to various "voices" involved in and affected by these conflicts was viewed by many respondents as a sign of acceptance of different points of view and seemed to increase their trust in me.

Although no material incentives were offered for interviews, in most cases people were enthusiastic to meet with me and discuss the issues at hand. This was particularly true in the case of the IDPs, and those respondents who were no longer active in political or public life and were therefore interviewed far less either by journalists in Georgia or foreign analysts conducting research on Georgia. The fact that I was working on my PhD degree also seemed to have a positive impact on many respondents, especially those that were usually very hard to get hold of and rarely gave interviews. Some of them held PhDs themselves and came into politics from academia. A number continued their academic work up to the present time. Thus, for them, giving an interview to a young researcher and in this way helping with her research was seen more as a collegial thing rather than as doing a favour. In fact, some respondents even pointed out to me that they disliked journalists and the only reason they agreed to be interviewed was that I was a researcher and not "after a sensational story". Instead, they viewed me as someone who was interested in finding out "the truth" and "what had happened in reality". In this way, many of them often claimed and assured me that they were confiding in me information that they had never voiced before and that they would never dare disclose such information to a journalist or an "outsider".

Furthermore, the fact that I was doing my degree at a Western university, my thesis was being written in English and my research was aimed at a Western audience also seemed to act as an

incentive for some respondents to give an interview. The reasoning behind this, as some of them explained, was that it was considered of extreme importance "to get the message across" and to let the world know the Georgian version of the story. Many also expressed readiness to be contacted again in the future. On several occasions respondents also shared their private archives with me, giving me access to newspapers (such as special issues of political party publications that were not distributed among the wider public), personal correspondence (confidential notes, diaries and letters) and copies of official records and documents, as well as film footage.

Interviews ranged from semi-structured to more informal and conversational. Most, however, were biographical (life history) interviews. Even though I had a number of semi-structured questions that served as a guide, respondents were often asked open questions and were encouraged to speak freely about the issues they found most important. There were no time restrictions on the interviews (at least not from my side). As a result, nearly all the interviews were lengthy, some lasting up to 8 hours (without interruption).

However, conducting in-depth interviews is not what sets this study apart from the already existing body of literature on this topic. Rather, it is the use of ethnographic approaches. In fact, one of my main criticisms of much of the current scholarship on Georgia's conflicts is the lack of such approaches. Researchers often turn to interviews but, as mentioned above, they mostly do so in order to enrich their mixed methods research designs,[86] in which case they usually "seek to mine these interviews for particular information rather than insider meanings and perspectives"

[86] On mixed-methods research see, among others Fielding and Schreier (2001); Greene, Lehn and Goodyear (2001); Brannen (2005).

(Schatz, 2009, p.9). Indeed, while many scholars writing on conflicts in Georgia use interviews as methods of data collection, they usually do so without much sensitivity to the viewpoints of the people they interview. The latter are often depicted (and dismissed) as overtly nationalistic (or even outright lunatic, as is the case with some members of the national movement) (Suny, [1988] 1994). On the contrary, however, "taking people's worldviews seriously" (Schatz, 2009, p.13) is the starting point for the current study. After all, as I argue, it is these worldviews that lie at the very core of inter-ethnic conflicts in Georgia.

6. Methodological and Ethical Issues

As is the case with almost all research, especially that involving fieldwork, a number of practical, methodological and ethical issues emerged while conducting this research. While some of the methodological issues concerning the use of interpretive methodology and ethnographic approaches have already been outlined above, albeit in passing, this section discusses some of the further challenges that I encountered while undertaking this research.

One such issue was the timing of my fieldwork, which coincided with preparations for parliamentary and presidential elections in Georgia in October 2012 and October 2013 respectively. While the main phases of my fieldwork took place in 2010 and 2011, during this pre-election period Georgian society seemed increasingly polarised according to political beliefs and loyalties, making the conditions for interviewing (especially with the political elites) even more difficult. Even though the current study does not focus on contemporary issues of inter-ethnic relations in Georgia, some respondents approached this topic with caution. This was the

case mostly with respondents holding higher positions of power or working for government agencies.

Another important methodological issue that arose was the issue of memory. In my interviews, I often inquired about the socio-political situation in Georgia before the outbreak of violence in the early 1990s, asking questions about people's attitudes towards different ethnic groups as well as the history of violence and the sequence of events. Analysis of this data, however, which relies heavily on oral-history interviews (as does the current study), raises some serious and difficult questions about the issue of interpretation (Wood, 2003, p.33). Among other scholars, Wood has noted that "memories" of the same events held by various people she had interviewed in El Salvador tended to be significantly different. She found that the narratives of supporters of opposing groups were generally in line with their political beliefs and loyalties (Wood, 2003, p.38). Similar processes were observed during my interviews in Georgia.

However, the fact that the topic of discussion was historical helped in the sense that people involved in these conflicts felt much more "detached" from the events that were unfolding in Georgia back in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In this way, they seemed able to talk and discuss some of the issues more freely and openly. They now looked at and talked about these events as "outsiders" with a more global perspective. As many of them agreed, they would not have been able to do the same in the 1990s, when Georgia was still emerging from the rubble of the Soviet Union. Many also admitted that they were now much more critical of their own actions and questioned the validity of some of the decisions they had made at the time.

On the other hand, the main question (and criticism) directed towards interviewing as a method of scientific inquiry is, of course, when it comes to people's attitudes and motivations for past actions and decisions, how do we know that claims made in interviews are not "ex-post rationales" and that the real reasons do not lie elsewhere (Wood, 2003, pp.38–9)? More importantly, however, even if individuals do not intend to deceive their interviewer deliberately, can human memory be trusted (Markus, 1986, p.38; Kolstø, 2002, p. 26)? The short answer to this question is no, or at least not entirely. As Gregory Markus (1986, p.29) pointed out in the 1980s,

> if 30 years of survey research has determined anything, it is that for most people most of the time … it is quite enough … to provide interviewers with some sense of what their *current* issue attitudes are, let alone recall what their dispositions might have been many years ago. (emphasis original)

Based on the study of respondents' political attitudes over a 9-year period, Markus (1986, p.30) has further argued that people's recollections about their past attitudes are "strongly biased toward their current ones". In other words, present attitudes inevitably influence recollections about the past, even though respondents themselves may not always be aware of these shifts in attitude. It seems that, once these shifts occur, "an individual's cognitive autobiography is rewritten so as to render the changes invisible" (Markus, 1986, p.41). There is thus strong evidence to suggest that, whether done deliberately or not, how people remember certain past events or their previous political attitudes and motivations is inevitably shaped and influenced by political, social and cultural processes taking place in the present (Wood, 2003, pp.31–2, 34, 39).

In the case of Georgia, things have been further exacerbated by the most recent outbreak of violence in South Ossetia in 2008, which turned into an inter-state war between Russia and Georgia, memories of which are still very much alive and fresh in Georgian society. Therefore, in order to avoid any confusion, at the beginning of each interview I made sure that my respondents had a very clear idea about the time frame of the topic of discussion. I explained that the current research concerned the initial outbreaks of violence in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and not the subsequent intermittent violence or the August 2008 war. Nevertheless, I was well aware that the respondents' memories were, without doubt, further shaped by subsequent experience of socio-political and economic changes[87] in Georgia over the two decades and, most importantly, by the events of 2008 and their aftermath. After all, conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia remain highly contentious and are one of the most, if not *the* most, sensitive and politically charged topics in Georgia to this day.

Yet another important issue concerned the issue of bias. While doing research – whether in the field or analysing data – I was acutely aware of my nationality as a Georgian and the implications this might have for my interview results, the data I generated and the way I was analysing it. On the one hand, being able to conduct interviews in my home country and in my native language (almost all interviews were conducted in Georgian) had obvious benefits. There was no need to use an interpreter, which made the whole process of communication between me and my respondents a lot easier and reduced the danger of missing certain subtleties in the data generated, which might have been the case if I were a non-native speaker.

[87] Besides the August 2008 war, another major political event in Georgia since the early 1990s was the "Rose Revolution" of 2003, in which Eduard Shevardnadze, who had been in power since 1992, stepped down as President of Georgia amid mass protests following fraudulent parliamentary elections.

Furthermore, while I cannot know for sure whether in any other case my respondents would have provided me with a different account of events or a different version of their stories, as an ethnic Georgian I was often viewed as an "insider", since most of my interviewees were themselves ethnic Georgians. At the same time, however, I was perceived as someone with an "outsider's" perspective – I was a Georgian living abroad. In this way, I was both "familiar" enough and sufficiently detached from Georgia's "everydayness" in order to be trusted.

On the other hand, being ethnic Georgian also meant that I could not gain access to Abkhazia and South Ossetia and was unable to conduct similar ethnographic research there. This significantly limited the scope of my research and remains one of the biggest limitations of this study. As a result, I had to focus my research solely on the Georgian side and look at the construction of conflicting group identities among ethnic Georgians and from an ethnic Georgian perspective.

7. Beyond Interviewing: Other Sources of Data

One solution to some of the methodological issues outlined above was triangulation. I cross-reference data collected from interviews using various other sources, including first-hand accounts published in Georgian- and Russian-language newspapers at the time. My focus was on newspapers that targeted distinct segments of society and had some of the largest circulations in the country. In addition, I have also conducted extensive archival work at the former Party Archive of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia (*sakartvelos shss arkivi (II)*). This material has been particularly useful in order to observe how inter-ethnic relations unfolded in Georgia during Soviet rule. I have used these sources to explore some of the less-

studied aspects of Georgian–Abkhaz relations, for instance – such as the 1956 and 1978 protests in Tbilisi, and the 1957, 1965, 1967 and 1977–8 protests in Abkhazia.

I further cross-check newspaper and archival sources from the Soviet period with Western media reports such as material from the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) Research Institute.[88] In addition, I use diplomatic cables of the United States Embassy in the Soviet Union. The 37 documents from this source concern developments within the Soviet Union in 1989–91, including Georgia and especially the conflict in South Ossetia. These documents, held at the National Security Archive at George Washington University in the U.S., were recently declassified and were released to the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI) in Georgia. I am one of the very first researchers to be able to use this material.[89]

Furthermore, I use material provided by two documentary programmes that have appeared on Georgian television in recent years. *Georgia – Modern History* is a series of 24 documentary programmes authored by historian Toma Chagelishvili and aired on Rustavi 2 between January 2001 and 2010. Another series, *History*, comrpises 32 documentary programmes by journalist Tatia Pachkoria and aired on Georgian public TV broadcaster 1 Arkhi between 16 February 2010 and 17 February 2011. I have found these programmes particularly useful, since they provide rare film footage of some of the important events of the time as well as speeches made by members of the national movement at various demonstrations and public rallies. They also feature interviews

[88] I further contacted Elizabeth Fuller, who authored many of these reports on Georgia in the 1970s and 1980s, in order to inquire about her sources and methods of inquiry at the time.
[89] In order to express my appreciation to the IDFI for allowing me to work with these documents, I provided a written summary of each that could be made available online for general public use.

with members of the public, including ethnic Abkhaz and Ossetians, which shed some light on public opinion on many aspects of inter-ethnic relations in Georgia in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Two further documentary films – *America In One Room* (2007), directed by David Kandelaki, and *Absence of Will: A Journey Through Georgia's Conflict Zones* (2009), directed by Mamuka Kuparadze, also provided some interesting insights into these conflicts. Elite interviews featured in these documentaries presented a further opportunity to cross-reference information I was given while interviewing the same people.

8. First-Person Research and the Role of the Researcher

Nevertheless, despite triangulation, some of the ethical issues outlined above point to broader methodological questions that concern the role of the researcher in the production of knowledge. The answers to these questions largely depend on one's epistemological position. While arguably all research is first-person in the sense that it is conducted by individuals, depending on how researchers position themselves in the research environment and how they view their role in the knowledge-generating process, some downplay the importance of the first-person "I" (Schatz, 2009, pp.15–6). In his discussion of ontology in the field of International Relations, Patrick Jackson (2008) labels this position as "dualism". According to this perspective, it is possible for a social scientist to become "merely a neutral conduit for 'the facts'" and generate knowledge that can be detached from the social setting in which it is produced (Jackson, 2008, p.132). This is in line with the positivist epistemology outlined above. By contrast, proponents of the opposing position of "monism" argue that researchers bring their personal characteristics and experiences to the forefront and acknowledge their impact on the research process (Jackson, 2008, p.133; see also Jackson, 2011). From a monist perspective, a researcher is "both a source of primary data

and a sense maker" (Wilkinson, 2013, p.391). This view is premised on the understanding that there is "no neutral, value-free way of adjudicating between textual readings or judgements" (Oren, 2006, p.226). It is therefore almost impossible to separate a researcher and the subjects of her research. As Schatz (2009, p.15) points out, "[t]o wish that it were otherwise is to cling to a naïve and outdated notion of science. For the monist, any truth-claim is necessarily 'partial'; one cannot metaphorically check one's partiality at the door".

With its basis in the interpretive research agenda, the underlying thinking for the current study is also monist, and it is the acknowledgement of the undeniable "partiality" and "subjectivity" of a researcher that lies at the forefront of using the first-person "I" in the current study. For mainstream political and other social scientists, however, "such subjectivity is intolerable" (Oren, 2006, p.226). In many of their works, the first-person "I" is often pushed into the background or is muted altogether (Schatz, 2009, p.16). While many scholars recognise the value of "fieldwork-based research" and use various qualitative methods, including face-to-face interviews, they mostly do so rather instrumentally. In other words, for many of them, conducting fieldwork is "an exercise in 'collecting' the *required* data", the "right" type of data that "fits" with their already set theoretical frameworks and produces largely generalisable, explanatory theories (Wilkinson, 2013, pp.389, 393, emphasis added). Thus, while many concede that each case of ethnic violence is unique in its own way, scholars largely view empirical material gathered from their case studies as something that needs to be further "decanted into … theoretical containers" (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p.443). In other words, many political scientists aspire to produce empirically grounded knowledge but, more often than not, they prioritise theory over empirics and favour

"'expert' forms of knowledge over local accounts" (Wilkinson, 2013, p.391; see also Schatz, 2009, p.14).

In the cases of violence in Georgia, for instance, many have used various theories outlined in Chapter 2 as their guides in the field and have been able to find evidence that would be fully compatible with their "theoretical containers" and would support their hypothesis (Wilkinson, 2013, p.394). In doing so, however, many have also lost sight of the "local epistemologies" (Gil-White, 2001) – how locals, people on the ground who participated in and/or were directly affected by these conflicts, felt about and understood them. In this way, one of the main goals of this study is to offer new ways of seeing Georgia's conflicts by engaging with and paying due attention to these local interpretations and understandings of ethnic violence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and show how they are embedded in, and shaped by, the historical and cultural context.[90]

[90] According to Schatz (2009, p.15), this is the main aim of any monist ethnographic study.

Chapter 4 – The Soviet Legacy: Institutions and the Construction of Conflicting Identities

1. Introduction

For much of the twentieth century the Soviet nationality question remained at the margins of Sovietology. It was either treated as "ideological facade" with little or no implication for the "reality" of socio-political life in the Soviet Union, or was discarded altogether (Brubaker, 1996, p.37). However, since the collapse of the USSR, the nationality question has become one of the most hotly debated topics and has been covered extensively by scholars from various disciplines. Despite the existence now of a substantial body of literature on this topic, some questions regarding certain aspects of the Soviet nationality policies continue to puzzle historians as well as political scientists. Many within and outside academia have argued that it was these policies that laid the foundations for inter-ethnic tensions across the Soviet Union resulting in violence in some parts of the country in late 1980s and early 1990s as the USSR fell apart. Among others, Rodolfo Stavenhagen (1996, p.89) is convinced that the reasons behind violent conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia are "intimately related to the way ethnic and national identities have been constructed" in the Soviet Union (see also Saparov, 2010, p.100).[91]

The main question this chapter will answer is – how did institutional structures influence identities in Georgia? The focus is on various aspects of the Soviet nationality policies, including the ethno-federal structure of the Soviet Union, and their role in the construction of antagonistic ethnic identities. This chapter also acts as a source of background to the thesis, providing

[91] Many in Georgia also share this view. See, for instance, author's interview with political scientist Giorgi (Gia) Tarkhan-Mouravi.

substantial background information on the cases under review. By tracing the process of evolution of Soviet nationality policies over several decades, I provide a detailed outline of how ethnic differences evolved in Georgia and how they ended up becoming hierarchical. By simultaneous institutionalisation of ethnicity at state, sub-state (group) and individual (personal) levels, the Soviet Union normalised the existence of multiple ethnic and linguistic identities across its vast territory. However, it not only celebrated these identities but also divided them into ethno-territorial and ethno-linguistic hierarchical categories. By territorialising identities and assigning them the status of "titular" nationalities,[92] the Soviet Union embedded within its state structures and institutions a notion that certain groups deserved special status and treatment – a notion, as I argue, that proved to be one of the most important sources of inter-ethnic tensions in Georgia. Most importantly, these policies shaped the very understandings of ethnicity and ethnic group belonging, and influenced the way Georgians, Abkhaz, and Ossetians perceived one another. In this way, Soviet institutional structures not only had a constraining effect on actors' political behaviour (both elites and the masses), but also constituted their interests (Brubaker, 1996, pp.23–4).[93]

Institutionalisation of ethnicity in Georgia resulted in the creation of three autonomous entities (Abkhazia, Adjara and South Ossetia). Since Abkhaz and Ossetians belonged to ethnic and

[92] "Titular" nationality is a direct translation from the Russian term *titulnaya natsionalnost* (or *titulnaya narodnost*). However, in essence, *natsionalnost* here refers to *ethnic* nationality rather than civic understanding of nationality per se (i.e., citizenship). Generally, "titular" nations also provided titles to the ethno-territorial units they represented (Brubaker, 1996, p.31; Marat, 2008, p.17).

[93] Brubaker (1996) is one of the few scholars who *explicitly* outlines a similar argument in regards to the role of institutions in the former Soviet Union. In this way, he also utilises analytical tools offered by neo-institutionalist school in sociology. While Zürcher (2007, pp.65–6) also discusses the cases of violence in the Caucasus region in light of the neo-institutional framework, his research is oriented towards more rational-choice institutionalism of political science (so-called actor-centred institutionalism).

linguistic groups different from Georgians, their identities were territorialised and granted the status of titular nationalities within their own autonomous territories. The case of Adjara was rather different – in fact, it was quite a unique case in the Soviet Union, created on the basis of a religious identity rather than being based on any distinct ethno-linguistic characteristics.[94] Adjars are ethnic Georgians and the majority of them speak Georgian as a native language. However, unlike most ethnic Georgians in the rest of the country, who predominantly practice Orthodox Christianity, due to a long history of Ottoman rule many Adjars are Muslim (Aves, 1996, p.160). Since the only differentiating feature between Adjars and Georgians was religion rather than ethnicity or language, they were not classed as a titular nationality of their autonomous republic. As a result, Georgia hosted only three different titular nationalities within its state borders (Georgians, Abkhaz and Ossetians). What this meant in practice is that alongside state-like institutions, Abkhaz and Ossetians developed their own counter-elites and a strong sense of national identity and entitlement. In this way, Soviet institutional structure provided these minority groups with both the motives and the means for seeking secession from Georgia.

In the coming sections I first provide some brief historical background on Georgia before its incorporation into the Soviet Union. I further outline some of the key issues that the Bolsheviks[95] faced when it came to administering the vast territories of the former Tsarist Russian Empire. I then turn to detailed examination of several key aspects of Soviet nationality policies. I start by

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[94] The other autonomous unit that was created based on a religious identity was the Jewish Autonomous *Oblast*, established within the RSFSR in 1934.

[95] The Bolshevik and the Menshevik factions emerged as a result of a split within the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) in 1904. The two names are derived from Russian words *bolshinstvo* ("majority") and *menshinstvo* ("minority"). The Russian branch of the Bolshevik Party, headed by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870–1924), would later become known as the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). I use the term Bolshevik(s) when referring to the earlier period of the Soviet Union.

mapping out the process of the so-called *korenizatsiya*.[96] My focus is on those aspects of ethnicity that were particularly targeted for politicisation, such as territory and language. I discuss at some length the privileged status of titular nationalities and what it meant for different nationalities in Georgia, the issue of demographics and the policies of resettlement that altered the ethnic composition of autonomous territories, and the issue of Russification, which became particularly significant in Georgia in the post-Stalinist period. I also consider various shifts that the Soviet nationality policies went through and how these changes (or inconsistencies) affected inter-ethnic relations in Georgia. Finally I discuss some of the unintended consequences of these policies and summarise the main findings of this chapter.

2. Georgia before the Soviet Union: Brief Historical Background

Due to its strategic geographic location in the south of the Caucasus Mountains, occupying some 69,700 square kilometres (26,911 square miles), what is now known as Georgia has often been considered a bridge between Europe and Asia, and where Christianity shared a spiritual frontier with Islam (Diuk and Karatnycky, 1993, p.141). Attracting people from all over the world, it has been a place "where cultures have crossed and clashed for millennia" (Seely, 2001, p.5). Indeed, present-day Georgia's territory (and the Caucasus in general) was often the bloodiest venue for Ionian Greeks, Romans, Persians, Arabs, Khazars, Huns, Seljuk and Ottoman Turks, Byzantines, Mongols and Russians (Hewitt, 1995; Menon and Fuller, 2000). This has contributed to turning the Caucasus into one of the most diverse places in the world, and "Georgia [certainly] reflects the … region's remarkable ethnic diversity" (Kaufman, 2001, p.86) (See Appendix 1, Map 2).

[96] This word is derived from the Russian term *korennoye naseleniye* meaning "indigenous population".

By the time Georgia emerged as an independent state at the beginning of the twentieth century it had been under Tsarist Russian rule for over 100 years. Historically, however, modern-day Georgia had often been split between the Ottoman and Persian spheres of influence. The eastern part of Georgia, usually represented by the Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti, was under Persian influence while the western part, largely divided into the kingdoms and principalities (*samtavroebi*) of Abkhazia, Samegrelo, Guria and Imereti, was more under the influence of the Ottoman world (de Waal, 2012, p.1712). Thus, by the time the Tsarist Russian Empire started annexing territories south of the Caucasus Mountains, Georgia was not a unified state but was split into several political entities.

The 1783 Treaty of Georgievsk was a critical turning point in the Georgian–Russian relationship. This “friendship treaty” effectively established the Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti as a Russian protectorate. King Erekle II (1720–98) handed his foreign policy rights over to the Russian Empress Catherine II the Great (1729–96) in return for full internal autonomy. Under the treaty Russia also vouched to defend Georgian lands in case of war. However, it failed to abide by the terms of the treaty when in 1795 Agha Mohammad Khan of Persia invaded and destroyed Kartl-Kakheti’s capital Tbilisi. Shortly after that, in 1801, Tsar Alexander I (1777–1825) abolished the Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti (which included the Shida Kartli region, i.e. present-day South Ossetia) altogether and declared its annexation by the Tsarist Russian Empire. Western Georgian provinces followed shortly: the Kingdom of Imereti was annexed in 1810, the Principality of Guria in 1827, the Principality of Samegrelo in 1856 and the Principality of Svaneti in 1859 (Tsereteli, 2010, p.7; see also Zürcher, 2007, p.16). Southern parts of Georgia that had previously been under the Ottoman rule were also annexed by the Tsarist Russian Empire as a result of the

Russo–Turkish wars of 1828–9 and 1877–8 – Samtskhe-Javaketi in 1829 and Ajara in 1878 respectively (Parliament.ge a, b).

Abkhazia, which occupies 8,700 sq km in the north-western part of the Caucasus Mountains along the Black Sea coast, first came under the Tsarist rule in 1810. However, full Russian control in the region was only established in 1864, until when Abkhazia continued to enjoy wider self-rule and was governed by its own princes (Suny [1988] 1994, p.64). After 1864, however, Abkhazia was transferred into Sukhum Military District (*okrug*) within the Kutaisi[97] Military Province (*guberniya*) and was subordinated to the Caucasian Administrative District of the Tsarist Russian Empire (Shnirelman, 2001, p.202; Blauvelt, 2007, p.206). Thus, until 1917 much of western Georgia was included in the Kutaisi Military Province while the eastern part was included in the Tiflis (now Tbilisi) Military Province.

As in much of Europe, signs of national awakening among different nationalities of the Tsarist Russian Empire started to emerge during the nineteenth century. From the 1880s onwards in particular, Tsarist Russification policies significantly radicalised nationalist intelligentsia in many parts of the Empire, including Georgia. This radicalisation was deepened by the devastating consequences of World War I (WWI), which further increased popular support for national movements, and local leaders now demanded full independence for their homelands rather than being satisfied with greater autonomy (Smith, 2006, pp.495–6).

[97] Kutaisi is the main city in the western Georgian region of Imereti and is presently the second largest city in Georgia.

Georgian nationalists took advantage of the political turbulence and power vacuum following the Russian revolutions of 1917,[98] and on 26 May 1918, amidst the break-up of the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic (TDFR),[99] proclaimed the independence of the Democratic Republic of Georgia headed by the Social Democratic Menshevik government. However, Georgia's post-WWI independence proved short-lived. On 25 February 1921, the 11th Red Army, headed by prominent Georgian Bolshevik Sergo Ordjonikidze, entered Tbilisi and Georgia's Menshevik government fled the country for Europe, mainly France. In 1922–36 Georgia was incorporated into the Transcaucasian Federative Soviet Socialist Republic (TFSSR), whose capital was Tbilisi, together with Armenia and Azerbaijan. It was the last of these South Caucasian republics to have come under Russian rule again. By mid-1921, just four years after the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks further extended their power across much of the former Tsarist Russian Empire and faced the question of how to administer the non-Russian territories (Smith, 2006, pp.495–7).

3. The Making of Soviet Nationality Policies

In Georgia, even today much of the debate about the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia is centred around Soviet nationality policies and their role in inciting violence between Georgians and Abkhaz and Georgians and Ossetians. Without doubt, these policies were some of the most interesting, complex and paradoxical features of the Soviet reality, with far-reaching – and, in the case of Georgia, devastating – repercussions. This is why no study of Georgia's conflicts would

[98] The February Revolution of 1917 overthrew Tsar Nicholas II, bringing an end to the Romanov dynasty and the Tsarist Russian Empire. The October Revolution in the same year, on the other hand, brought to power the Bolshevik faction of the RSDLP and laid the foundations for the creation of the Soviet Union.
[99] The Transcaucasian Federation (February–May 1918) was a short-lived federation of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Georgia was the first among the three to have declared its independence.

be complete without first understanding the *raison d'être* behind these policies.

Vladimir Lenin, the driving force behind the October Revolution of 1917 and the main ideologue of the Soviet nationality policies, believed that the concept of national self-determination also included the right to secession (Lenin, [1914]1960, pp.581–630; [1917]1960, pp.102–8). However, by recognising this right he did not necessarily want it to be actually exercised. As historian Jeremy Smith (2004) argues, in Lenin's view, the mere availability of such rights should have been "sufficient to persuade national minorities of the security of their national rights". Furthermore, the economic benefits of being part of a larger political entity as well as the idea of class unity would act as a strong incentive for these minority groups to stay within a larger state (see also Smith, n.d). This was the thinking that would subsequently inform much of the future direction of Bolshevik policies on this issue and provide the framework for Soviet nationality policies.

There has been much debate and speculation about the essence of these policies – were they a clearly defined, coherent set of policies with set long-term goals or were they aimed at addressing immediate challenges that the Bolsheviks faced, without any clear long-term implications in mind? Were these divide-and-rule policies aimed at the Russification of the non-Russian peoples or were they genuinely trying to protect the rights of the many ethnic minorities of the former Tsarist Empire? These are some of the questions that have remained at the heart of this debate.

Some have argued that, in the first years following the October Revolution, when the Bolsheviks embarked on building a multi-ethnic state they did not have a particularly clear idea of how this

state should be organised or what exactly should be the status of its numerous ethnic and national minorities (Smith, n.d.). The nationality question was fiercely debated at party conferences and congresses, the major disagreement being over whether the rights of separate nationalities should be recognised in any form at all. Prominent Bolsheviks launched a campaign against the "absurdity of federalism", endless "breeding" of republics and "undeveloped ethnic groups", and warned against "growing nationalist appetites" (Slezkine, 1994, pp.417, 420; see also Smith, n.d). Rosa Luxemburg's statement made shortly after the October Revolution, for instance, was shared by many of her fellow "comrades" at the time:

> [n]ations and mini-nations are cropping up on all sides announcing their right to form states. Putrefied corpses are climbing out of age-old graves, filled with the sap of a new spring, and peoples "without history" who never yet formed an independent state, feel a powerful urge to do so. (cited in Connor, 1984, p.581)

Bolsheviks feared that recognising the national rights of different groups would be a victory for "divisive bourgeois nationalism" and that it would divert attention from the wider "class struggle", which was considered a much bigger and more important issue (Smith, n.d.; see also Slezkine, 1994, p.420).

Lenin was aware of these concerns but he also believed that one of the causes of nationalism in the Tsarist Empire was the distrust (*nedoverie*) that non-Russian peoples had towards ethnic Russians – a dominant nationality in the Tsarist Empire that many associated with oppressive nationality. Furthermore, he was "far more suspicious of the 'Great Power chauvinism' of the

Russians" than nationalism of non-Russians (Suny, 2004; Slezkine, 1994, p.419).[100] Granting more rights to the non-Russian peoples was therefore meant to appease their leadership while providing an opportunity for introducing socialism to the masses (Smith, 2006, p.498). In other words, as Julie George (2009, pp.29–30) argues, the main goal of Lenin and other Bolsheviks was to internationalise the proletariat, not to nationalise it. In this way, Lenin's understanding of nationalism was in line with fundamental Marxist thinking on this issue – it was viewed as "a transitory social phenomenon, subordinate to the class struggle, which could nevertheless be used to achieve immediate political goals" (Zaslavsky, 1992, p.98).

The decision on this issue was officially adopted in 1919 and, while there were few among the Bolsheviks who considered national self-determination "either normal or desirable", the general understanding seems to have been that it was a "necessary evil". There were disagreements about the origins of nations or the future of nationalism but it was widely accepted that "for better or for worse, humanity consisted of more or less stable *Sprachnationen*"[101] (Slezkine, 1994, pp.416, 421). Thus, while Bolsheviks did not believe in the longevity of nations, they could not avoid their existence either (Connor, 1984, p.581).

In order to deal with the nationality question, the Bolsheviks set up the People's Commissariat of Nationalities (*Narkomnats*),[102] headed by another prominent Georgia-born Bolshevik – Joseph

[100] Many Bolsheviks shared the same view. Joseph Stalin, for instance, argued that Russian chauvinism was "nine tenths of the problem," while Nikolai Bukharin believed that it was, in fact, the only danger that the Bolsheviks faced (Slezkine, 1994, p.425).
[101] *Sprachnationen* is a German word that literally means "language nations"; in other words, the Bolsheviks largely understood nations as stable "ethno-linguistic communities".
[102] *Narkomnats* (*Narodnyi Kommissariat po Delam Natsionalnostsei*) was equivalent to the Ministry of Nationality Affairs.

Stalin (1878–1953). Stalin would play a prominent role in setting up the first autonomous republic in the RSFSR in 1919 – the Bashkir Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) (Smith, 2004; George, 2009, p.30). He envisaged extending this system of territorial autonomy within the RSFSR to Ukraine, Belorussia (now Belarus) and the TFSSR. Until this time these republics had been linked to the RSFSR only by treaties, although some of the key areas (such as defence, foreign affairs) were governed by Moscow – the capital of the RSFSR (Smith, 2004; n.d.). Nevertheless, even if only formally, independent state apparatus had a significant symbolic meaning for some of these republics and Stalin was certainly aware of the kind of reaction that his proposal might have evoked (RFE/RL, 28 September 1990, p.18).[103]

It has often been argued that because of his roots Stalin's decisions were often favourable to Georgia. However, this example demonstrates that, rather than granting more rights, Stalin did not hesitate in proposing direct subordination (and incorporation) of Georgia to the RSFSR. Like Lenin, his policy recommendations were dictated, first and foremost, by pragmatic politics and were more concerned with the bigger picture (in this case, the overall unity of the Communist Party) than with the consequences of these policies for individual states or peoples.

Lenin's views on this issue differed significantly from those of Stalin. According to him, Ukrainians, Belorussians, Georgians, Armenians and Azerbaijanis could not be treated the same way as the Bashkirs, for instance, and therefore could not have the same type of federal

[103] In Georgia, for instance, when Stalin's draft resolution – the so-called autonomisation plan was made known to the republican authorities, it was openly rejected. The Georgian side argued that such actions were "premature" and demanded that Georgia preserve "all the attributes of independence". According to some sources Georgia was, in fact, the only republic where Stalin's plan was met with such open hostility (RFE/RL, 28 September 1990, p.18; see also Smith, 2004).

arrangements. In later years Soviet commentators often blamed Stalin for distorting Lenin's vision of genuine federalism and turning the Soviet Union into a unitary state in practice. However, as was the case with the right to self-determination, Lenin's reservations about the nature of Soviet federalism were not so much dictated by his concern for the non-Russians as by pragmatic politics (RFE/RL, 28 September 1990, p.19). In his view, direct subordination of these populations to the RSFSR would further alienate them. On the other hand, if they maintained some attributes of independent states, even if only on paper, they were less likely to rebel. In other words, as mentioned above, Lenin firmly believed that it was necessary to provide certain rights and guarantees "in principle" so that they "would not be demanded in practice" (Gleason, 1990, p.30). What he hoped to achieve was that ethno-federalism "would lead nations to support the communist cause, … and, with development, eventually exchange national identities for a common ideological identity" (Bunce, 2005, p.427; see Lenin ([1922]1961, pp.729–34).

In the end, Lenin won the vote and in October 1922 a resolution was adopted based on which the non-Russian republics formed a union with the RSFSR rather than become part of it. Shortly afterwards, on 30 December 1922, the First Congress of Soviets adopted the Union Treaty that formally created the Soviet Union (RFE/RL, 28 September 1990, p.19).[104] Thus, as Smith (2006, p.495) argues, "[i]nstead of encouraging the outright independence, Lenin and his successors implemented nation-building policies within a territorially defined federal structure," creating one of the world's first, and largest, socialist states.

[104] The first Soviet Constitution, in 1924, officially legitimised the December 1922 Union Treaty (Smith, 2004; Suny, 2004).

The Soviet Union was initially made up of the RSFSR, the Ukrainian SSR, the Belorussian SSR and the TFSSR. Five central Asian republics – the Kazakh SSR, the Kyrgyz SSR, the Tajik SSR, the Turkmen SSR and the Uzbek SSR – were created in the following years. During World War II (WWII), the territory of the Soviet Union was further enlarged by adding four republics – Moldova, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – bringing the total number of Union republics to 15 (for a political map of the Soviet Union, see Appendix 1, Map 3).

Territorialisation of Ethnicity in the Georgian SSR

Before the establishment of Bolshevik rule Georgia hosted one autonomous territory within its state borders – Article 117 of the 1921 Constitution of the Social Democratic Republic of Georgia, adopted on 21 February – just days before the Bolshevik takeover – granted an autonomous status to Abkhazia (albeit under its Tsarist name of Sokhumi (Sukhum) District). However, after the Bolsheviks came to power, while Georgia maintained its sovereignty (at least on paper), the ethno-federal structure of the Soviet Union left it with three autonomous political entities.

Bolshevik rule in Abkhazia was established on 4 March 1921 and on 31 March the Abkhaz Revolutionary Committee (*Revcom*) officially proclaimed the creation of the Abkhaz Soviet Socialist Republic with its capital in Sokhumi (Sukhum), separate from Georgian SSR. However, on 16 December 1921 a Treaty of Union (*Soyuznyi Dogovor*) was signed in Tbilisi between Abkhazia and Georgia and in February 1922 the status of Abkhazia was officially changed from the Soviet Socialist Republic to that of so-called Treaty Republic (*Dogovornaya Respublika*) (Blauvelt, 2013, p.4). This change in status was reflected in the 1925 Abkhaz constitution,

according to which Abkhazia was pronounced a sovereign state but with close links with Georgia (Shnirelman, 2001, p.206). In 1922, first Georgia (on 12 March) and then Abkhazia (on 13 December) both joined the TFSSR, remaining part of it until 5 December 1936. It was not until 17 April 1930 that, following Nestor Lakoba's[105] recommendations, the concept of "Treaty Republic" was substituted with "Autonomous Republic" in the Abkhaz constitution and on 19 February 1931 Abkhazia was officially transformed into an ASSR within Georgia (RFE/RL, 26 June 1978, p.3; Shenfield, 2010; Papaskiri, n.d., pp.4, 18).

The Adjarian ASSR, the smallest of Georgia's autonomous units with a territory of 2,900 sq km and with its capital in Batumi, was created on 16 June 1921 in the south-western part of Georgia on the Black Sea coast bordering Turkey. On 20 April 1922 the South Ossetian Autonomous *Oblast* was set up with its capital in Tskhinvali (Aves, 1996, p.159). South Ossetia occupied 3,900 sq km in the centre-north of Georgia, south of the Caucasus Mountains (see Figures 2, 3 and 4). On 7 July 1924 – two years after the creation of the South Ossetian Autonomous *Oblast* – the North Ossetian Autonomous *Oblast* was set up in the North Caucasus as part of the RSFSR, and was transformed into an autonomous republic on 5 December 1936 (Zürcher, 2007, p.29).[106]

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[105] Lakoba (1893–1936) was a prominent Abkhaz Bolshevik. He died in suspicious circumstances in Tbilisi, and many Abkhaz implicated Lavrenti Beria – then First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party – in his death (Blauvelt, 2007, pp.207–16).

[106] For more on North Ossetia, see Tsotniashvili (1998, pp.19–20); Akiner (1983, pp.182–5).

Figure 2: Soviet Ethno-Federal Pyramid and the Territory of the Georgian SSR (1921-1922)

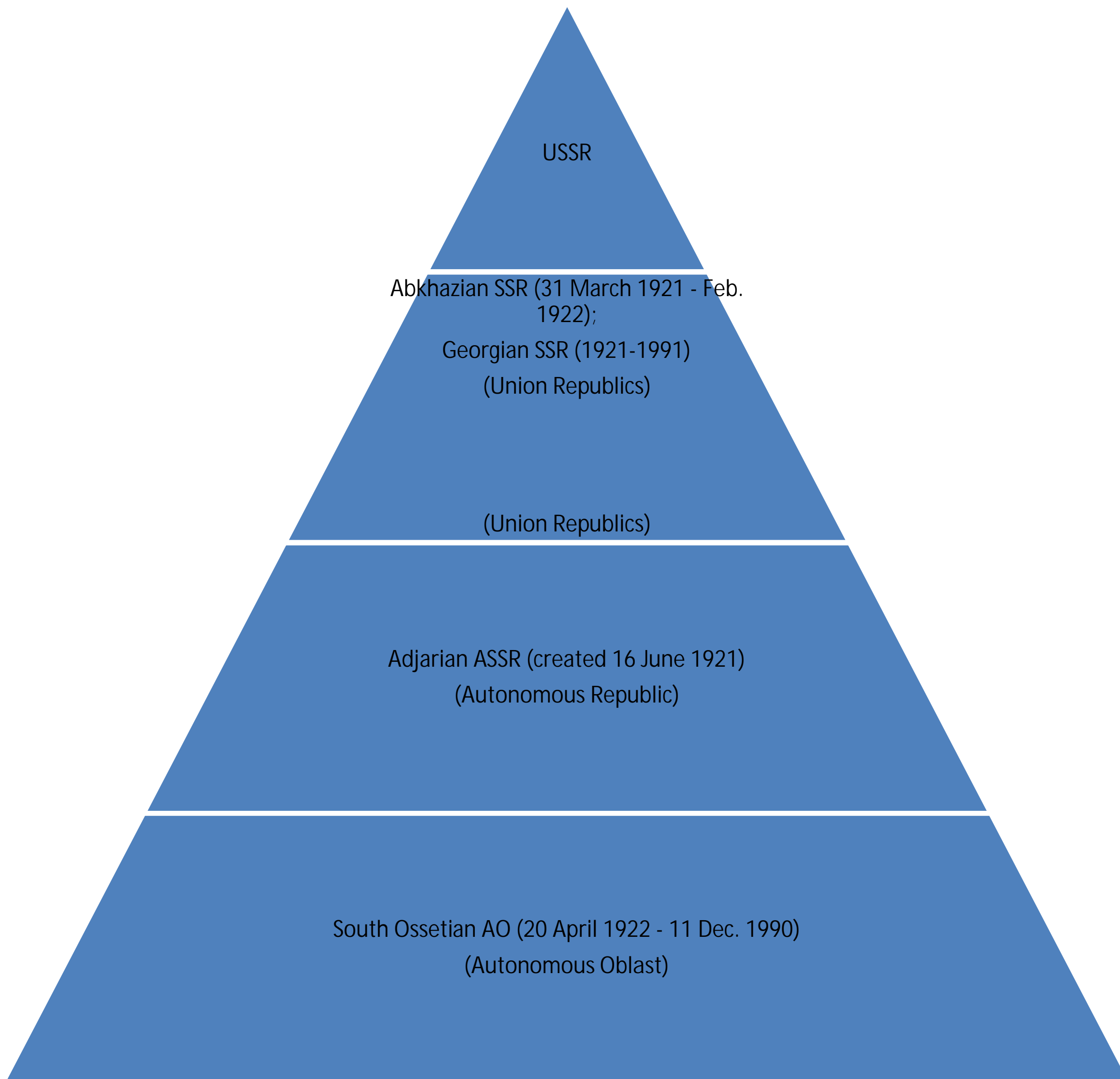


Figure 3: Soviet Ethno-Federal Pyramid and the Territory of the Georgian SSR (1922-1936)

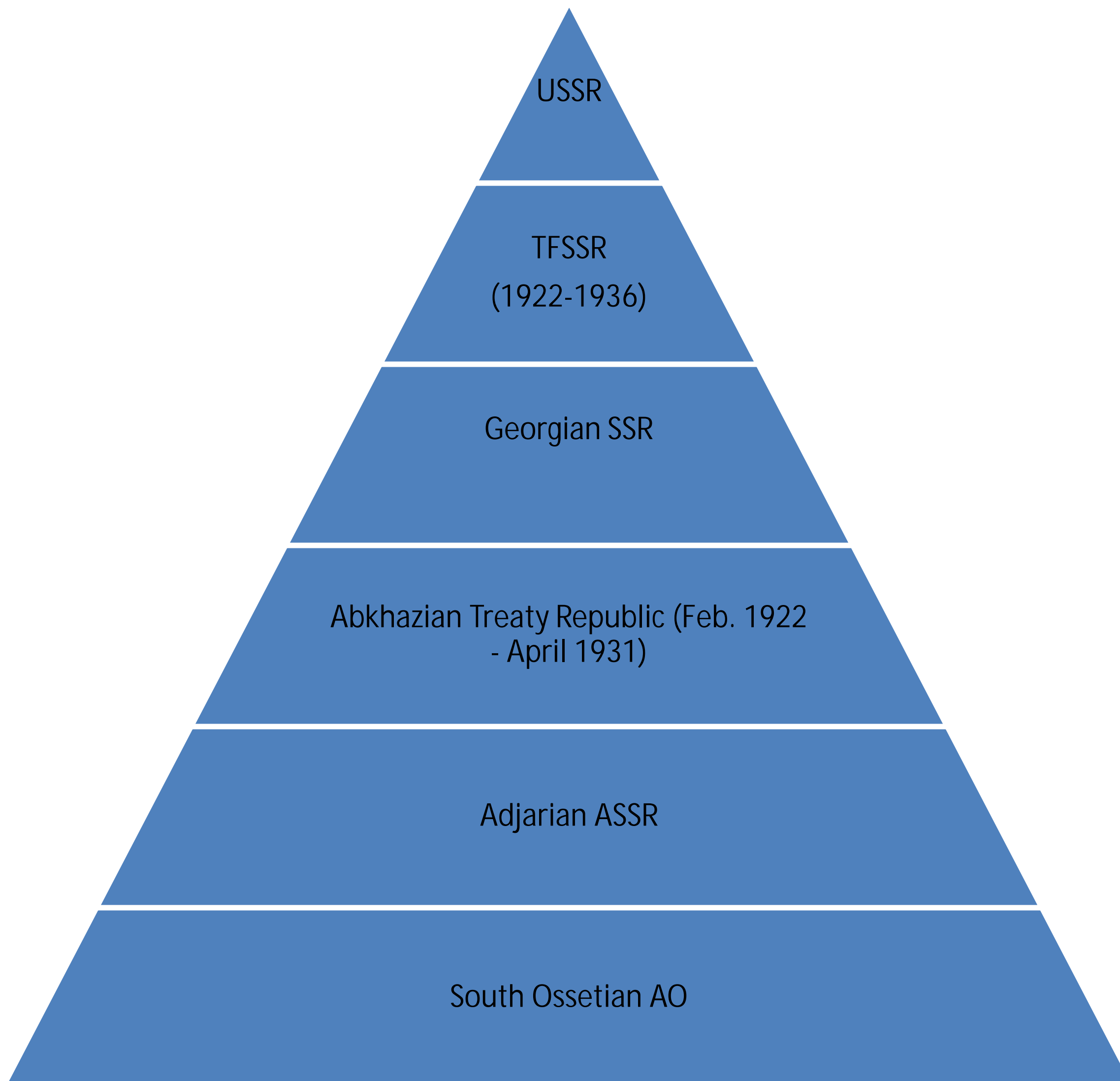
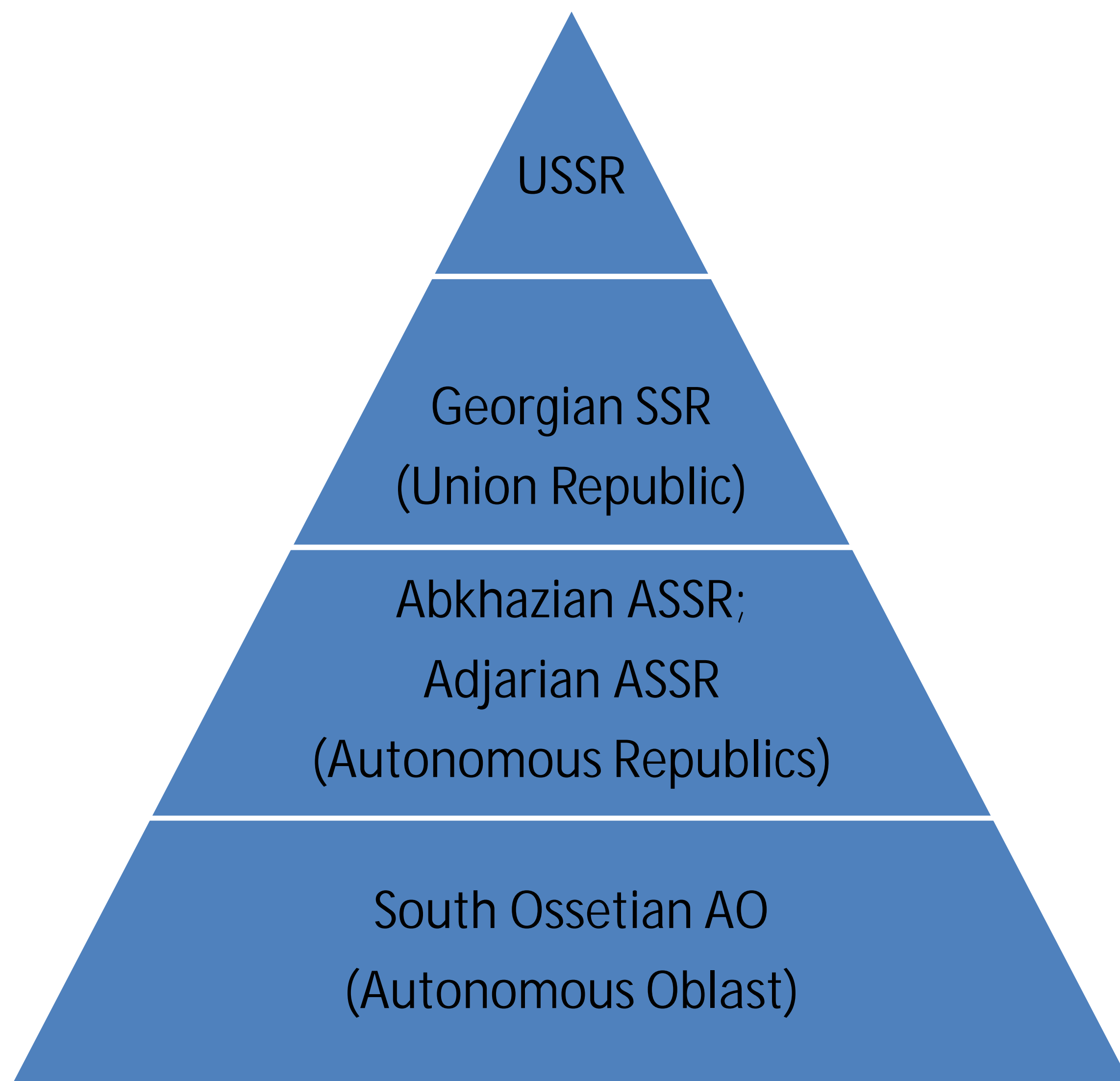


Figure 4: Soviet Ethno-Federal Pyramid and the Territory of the Georgian SSR (1936-1991)



The issue of the legitimacy of these autonomous territories has been a particularly sensitive one and has played a decisive role in the outbreak of violence in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In South Ossetia, for instance, the main trigger for violence was directly connected to the status of autonomy. While sporadic clashes in the region were first reported in 1989, January 1991 saw a

major escalation of violence (interview with Vazha Adamia[107]).[108] This was preceded by a series of legislative decisions that significantly contributed to the deterioration of the situation in South Ossetia. In September 1990 the local authorities passed a decree on sovereignty proclaiming the "South Ossetian Soviet Democratic Republic" and appealing to the USSR Supreme Soviet for permission to become an independent constituent republic of the Soviet Union (*Zarya Vostoka,* 22 September 1990, p.1; 25 October 1990, p.3).[109] Following this, in December 1990 the newly elected Georgian Supreme Soviet[110] dominated by Zviad Gamsakhurdia's Round Table–Free Georgia Bloc, officially abolished autonomous status of South Ossetia (RFE/RL, 21 December 1990, pp.8–9).[111] This decision served as a major trigger of the renewal of fighting in the region in 1991 (National Security Archives (U.S.), Doc. 7, 11 January 1991; Doc. 8, 21 February 1991).

The status of autonomy also became a major factor in the outbreak of violence in Abkhazia. Referring to Abkhazia's demotion from a Union republic to a "treaty republic" and ultimately to an autonomous republic, the Abkhaz have always complained that Abkhazia was one of the few cases in the USSR "whose status was scaled down, rather than up, according to Stalin's wishes"

[107] A dentist by training, Adamia was one of the founders and the head of the Merab Kostava Society, a paramilitary organisation founded in June 1990. He was a close associate of Merab Kostava (1939–89), the prominent dissident and one of the leaders of the national movement (interview with Adamia; see also Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2001).

[108] For more on this, see National Security Archives (U.S.), Doc. 17 (7 June 1991); Zürcher (2007, p.116).

[109] This decision was preceded by a decision of the Georgian Supreme Soviet in August 1990 to adopt an election law that effectively excluded regional political parties from participating in Supreme Soviet elections in Georgia scheduled for 28 October. This reportedly contributed to South Ossetia's decision to declare sovereignty (RFE/RL, 21 December 1990, p.9; see also National Security Archives (U.S.), Doc. 5, 2 November 1990).

[110] The Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR was the highest legislative body in Georgia. After the October 1990 elections it was renamed to the Supreme Council of the Republic of Georgia.

[111] This came only days after South Ossetian delegates at the Georgian Communist Party's special congress refused to support the party's decision to separate from the CPSU (RFE/RL, 21 December 1990, pp.8–9).

(Vladislav Ardzinba,[112] cited in Glebov and Crowfoot, 1989, p.79). Georgians, on the other hand, have argued that the problem was Stalin's decision to let Abkhazia sign a Union Treaty with Georgia in the first place and adopt a separate constitution in 1925, rather than transform it back to an autonomous republic within Georgia (Davitashvili, 2003, p.408). This issue came up again on 23 July 1992 when 35 of the 65 deputies in the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet voted in favour of suspending the latest (1978) Abkhaz Constitution. The latter specified that the Abkhaz ASSR was a constituent part of the Georgian SSR. After suspending it, Abkhazia reverted to the constitution of 1925, under which it was considered a Union republic forming a federation with the Georgian SSR as part of the Union Treaty (*Svobodnaya Gruziya,* 25 July 1992, p.1; RFE/RL, 4 September 1992, p.4).[113] [114] At the same plenary session, a further decision was made to change the name of the Abkhaz ASSR to the "Republic of Abkhazia", and a new coat of arms and flag of Abkhazia were also adopted (*Svobodnaya Gruziya,* 25 July 1992, p.1).[115] The reversion to the 1925 Abkhaz

[112] A historian by training, Ardzinba (1945–2010) was elected as Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Abkhaz ASSR in 1990. From 1994 to 2005 he served as the first *de facto* president of Abkhazia (Anchabadze, 1999, p.136; Coppieters, 2002, p.103).

[113] It was said that this decision was prompted by an earlier decision (on 21 February 1992) of the Military Council of Georgia to suspend the 1978 Constitution of Georgia and revert to the 1921 Constitution. Under the latter constitution of the Social Democratic Republic of Georgia, while Abkhazia maintained its autonomous status it was listed under its Tsarist name of Sokhumi (Sukhum) District and remained a part of Georgia (*Svobodnaya Gruziya,* 25 July 1992, p.1; 28 July 1992, p.1; Shnirelman, 2001, p.205; Gachechiladze, 2011, p.271).

[114] However, already in August 1990 the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia had adopted a "Declaration on State Sovereignty" (*Zarya Vostoka,* 28 Aug. 28, 1990, p.1; see also FRE/RL, 4 Sept. 1992, p.2). At the time, the Abkhaz authorities left the concept of "sovereignty" open to be defined later. It was only in 1999, a year after the brief renewal of fighting in Abkhazia that a referendum was held on the question of "independence" of Abkhazia with the majority of people voting in support of "independence". The results of the referendum are not recognized by the Georgian side and the international community.

[115] At a press conference following the parliamentary session, Ardzinba argued that these decisions did not mean that Abkhazia no longer constituted a part of Georgia "because according to Article 4 of the Constitution of Abkhazia of 1925, Abkhazia is united with Georgia based on the Treaty [of Union of 1921]" (*Svobodnaya Gruziya,* 25 July 1992, p.1). Despite these statements, however, Russia's main TV broadcasting company *Ostankino* continued to report that "Abkhazia declared 'full independence', … that Abkhazia separated from Georgia, that a new Karabakh is possible in Abkhazia" (*Svobodnaya Gruziya,* 28 July 1992, p.1).

Constitution reportedly prompted Tengiz Kitovani, then Georgia's Minister of Defence,[116] to enter the territory of the Abkhaz ASSR and march his National Guard troops to Sokhumi (Sukhum) – the incident that marked the start of the Abkhazian war on 14 August 1992 (RFE/RL, 1 Jan. 1993, p.23; 27 Aug. 1993). In other words, the issue of territorial autonomies was at the forefront of the tensions (and eventual outbreak of violence) between Georgians, and Abkhaz and Ossetians.

The Georgian side has continuously questioned the existence of the three autonomous territories within the Georgian SSR and has argued that the only explanation for setting up these autonomies, while many less ethnically homogeneous republics had no autonomy at all, was a deliberate divide-and-rule policy exercised by the Soviet Union (Aves, 1992, p.177). Indeed, by 1991 Georgia had the second-largest number of autonomous territories within its state borders of any Soviet republic (after Russia).[117] Some Western scholars are also convinced that the Bolsheviks initially supported strengthening political power of the Abkhaz and Ossetians "in order to create an ally against opposing political forces in Georgia" (Derluguian, 1999, pp.261–2).[118] Others, on the other hand, maintain that the ethno-federal nature of the Soviet Union was more of a necessity than a deliberate policy of divide and rule. By the time the Bolsheviks came to power in October 1917 nation-states had already emerged in the borderland regions of the Russian Empire, including the Caucasus, and they therefore "had little choice but to build the new federation on the principle of national-territorial autonomy" (Zaslavsky, 1992, p.99). Yet

[116] A sculptor by training, Kitovani, was appointed Commander of the National Guard of Georgia by Zviad Gamsakhurdia in 1991 and served as Georgia's Minister of Defence under Eduard Shevardnadze in 1992–3.

[117] The RSFSR incorporated 16 autonomous republics, 5 autonomous *oblasts* and ten autonomous *okrugs* (areas/units).

[118] For a similar argument, see also Connor (1984, p.581); Ziegler (1985, p.20); Zürcher (2005, p.12; 2007, p.26).

others view territorial arrangements in the Caucasus "as an improvised solution to the conflicts that had been raging there" before the Bolsheviks' arrival (de Waal, 2012, p.1715). Indeed, Georgia's Menshevik government faced violent uprisings in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 1918–21 and had to resort to military action in these regions in order to suppress the revolts. In this case, the argument goes, rather than imposing it on the region, Bolsheviks were compelled to use this complex ethno-federal system in order to stabilise and manage the conflict-ridden South Caucasus by giving its diverse ethnic minorities a say in the new political order (de Waal, 2012, p.1715).[119] Paata Zakareishvili is one of the few Georgian analysts who would agree with this explanation. According to him, Stalin's aim was not "to stir up trouble but rather to solve trouble. … These autonomous territories were not 'bombs' to be exploded in the future but rather they were to deal with the reality of the situation at the time" (author's interview). In other words, the "legitimation of ethnicity", by territorialising it, was viewed by Bolsheviks "as a concession to ethnic grievances and developmental constraints, not as a brilliant divide-and-rule stratagem" (Slezkine, 1994, p.430).

One could argue, however, that these opposing views are not, in fact, mutually exclusive. It is true that the Bolsheviks had little room for manoeuvre when they took over power in the South Caucasus and had to make significant concessions to various ethnic minorities. However, it is also true that they were well aware of the power of the "nationality question". Granting Abkhazia the status of a Union republic in the first months of 1921 and setting up autonomous territories in Adjara and South Ossetia in 1921–2 might have been initially motivated by short-term policy objectives. But it is also undeniable that authorities in the Kremlin successfully used federal

[119] For a similar argument, see also Smith (1997a; 1997b); Saparov (2010).

institutions to further "expand their control over the politicisation of ethnicity" (Roeder, 1991, p.197). As a result, over time these territorial arrangements turned into powerful "tools" in the hands of Moscow and played an important role in alienating these regions (especially Abkhazia and South Ossetia) from Tbilisi. The issue of the legitimacy of Georgia's autonomous territories and the sense of injustice it had created among Georgians as well as the Abkhaz and Ossetians, however, was only one "side-effect" of the institutionalisation of ethnicity, which had other, equally important outcomes.

4. *Korenizatsiya* and the Politicisation of Ethnicity

The federal structure of the Soviet Union became one of the main aspects of the nationality policies. However, it went hand-in-hand with the process of *korenizatsiya.* The latter comprised "a set of policies aimed at developing and promoting national identity" and was meant to produce "flourishing" (*rastsvet*) of various ethnic groups across the Soviet Union (Smith, 2006, p.498). Throughout the 1920s, these policies would "turn into the most extravagant celebration of ethnic diversity" in the Soviet Union (Slezkine, 1994, pp.414–5, 422; see also Zürcher, 2007, p.23). In this way, as Rogers Brubaker (1996, pp.8, 29) argues, the Soviet Union probably went further than any other state "in sponsoring, codifying, institutionalising, and even (in some cases) inventing nationhood and nationality".[120]

Through the process of *korenizatsiya*, Soviet policymakers actively promoted the local languages of different ethnic groups, established educational and cultural institutions in these indigenous

[120] For a similar argument, see also Zaslavsky (1992, p.99); Cheterian (2008, pp.45–6).

languages, followed affirmative action in areas of employment and encouraged the advancement of local cadres into positions of power (Suny, 1993, pp.101, 105). Thus, the first decade of the Soviet Union is often dubbed “an era of nation-building” (Smith, 2006, pp. 498, 501).

At the time of its collapse, the USSR consisted of around 127 officially recognised ethnic entities (Glebov and Crowfoot, 1989, p.78). Union republics and their autonomous territories might have lacked any real sovereignty but every large non-Russian ethnic group within the Soviet Union was guaranteed a territorial identity. The interesting thing, however, is that before the February 1917 Revolution, in Tsarist Russia there seemed to be “no official view of what constituted nationality” (Slezkine, 1994, p.427). The main ascriptive characteristic at the time defined the Tsar’s subjects according to their “religious confession”, which was largely associated with Christianity (and Orthodox Christianity in particular). Non-Orthodox (i.e. non-Christian) communities, on the other hand, were generally referred to as “aliens”, or “non-kin”/“non-native” (*inorodtsy*), which sometimes also meant “backward”. Thus it was only after the February Revolution that these “Christians” and *inorodtsy* were replaced by uniform categories of nations (*natsii*), nationalities (*natsionalnosti*), peoples (*narody*),[121] and numerically small or underdeveloped peoples (*narodnosti* or *malochislennye narody*).[122] Tribes (*plemena*) were at the very bottom of this ethnic “ladder” (Slezkine, 1994, pp.426–7; Wolczuk and Yemelianova, 2008, p.178; Rutland, 2010, p.117). The main difference between the nationality question under the Romanovs and under the Bolsheviks, however, was that in the Tsarist Empire multi-nationality was never really institutionalised. It was this “state-sponsored codification and

[121] *Narody* was an ethnically non-specific term (Slezkine, 1994, pp.427, 443).
[122] Like *natsionalnost, narodnost* is sometimes also translated in English as “nationality”.

institutionalisation" of ethnicity in the Soviet Union that made the latter a rather unique case (Brubaker, 1996, pp.26–7).

To the Bolsheviks the classification of different nationalities represented different stages of group development and the status of these groups varied according to their evolutionary, territorial or social standing. Hence *natsii* or *natsionalnosti* were viewed as more advanced forms of social categorisation and were considered as "first-class nationalities", while others were placed in the category of the "second-class" or even "third-class" nationalities. Others still were granted limited or no political status at all (Smith, 1992, p.59; Slezkine, 1994, pp.427, 450; Wolczuk and Yemelianova, 2008, p.178).

In practice this ethnic demarcation meant that non-Russian groups that were considered socially and culturally more progressive and which had relatively large populations (usually more than 100,000) were labelled *natsii* and had a right to their own Union republics (Wolczuk and Yemelianova, 2008, p.180). However, another mandatory criterion for Union republics was to share borders with foreign countries (Zürcher, 2007, p.25). Groups with smaller population ratios were generally assigned a lower status (Stavenhagen, 1996, p.58). Those nationally defined minority groups who lived in "somebody else's" territory and who did not already have their own territory elsewhere in the USSR also had the right to their own territorial units within the Union republics. Ossetians were one of the few cases in that they were allocated two autonomous territories within two Union republics – the South Ossetian Autonomous *Oblast* within the

Georgian SSR and the North Ossetian ASSR within the RSFSR.[123] Secure within their own territorial borders, these different ethnic groups were further "encouraged to develop and, if necessary, create their own autonomous cultures" (Slezkine, 1994, p.430).

As a result, within the 15 Union republics of the Soviet Union, 40 other peoples possessed some form of governmental structure whose title also reflected their ethnic identity. Altogether, by the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, there were 20 ASSRs, 8 autonomous *oblasts*, and 11 autonomous *okrugs* (Roeder, 1991, p.204).[124] Each of these autonomous territories had its own officially recognised titular nationality (Coppieters, n.d.; Zürcher, 2007, p.23). This four-tier Matrioshka-style ethno-federal structure of the Soviet Union was intrinsically linked to the status of nationalities. In the same way that ethnic communities being categorised as *natsii* or *plemena* made a huge difference, having the status of an autonomous republic put one's group on a higher rung of the federal hierarchy than having an autonomous *okrug*, for instance. This ethno-federal hierarchy manifested itself in many ways in the daily lives of Soviet citizens and was reflected (and embedded) in many Soviet institutions (Cheterian, 2008, p.46).[125] Control of resources by cadres of a particular ethnic group depended significantly on this hierarchy, and by being at the top of the ethno-federal "ladder" it was the "nations" and their Union republics that got most of

[123] In the Caucasus Armenians also had a Union republic of their own while also having a predominantly Armenian-populated Autonomous *Oblast*, Nagorno Karabakh, within the Azerbaijan SSR.

[124] For more on the federal structure of the Soviet Union, see also Connor (1984, p.221); Bremmer (1997, p.8); Hale (2008).

[125] Cheterian (2008, p.46) makes an interesting observation about the manifestation of this hierarchy in the Soviet Army, for instance, where positions at the highest military echelons were generally reserved for ethnic Russians and other Slavic nationals. The Baltic nations, Georgians and Armenians (and the other Christian nations) were at a lower level. At the very bottom of this hierarchy were the Muslims, who were generally allocated places in construction or in kitchens (see also interview with Soso Jajanidze, 1 Arkhi TV, 8 May 2010).

the privileges available (Roeder, 1991, p.220).[126] This is why, as we will see in more detail in the coming chapters, the issue of whether the Abkhaz and Ossetians were a nation (*natsiya*) or a people (*narod*) was of utmost important to the Georgian national movement.[127] The wider understanding was that, as "non-nations", Abkhaz and Ossetians had no claim to the attributes of statehood and therefore no right to demand sovereignty.

In contrast to the Union republics, the status of autonomous republic was *generally* (although not always) awarded to those ethnic groups who did not inhabit geographically strategic border regions and who were smaller in number than the titular nationalities of the Union republics (Zürcher, 2007, p.25). In Georgia, while Abkhazia fitted these requirements, Adjara did not. The latter was situated by the Black Sea in a very strategic location, sharing the border with Turkey.[128] The status of autonomous *oblast* was also awarded to numerically smaller ethnic groups with compact settlements within Union republics (such as South Ossetia). The Union republics, autonomous republics and *oblasts* possessed some elements of sovereignty although, unlike the Union republics – which were considered "sovereign states" according to the Constitution of the Soviet Union – autonomous republics and *oblasts* were only considered "national states". In practice this meant that Union republics had their own national troops and the right, at least on paper, to secede from the Soviet Union. Autonomous territories, on the other hand, were considered subjects of Union republics and enjoyed no such rights. The major

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[126] For more on this in the context of Georgia, see Nodia (1996, p.10); Blauvelt (2007, p.212).

[127] My usage of the term "national movement" implies nationalist principles. I use this term throughout the thesis since it stands closest to the term used in Georgian language. The self-designating name of the members of the national movement of Georgia has generally been "national liberation movement", as opposed to "nationalist movement", as it is often labelled in western media and academic scholarship conveying an extreme position of some of the members of the movement.

[128] In the Caucasus, the case of the Nakhchyvan ASSR also did not conform to this general rule. This autonomous republic within the Azerbaijan SSR is an Azerbaijani exclave that shares a border with Turkey.

difference between autonomous republics and *oblasts* was in the degree of political and cultural self-administration. Autonomous republics had much larger regional bureaucracies and, unlike *oblasts*, they had their own universities (as opposed to specialised institutes or branches of universities), albeit that the main language of instruction at university level was usually Russian, as was the case in Union republics, rather than native languages (Zürcher, 2007, pp.25–6).

The question, of course, was until when would this "breeding" of ethnic and national groups and autonomous territories last? Without doubt, the authorities in Moscow were certainly considering some practical matters – ethnic and territorial categorisation of people provided an easier way to integrate large territories and the diverse populations of the Soviet Union into one political system. However, as has already been discussed above, Lenin's views on this issue were as much ideological as pragmatic. Thus, as Francine Hirsch (2007) points out, as well as realising some practical goals, Bolsheviks were also pursuing a policy of "state-sponsored evolutionism". Their thinking seems to have been informed, at least to a degree, by the belief that numerically small peoples (*narodnosti*) would eventually merge into much larger groups of nations (*natsii*) and nationalities (*natsionalnosti*). In other words, Bolsheviks believed that they could achieve, and even speed up, the historical progress of the peoples of the Soviet Union "from tribes to ethnic groups to nations" (Hirsch, cited in Dobczansky, 2007; see also Smith, 1992, p.58). This process would last until all social, economic and cultural backwardness between these different peoples was overcome and all linguistic differences were eliminated (Parsons, 1982, p.548). Some have argued that Bolsheviks did not really have any strict time frame for this transformation to occur and that the deadline for achieving these goals was postponed indefinitely (Slezkine, 1994, p.424). It seems more likely, however, that even though Bolsheviks acknowledged that this was a

long-term process likely to take centuries, they "were not willing to wait this long and sought to move the process forward" (Hirsch, cited in Dobczansky, 2007; see also Hirsch, 2005, p.231).

The process of institutionalising ethnicity was not restricted to group level. Introducing nationality as a legal means of identification in 1932 was one of the more far-reaching steps towards politicising ethnicity at the personal level as well (Brubaker, 1996, p.31; see also Zaslavsky, 1992, p.99). A person's nationality was officially determined at birth by the nationality of one's parents, and one was legally categorised according to this nationality in all personal or official documents throughout one's life (Karklins, 1986, p.23). One could change their name or authorised domicile (*propiska*)[129] but not their nationality. In other words, as Yuri Slezkine (1994, p.444) puts it, "each individual got stuck with a nationality and most nationalities got stuck with their borders". Indeed, over the next few generations, nationality became "an immutable ascriptive characteristic of every Soviet citizen" (Karklins, 1986, pp.32, 42) and its consequences constitute one of the most interesting aspects of Soviet nationality policies.

4.1. The Privileged Position of Titular Nationalities in the Georgian SSR

This simultaneous institutionalisation of ethnicity – "territorial and political on the one hand, ethnocultural and personal on the other hand" – significantly strengthened national self-consciousness of ethnic minorities in the Soviet Union (Brubaker, 1996, p.23; see also Suny 1990, p.248). Since Georgia was not a homogeneous state, hierarchical division of different nationalities on a sub-state level left it with three different titular nationalities within its borders. Georgians were considered a titular nation of the Georgian SSR. According to the final Soviet

[129] *Propiska* was one of the ways of controlling settlements within the Soviet Union (Nodia, 1996, p.9).

census in 1989, ethnic Georgians constituted 70.1% (3,787,393) of the total population of Georgia, which numbered 5,400,841 people (*Zarya Vostoka*, 23 March 1990, p.2).

The Abkhaz, on the other hand, were considered a titular nationality of the Abkhaz ASSR. In 1989, Abkhaz nationals in Georgia numbered 95,853, the overwhelming majority of whom (93,267 people) lived in the Abkhaz ASSR. The Abkhaz constituted 1.8% of the total population of Georgia and 17.8% of the total population of Abkhazia's 525,061 people. Ethnic Georgians constituted a plurality in the autonomous republic before the outbreak of violence, with 45.7% (239,872 people) of the total population of Abkhazia (*Zarya Vostoka*, 23 March 1990, p.2).

Ossetians were also considered a titular nationality both in South Ossetia and North Ossetia (Osipova, 1997, p.40). South Ossetia had a population of 98,527 people in 1989 and ethnic Ossetians formed the majority with 66.2% (65,232) of the overall population of the *Oblast*.[130] Ethnic Georgians were the second largest group, comprising 29% (28,544) of the total population. However, Georgia's overall Ossetian population was much higher – 164,055 people, of which 98,823 (60.2%) lived in other parts of Georgia. Thus, unlike the Abkhaz, more Ossetians lived outside the South Ossetian Autonomous *Oblast* than within it (ICG, 2005, p.1). Overall, Ossetians comprised 3% of Georgia's total population (*Zarya Vostoka*, 23 March 1990, p.2) (see Appendix 3, Factboxes 1, 2 and 4).

[130] At the same time, by 1989 the population of North Ossetian ASSR (within the RSFSR) was 632,428 people, with Ossetians comprising 53% of the total population of the republic (Zürcher, 2007, p.29).

The Adjarian ASSR had a population of 392,432 in 1989 (*Zarya Vostoka*, 23 March 1990, p.2). In 1926, when Adjars were last counted as a separate ethnic category in a Soviet census, they made up about 4% of the total population of Georgia (Goldenberg, 1994, p.101).

In practice, dividing society into several titular nationalities meant that the process of national consolidation in Georgia went in three different (and separate) directions. By being members of titular nationalities, certain groups were always privileged in certain parts of the republic. Thus, the Abkhaz and Ossetians were granted a disproportionate share of socio-economic, political and cultural privileges in their own autonomous units (Zürcher, 2007, p.26). On the other hand, these groups, as well as significant numbers of other ethnic minorities in Georgia (Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Greeks, Jews, Kurds and Russians) found themselves disadvantaged "in the competition for the budgetary pie" at the central (i.e. Union republican) level (Suny, [1988] 1994, p.290). Since minorities were relatively underrepresented at the republican level, this area became a protected area of privilege for ethnic Georgians (Cheterian, 2008, p.159). In other words, policies of *korenizatsiya* effectively turned ethnicity into "a condition for success" (Roeder, 1991, p.39), and created a sense of entitlement amongst Georgians, Abkhaz and Ossetians that as representatives of titular nationalities they deserved to be treated in a certain (more privileged) way.

As early as 1923, Ordjonikidze complained that while Georgians made up only 25% of the population of Tbilisi they occupied "43% of the city soviet, 75% of the city executive committee, 91% of the presidium of the executive committee, and 100% of both the republican *Sovnarkom*

and the Central Committee of the Party"[131] (cited in Slezkine, 1994, p.426). This trend continued over the next few decades and was reflected in other, non-political spheres of the country. Between 1955 and 1972, for instance, ethnic Georgians occupied 97.2% of all nomenklatura positions in Georgia despite constituting only 64.3% of the overall population of the Georgian SSR in 1959 (Hodnett, 1978, p.103). In 1969–70, when constituting 67% of the republic's overall population, with the same number of the overall college-age student population, ethnic Georgians made up 82.6% of the overall student body of Georgia's institutions of higher education (Parsons, 1982, p.554).[132] Furthermore, 91% of the books and 83% of newspapers published in Georgia in 1985 were in the Georgian language (Coppieters, 2002, p.101; see also Smith et al., 1998, p.6).

In contrast, while ethnic minorities complained that they were constantly being discriminated against and lacked any real opportunities, especially at the central republican level, ethnic Georgians argued that it was they who were continuously disadvantaged in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This issue was particularly emphasised in regard to Abkhazia, where as early as 1926 ethnic Georgians comprised the largest ethnic group of the autonomous republic, with 33.6% of the overall population (see Appendix 3, Factbox 2). The Georgian side viewed Abkhaz complaints as "unfounded" and "often absurd". One of the issues highlighted, for instance, was the name of the "Subtropical Production Institute of Georgia" in Abkhazia, over which the Abkhaz complained about the usage of "Georgia" in the institute's title as opposed to "Abkhazia" (interview with Rapiel Gelantia).[133] Especially after the Abkhaz protests of 1977–8, which will be

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[131] *Sovnarkom* (*Sovet Narodnykh Komissarov*) is Russian for the Council of People's Commissars.
[132] According to some reports, 98% of all students enrolled at Ivane Javakhisvhili Tbilisi State University (TSU) in 1987 were ethnic Georgians (Coppieters, 2002, p.101).
[133] For more on this, see *Literaturuli Sakartvelo* (26 May 1989, p.2).

discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, Georgians voiced concerns about the distortion of the local history of Abkhazia. They complained that Georgian historic monuments were destroyed and Georgian toponyms were replaced by Abkhaz ones. One news report from 1989, for instance, records that Georgian villagers protested that upon entering their village from Gudauta (a predominantly Abkhaz-populated town in Abkhazia) there was not a single sign in Georgian. They argued that they felt like "caged birds" in the Abkhaz ASSR (1 Arkhi TV, 13 March 2010).[134] Furthermore, complaints were raised that ethnic Georgians were refused residence permits in Abkhazia, were denied permission to build houses or to be allocated private plots, and that leadership positions in both political and cultural spheres of the autonomous republic were mainly occupied by ethnic Abkhaz (RFE/RL, 10 March 1989, p.26; Coppieters, 2002, p.102).[135]

Western commentators also observed that the Abkhaz were indeed "overreaching in the matter of representation in the Party and government" and were keen to occupy all the key government positions in the Abkhaz ASSR (RFE/RL, 26 June 1978, p.6).[136] In 1990, for instance, ethnic Abkhaz occupied up to 67% of the ministerial positions in the Abkhaz ASSR. Since control of economic resources largely depended on the control of administrative organs, ethnic Abkhaz were left in charge of most of the local economy in the autonomous republic (Slider, 1997, p.170; Zürcher, 2005, p.3; 2007, p.120).[137]

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[134] For more on this, see also 1 Arkhi TV (18 November 2010).

[135] For more on this, see author's interviews with General Levan Kiknadze, former Deputy Head of the Counterintelligence Service of the Abkhaz ASSR, and his collegue Colonel Gogi Maisuradze.

[136] For more on the status of ethnic Abkhaz in the Abkhaz ASSR in the 1970s, see *Zarya Vostoka* (27 April 1973, p.2); Benet (1974). For more on the status of different nationalities in Abkhazia in the 1980s, see also RFE/RL (10 March 1989).

[137] It must be pointed out, however, that this has not always been the case in Abkhazia and that these changes were taking place mainly during the previous two decades of the Soviet Union – in the 1970s and especially the 1980s. In 1980, for instance, the regional Communist Party organisation of Abkhazia complained that it was ethnic Georgians

The fact that the Abkhaz, a comparatively smaller ethnic group within the Abkhaz ASSR, were awarded more rights and privileges than the much larger group of ethnic Georgians, became an issue again when, in spring 1991, a joint group of Abkhaz and Georgian legal experts drafted an electoral law governing legislative elections in Abkhazia. The number of deputies was reduced from 130 to 67, of whom 28 would be ethnic Abkhaz (who constituted 17.8% of the total population of Abkhazia at the time); 26 Georgians (45.7%); and 11 seats divided between Armenian (14.6%), Russian (14.4%), Greek (2.8%) and other nationals of Abkhazia (see Appendix 3, Factbox 2). According to this new law, a two-thirds majority would be required to pass legislation.[138] Many in Georgia were against this arrangement, dubbing the law *apartheid*-like. They believed that the 17.8% Abkhaz should not be allocated more seats than the 45.7% Georgians.[139]

What the above-listed examples demonstrate is that the privileged position of the titular nationalities, whether in autonomous territories or at the republican level, led to continuous counter-accusations by each side and aided the further accumulation of grievances. Already in 1985, these counter-accusations led one Western analyst to remark that "no solution exists to these problems that would satisfy both the Abkhaz and the Georgians. Both perceive the nationalist strivings of the other ethnic group as a threat to their own rights" (Slider, 1985, p.65). In this context, a sense of victimisation became particularly relevant, and the opposing communities almost competed with one another to demonstrate who had suffered the most at the

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who were overrepresented in the Abkhaz Communist Party, accounting for 51% of the membership positions while constituting only 43.9% of the overall population of Abkhazia at the time (Slider, 1985, p.53; see also Shnirelman, 2001, pp.211–2).

[138] See *Svobodnaya Gruziya* (11 July 1991; 17 October 1991; 4 December 1991; 14 May 1992, p.2); Zürcher, 2007, p.130).

[139] See author's interviews with Nodar Natadze and Nino Ratashvili.

hands of the other group. Bruno Coppieters (2002, p.110) sums up the situation eloquently when he argues that inter-ethnic relations in Georgia

> constitute long-term cycles of victimisation in which the perpetration of aggression or the refusal to redress historical injustices is justified by a previous victimization, so that every community considers that it has objective grounds for seeing itself as a victim and refusing to acknowledge guilt.[140] [141]

Indeed, the issue of victimisation became one of the main issues in Georgian–Abkhaz and Georgian–Ossetian relations and played a decisive role in constructing conflicting group identities. In fact, as I argue, it was this sense of victimisation and accompanying ethnic fears that led to the emergence of a security dilemma among these groups. Security dilemma is understood in a broad sense here, referring to the situation when each group's actions, largely motivated by fear of the "other", create fear and insecurity among members of the opposing group as well (Kaufman, 2006, p.55). Thus, as Christoph Zürcher (2005, p.10) points out, "the mobilisation of the three groups was an interdependent process in which each action produced a counteraction". In this way, contrary to the arguments advanced by mainstream security approaches discussed in Chapter 2, I argue that the security dilemma in Georgia was not simply the result of institutional weakness of the Soviet Union and the ensuing "domestic anarchy", manifesting itself in the late 1980s only. Rather, it was embedded in the very institutional structure of the Soviet Union and was unfolding over the course of several decades.

[140] Coppieters (2002) originally makes this argument in relation to Georgian–Abkhaz relations but it is also relevant in the case of Georgian–Ossetian relations.
[141] For more on this, see also Crelinsten (1996, pp.175–85); Coppieters (1998, p.164).

4.2. Language and Ethnicity in the Georgian SSR

Central to the issue of victimisation was the language question. While the authorities in Moscow actively promoted an idea of a nation fixed to a certain territory, they also promoted an alternative view, that of “an ethno-cultural community, typically a community of language” (Brubaker, 1996, p.35; see also Suny, 1993, p.110). As part of the process of *korenizatsiya* Bolsheviks embarked on promoting linguistic and cultural rights of the Soviet Union’s many nationalities, and supporting native languages was an important part of this process. There was a strong belief at the time that only the native language could enable a full intellectual development of the proletariat. As a result, native-language schooling proliferated across the Soviet Union. By 1926, for instance, in Abkhazia alone, alongside Georgian and Abkhazian schools there were “43 Armenian, 41 Greek, 27 Russian, 2 Estonian and 2 German schools” (Slezkine, 1994, pp.417–8, 430). The language issue thus became an important tool in the politicisation of ethnicity in Georgia, especially as the three groups concerned all spoke different languages.

The Georgian language, with its unique alphabet, is part of the Caucasian language family – Kartvelian (or South Caucasian) branch.[142] The Abkhaz language, on the other hand, belongs to the North-West Caucasian branch of the same language family, while Ossetian is an Indo-European language and is part of its North-Eastern Iranian branch (RFE/RL, 8 December 1989, p.17; Toft, 2002, pp.129–30; Zürcher, 2007, pp.119–20).

[142] However, attempts to link Georgian to other languages within or beyond the Caucasus have so far been unsuccessful, which is why some scholars even consider Kartvelian an entirely separate language family from the Caucasian one (Hewitt, 1995, p.49).

Linked to the language issue was also the question of alphabets. The Abkhaz language, with its complex sound system, was developed into a written language only in the mid-nineteenth century. Russian general Pyotr Karlovich Uslar is believed to have invented its alphabet in 1862 (Shnirelman, 2001, p.216). Uslar's Abkhaz alphabet consisted of 37 letters and was largely based on Cyrillic script. Since then, however, it has gone through a number of changes until reaching its present-day form. In 1865, another Russian general, Ivan Alekseevich Bartolomei, suggested a different version of the Abkhaz alphabet, also based on Cyrillic, which became the basis of the first primer in the Abkhaz language, published in Tbilisi in 1892. In 1909 Alexei Chochua modified Uslar's version of the Abkhaz alphabet and expanded it to 55 letters (Shnirelman, 2001, p. 216; Shenfield, 2012).[143]

In the 1920s and 1930s considerable efforts were made to further "develop the Abkhaz language and introduce a more sophisticated vocabulary" (Blauvelt, 2007, p.219). Hence in 1926 the Cyrillic alphabet was replaced by a Latin-based alphabet devised by Georgia-born historian and linguist Niko Marr.[144] Marr's so-called Abkhaz Analytical Alphabet contained 77 letters; however, two years later it would be replaced again by another Latin-based alphabet (Slezkine, 1994, p.427; 1996; Shenfield, 2012). Yet another switch of alphabets occurred in 1938, when "Russian, already the effective lingua franca of the Soviet Union, [became] compulsory subject of study in all schools", and hence all Latin-based alphabets were made to switch to Cyrillic-based alphabets (Smith, 2006, p.500). Instead of Cyrillic, however, the Abkhaz language now acquired an adapted version of the Georgian alphabet, which continued to be used until after

[143] For more on the Abkhaz language, see also Hewitt (1995, pp.48, 57); Blauvelt (2013, p.8).
[144] Marr (1865–1934) was in charge of the Caucasus section of the Commission responsible for the study of the population of Russia and its borderlands.

Stalin's death. In 1954, Abkhaz began to be written in Cyrillic once more (Blauvelt, 2007, p.219).[145] Having a written language (and therefore an alphabet) played an important role in the ethno-linguistic hierarchy of nationalities in the Soviet Union. These changes, often within rather short periods, therefore increased the sense of vulnerability among the Abkhaz and contributed to their feeling of victimisation.

These changes also affected the Ossetian language, although to a lesser degree. During the eighteenth century it was first written in a version of Arabic script; however, in 1844, a method was devised of writing Ossetian with the Cyrillic alphabet. After the establishment of Soviet rule, similarly to the Abkhaz case, a version of the Latin alphabet was introduced for written Ossetian during the period 1923–37. From 1938, the Georgian alphabet substituted Latin until Ossetian switched back to Cyrillic in 1954 (Omniglot, n.d.).

The Abkhaz and Ossetian sides have argued that switching their alphabets to Georgian was part of the "Georgianisation" policies that were directed towards linguistic and cultural assimilation of ethnic minorities in the Georgian SSR. It was believed that this was largely due to powerful positions held by two prominent Georgia-born communists – Stalin and Lavrenti Beria[146] – whose decisions were often viewed as being in favour of Georgia and Georgians (RFE/RL, 26 June 1978, p.4).[147] While the real intentions of Stalin and Beria are questionable, it cannot be

[145] For more on this, see also *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (1970, p.45); RFE/RL (26 June 1978, p.4; 11 August 1989).
[146] Beria (1899–1953), born in Abkhazia, was another prominent Georgian Bolshevik. He served as the First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party on two occasions, in 1931–32 and 1934–38. In 1938 he was made the head of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) and was transferred to Moscow. He was arrested and executed in 1953 following Stalin's death.
[147] Among some Western and Russian scholars who share similar views, see Glebov and Crowfoot (1989, p.79); Cheterian (2008, pp.156–7); Blauvelt (2009, p.654); Shnirelman (2003, p.60).

denied that the process of Georgianisation of ethnic minorities was indeed taking place in the 1930s and 1940s in Georgia. This was particularly well manifested in the case of Abkhazia. In fact, as some have argued, this period “was the only period in the past 200 years when Abkhazia was effectively ruled from Tbilisi” (Smith, 2008, p.9).

The 1922 Constitution of the Georgian SSR listed Abkhaz, Georgian and Russian as all being languages of government in Abkhazia. In practice, Russian remained both “the language of government and of daily life in Abkhazia”; in fact, the 1925 Abkhazian Constitution (Section 2, Paragraph 6) listed Russian as “[t]he language of state bureaus [organs] of the Abkhazian SSR” (Blauvelt, 2007, p.219). Thus, at the time – as now – teaching in Abkhaz schools was conducted in the Abkhaz language for the first four years only, after which all subjects were taught in Russian.[148] In 1944, however, it was announced that the education system in Abkhazia was significantly slowing the cultural development of the republic and that, in order to avoid this, it was necessary to introduce Georgian as a language of instruction in schools. It was argued that “Georgian culture, as unquestionably higher in relation to Abkhaz culture, has a direct influence on it and enriches it” (Blauvelt, 2007, pp.219, 221). Thus, from the following school year Georgian language textbooks were introduced in primary and secondary schools of the Abkhaz ASSR. More than 220 teachers reportedly lost their jobs during this time due to lack of knowledge of the Georgian language. Many schools in predominantly Abkhaz-populated regions of the autonomous republic were also forced to close down. As a result, this significantly affected ethnic Abkhaz populations’ chances of getting higher education and better employment. This

[148] See author’s interviews with Georgian IDPs – Lali Khutsishvili and Avto Gugeshashvili who fled Gagra, Abkhazia in 1992, and Guram Odisharia – a Georgian writer from Abkhazia. A historian by training, Odisharia served as Georgia’s Minister of Culture and Monument Protection in 2012–14.

policy continued until 1954, when the Abkhaz alphabet switched back to Cyrillic and teaching in schools (including Georgian-language schools in the Abkhaz ASSR) "reverted to the Russian language beyond the primary grades" (Blauvelt, 2007, pp.221, 224; see also Coppieters, 2002, p.92).[149]

The renaming of toponyms was another major issue. In March 1947 a special commission was set up to deal with this issue and, according to some sources, during the period 1948–52 more than 147 place names were changed from Abkhazian to Georgian (Shnirelman, 2001, p.208; see also Blauvelt, 2007, p.221).

As mentioned, issues connected to the Abkhaz language and alphabet became increasingly important and contributed to the sense of victimisation among the Abkhaz who felt vulnerable about their future as a nation amidst the dominance of Georgian language and culture. This further contributed to the emergence of Abkhaz nationalism. Beginning in 1947 and spanning the next few decades, multiple letters, statements and telegrams, both individual and collective, would be sent by the Abkhaz to the all-Union organs in Moscow, bypassing authorities in Tbilisi (Blauvelt, 2007, p.221).[150] The main theme of these letters (as well as the Abkhaz protests of 1957, 1965, 1967 and 1977–8, discussed in more detail in Chapter 5) was the marginalised position of the Abkhaz in their autonomous republic. Issues concerning the restoration of Abkhaz geographical names, lack of attention given to the development of Abkhaz language and culture,

[149] According to Rapiel Gelantia, before the outbreak of violence there were about 234 schools in Abkhazia, of which 170 were of Georgian language and the rest of Abkhaz–Russian language (author's interview).
[150] For more on this, see author's interview with Jumber Patiashvili. Patiashvili took over Eduard Shevardnadze as the Party First Secretary of the Georgian SSR in 1985 after Shevardnadze's appointment as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union. He eventually resigned from his post in the aftermath of the 9 April 1989 events.

and inadequacies in the training of the Abkhaz cadres all featured prominently in these letters and protests (Slider, 1985; see *Zarya Vostoka*, 26 May 1978, p.1; *Sovetskaya Abkhaziya*, 23 May 1978, p.1).

South Ossetian complaints against Tbilisi were very similar to those of the Abkhaz, and language issues had been particularly instrumental in their campaign for separation from the Georgian SSR. Indeed it could be argued that the publication of the Georgian state programme on language in late August 1989 acted as a catalyst for popular emotions in South Ossetia and the situation quickly deteriorated from then onwards (RFE/RL, 8 December 1989, p.19).[151] Published in the republican press, the programme underlined the importance of Georgian as the state language of the Georgian SSR and called for its "increased use … in all spheres of public life" (RFE/RL, 8 December 1989, p.18; see *Zarya Vostoka*, 25 August 1989, pp.1, 2–3). If implemented, this decision would have had a significant effect on ethnic minorities, including the Abkhaz and Ossetians, who generally did not have sufficient knowledge of Georgian. The publication was followed by the further spread of rumours in South Ossetia that all non-Georgian schools would switch to Georgian as the language of instruction (*Akhalgazrda Komunisti*, 30 September 1989, pp.6–7). Interpreted by many Ossetians as an act of linguistic oppression, the South Ossetian Popular Front *Ademon Nykhas* (meaning "popular shrine" in Ossetian) rejected the programme as "antidemocratic and discriminatory" and called for strikes at a number of industrial sites in South Ossetia.[152]

[151] For more on this, see also Birch (1996, p.161); Shnirelman (2001, p.355).

[152] For more on the developments in South Ossetia at the time, see *Komunisti* (15 October 1989, p.3); *Literaturuli Sakartvelo* (20 October 1989, p.6); *Zarya Vostoka* (29 October 1989); RFE/RL (8 December 1989, pp.18–9). See also Zürcher (2007, p.142); Cheterian (2008, p.173).

Moreover, on 5 September 1989 the regional newspaper of South Ossetia published the state programme on the development of the Ossetian language, proposing equal status for Ossetian, Georgian and Russian as the state languages of the autonomous *oblast* (*Sovetskaya Ossetia*, 5 September 1989, pp.1–2; *Akhalgazrda Komunisti*, 30 September 1989, p.7). On 26 September, however, the *Oblast* Supreme Soviet passed an amendment to Article 75 of the 1978 Constitution of the South Ossetian AO, declaring Ossetian as the sole state language of the *Oblast* (RFE/RL, 8 December 1989, p.19; see also 1 Arkhi TV, 2 December 2010). Until then, according to that Article, Georgian had been the state language in South Ossetia (*Zarya Vostoka*, 16 April 1978, p.3). Hence it was language-related issues that sparked a series of decisions and events that eventually turned from "wars of words" and "wars of laws" into actual physical violence in South Ossetia. Over the next few decades, alongside the status of territorial autonomies, language would continue to play a crucial role in the development (or rather, deterioration) of both Georgian–Ossetian and Georgian–Abkhaz relations.

4.3. The Adjar ASSR: A Distinct Case

The importance of language in the development (or lack of it) of national self-consciousness among Georgia's ethnic minorities is also well manifested in the case of Adjara. As mentioned above, despite the fact that the Adjars had their own territory bearing their name, they had no titular nationality. Georgi Derluguian (1999, pp.275, 277) calls Adjara "the land without a people" and argues that the story of "the missing titular nationality" of Adjara is very much the story of why a separate Adjar identity never really materialised in this autonomous territory of Georgia. One of the main reasons why this was so and why Adjarian cultural identity never became a politically relevant phenomenon was that the Adjars did not have a language of their

own – for the overwhelming majority of them Georgian was a native language. Since language was central to Stalin's definition of what constituted a nation, without a language of their own Adjars never really developed a strong sense of national identity, separate from Georgian (Kaufman, 2001, p.124). Furthermore, Bolsheviks were not committed to the political recognition of religion-based cultural groups. Religion was not on Stalin's list of national characteristics. Thus, despite being the main determinant for setting up an autonomous republic in Adjara, it could not have become the primary basis for a new Adjarian identity in a largely atheist Soviet society. Even though the Soviet reality was full of controversial principles, politicising a term such as "Muslim Georgian" would have been an extreme move and, as Derluguian (1999, p.262) points out, any self-aware Georgian would have considered it "an oxymoron; more than that, a dangerous abnormality". This is why the authorities in Moscow never really opposed the Georgianisation of Adjara and assimilation of Adjars into the Georgian society.

5. Inter-Ethnic Relations and the Issue of Russification

While for the first decade of the Soviet Union's existence, it was the process of *korenizatsiya* that determined the structure and nature of Soviet ethno-federalism, by the early 1930s nationality policies were taking a different turn (Martin, 2001; Smith, 2006). By 1934, Stalin was already declaring that all essential differences in the Soviet Union had been overcome and the society had reached a sufficient level of industrialisation. As a result, *korenizatsiya* and the nation-building policies of the 1920s were no longer needed, at least not in their original form. By this time, however, the Soviet Union could boast 192 languages – and consequently 192 bureaucracies in native languages. In order to run the newly centralised command economy and education system more effectively, there was a need for better communication between the Centre (i.e. Moscow)

and all these different layers of national units. It therefore seemed the perfect time to disband some of the smaller ethnically defined units and instead focus "on a few full-fledged, fully equipped 'nations'" that had already developed strong national identities and had their own autonomous territories with extensive bureaucracies (Slezkine, 1994, pp.414, 439, 442, 445).

A further, and very striking, innovation of this new "turn" in the nationality policies was the emergence of Russia and Russians at centre-stage of Soviet politics. During the process of *korenizatsiya* Russians had lost the privileges they had possessed during Tsarist times. Indeed, as residents of other Union republics they also experienced a certain negative discrimination. In 1935, however, Stalin pronounced that "non-Russian 'mistrust' had been overcome" and that it was now time to rehabilitate Russia and Russians (Martin, 2001, p.451).[153]

One of the earliest manifestations of upcoming change in Soviet nationality policies was the interpretation of Russian history. Throughout much of the 1920s the Soviet regime supported the so-called Pokrovsky school of history,[154] which portrayed the Tsarist Russian Empire as a "brutal colonial regime" – a "prison of nations". A decade later, however, positive aspects of the Russian Empire started to be emphasised in official Soviet discourse. In fact, not only was Russian history and culture rehabilitated but the Russian people were announced "as being superior" to all the other nationalities (Smith, 2006, p.499; see also Martin, 2001, pp.452–3). Instead of promoting individual national cultures, nationality policies now put more emphasis on *sblizhenie* – the so-called brotherhood of peoples. What this meant in practice was that, while there was a

[153] For more on this, see also Slezkine (1994, pp.434–5); Smith (2006, p.499).
[154] Named after leading Soviet historian Mikhail N. Pokrovsky (1868–1932).

widespread belief that “different cultures could share a common space within the Soviet framework,” the leading position in this space was allocated to Russian nationals (Smith, 2006, p.500).

The revival of the Russian language and culture was also further manifested in language laws when in 1937–9 the Cyrillic alphabet replaced Latin in most literary standards written in the 1920s. However, the changes of particular importance in the case of the Georgian SSR were those enacted in 1938, when Russian language became a compulsory subject in all non-Russian schools (Smith, 2006, p.500; see also Martin, 2001, pp.456–7). In the years to follow, the issue of the victimisation of the Georgian language vis-à-vis Russian would turn into one of the most decisive issues in the construction of conflicting group identities among ethnic Georgians.

These shifts in the nationality policies are open to a variety of interpretations among the scholarly community as well as among the wider public in the former Soviet Union. While some commentators argue that the policies of the 1930s were a sign of the Soviet Union’s ultimate goal of Russification of its non-Russian peoples, others are reluctant to accept this view. Smith (n.d.), for instance, argues that during the 1930s national cultures and national languages continued to be celebrated and the constitutional status of the republics remained the same; thus, the policies of the 1930s cannot be considered as outright Russification (see also Brubaker, 1996, p.37). Others, in contrast, are convinced that the policies of *korenizatsiya* were meant to grant only a temporary permission to minority groups to express their nationalist sentiments in exchange for

their political support of socialism.[155] Thus, “the turn against national leaders and cultures was merely recognition of the fact that Soviet power was securely established and an ‘internationalist’ programme of national assimilation could now be implemented without fear” (Smith, 2006, p.500).

Rapid collectivisation and industrialisation of the Soviet Union resulted in a massive movement of population across its vast landmass. Above all, this concerned the migration of Russians into the non-Russian republics; it would therefore seem counterproductive to continue the earlier anti-Russian stance in these republics. Furthermore, the fear that the Soviet Union might be drawn into a major inter-state war became more established in the late 1920s and early 1930s. This further increased the importance of the loyalty of Russians – the largest nationality of the Soviet Union (Smith, 2006, p.501; see also Armstrong, 1992a). The threat of war also raised fears of the USSR splitting along national lines, and emphasis on “the unity rather than the diversity of Soviet nations” must have hence seemed more appropriate (Smith, 2004).

Like Lenin, Stalin seldom thought in terms of nationalities; as John Armstrong (1992b, p.41) notes, it is more likely that he “viewed symbolic concessions to Russians as instrumentally necessary”. Even while promoting Russian nationalism, however, Stalin also maintained a certain degree of influence in his political apparatus for some non-Russians (particularly Georgians and other South Caucasian republics), and it was only under the rule of his successor Nikita Khrushchev (in office 1953–64) that the dominance of Russians (and Slavic nations in general) became more “thoroughgoing” (Armstrong, 1992b, p.41).

[155] See, for instance, Pipes (1964, pp.296–7); Connor (1984, p.581); Ziegler (1985, p.21); Gleason (1990, p.27).

5.1. Demography and the "Brotherhood of Peoples" in the Georgian SSR

These shifts in the nationality policies and the turn from *korenizatsiya* to "brotherhood of peoples" had curious manifestations in Georgia. During this period (the 1930s and 1940s), there were instances of Georgianisation in autonomous territories of the Georgian SSR. A particularly strong case can be made with regard to the linguistic Georgianisation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. However, this period also coincided with large-scale voluntary resettlements of non-Abkhaz ethnic groups to Abkhazia – a process that in fact had its roots in the Tsarist period.

In 1864, the year when Abkhazia was fully subordinated to Tsarist rule, frontier wars in the Caucasus finally came to an end. As members of the North Caucasian tribal alliance, the Abkhaz were on the losing side and launched a series of unsuccessful uprisings in 1866 and 1877. As a result, significant numbers of Abkhaz were deported *en masse* to the Ottoman Empire, alongside other North Caucasian peoples.[156] This process is known as *mohajirstvo* ("migration") and has an enormous symbolic meaning for the Abkhaz. Starting in the 1870s and 1880s these territories were instead resettled by other ethnic groups including Georgians (especially from western Georgia), Armenians, Estonians, Germans, Greeks and Russians (Kaufman, 2001, p.95; Blauvelt, 2007, p.206; Cheterian, 2008, pp.66, 68, 188). Hence it is from this period that the ethnic Abkhaz proportion of the native population of Abkhazia started to decline (see Appendix 3, Factbox 3). By the time of the establishment of Soviet rule in Abkhazia in 1921, ethnic Abkhaz constituted only 32% of the total population of Abkhazia; their numbers dropped to 27.8% by 1926 and to 18% by 1939. Between 1926 and 1939 the proportion of ethnic Georgians in Abkhazia also fell, from 33.6% to 29.5%. In fact, during this time, resettlement of other ethnic groups (such as

[156] As a result, significant numbers of ethnic Abkhaz live in present-day Turkey and some Middle Eastern countries.

Armenians, Greeks and Russians) was much higher than that of Georgians. During 1939–59, however, the ethnic Georgian population of Abkhazia increased significantly – reportedly by 66,254 people, compared to less than 5,000 for the Abkhaz share of the population.[157] (See Appendix 3, Factbox 2).

These shifts in demographics are often also associated with the policy of Georgianisation (Shnirelman, 2001, p. 207; Blauvelt, 2007, pp.217–8). However, political motives behind migration movements in Georgia cannot be disassociated from economic ones. Indeed, as some have argued, "both kinds of motives were strongly interlinked in the Soviet type of planned economy" (Coppieters, 2002, p.92). Thus, it seems more likely that these resettlement policies were part of the process of forced collectivisation that was taking place in the Abkhaz ASSR at the time.[158] Abkhazia was actually one of the last regions in the Georgian SSR to be collectivised. According to official figures, by 1934 only 34.1% of agriculture in Abkhazia was collectivised, while the overall figure for the Soviet Union in 1932 was already 61.5% (Blauvelt, 2007, pp.213, 218).

Whatever the real reasons behind these resettlements, they affected the ethnic composition of Union republics as well as ethnic regions and the issue of demography became significantly politicised. In Georgia, it became a particularly sensitive issue with regard to both Abkhazia and South Ossetia and significantly contributed to the deepening of feelings of fear and suspicion

[157] See Slider (1985, p.52); Lakoba (1998, p.88); Shnirelman (2001, p.207); Coppieters (2002, pp.92, 112); Blauvelt (2007, p.218); Cheterian (2008, p.69).
[158] However, it has to be pointed out that the resettlement did continue until the mid-1950s – well after the collectivisation of Abkhazia had been achieved (Blauvelt, 2007, p.218; see also Shnirelman, 2001, p.207).

among the opposing groups. In the Abkhaz ASSR the Abkhaz were on the defensive – as representatives of a minority group within their republic, they were concerned about losing the status of both the titular nationality and the autonomous territory (Coppieters, 2002, p.92). In South Ossetia, on the other hand, Georgians were concerned about their minority status within the autonomous *oblast*, which further exacerbated inter-ethnic tensions between these communities.

5.2. From "Brotherhood" to the "Merging" of Peoples

Following Stalin's death in 1953, Khrushchev took over the office of General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU, and signs of a further ideological shift in Soviet nationality policies started to emerge. After consolidating his power Khrushchev introduced a number of changes in relation to Soviet nationality policies. He replaced the notion of the "brotherhood of peoples" with *sliianie* ("merging of peoples") and declared the issue of the national question solved. According to this thinking, national differences were rapidly disappearing and the period of "mature communism" was fast approaching. For Khrushchev and his ideologues this meant that the "merging" of the Soviet nationalities would soon also be complete. Taking into consideration the already dominant position of Russians in the Soviet Union, it was inevitable that this new merged "Soviet" identity would be centred on Russian language and culture (Smith, 2006, pp.505–6, 510).[159]

The new nationality policies were manifested particularly well in Khrushchev's new education law, which was presented in November 1958 and further affected the status of non-Russian

[159] For more on this, see also Parsons (1982, pp.547–8); Slezkine (1994, p.449).

languages. The law made knowledge of the Russian language compulsory at schools from grade one. Parents could now choose which language they wanted their children to be educated in and schools had the right "to drop the teaching of a second language" (Smith, 2006, p.510). This seemed to go against Lenin's idea of giving every child an opportunity to be schooled in their native language. It also meant that ethnic minorities were now no longer required to learn the local languages of the republics in which they resided. In fact, as Dmitry Gorenburg (2006, pp.281–2) points out, many parents "did prefer to send their children to Russian language schools because of the perception that fluency in Russian was the key to a successful career" (see also Slezkine, 1994, p.449).

This law had significant repercussions in Georgia too, and its impact went far beyond ideological shifts. Despite the Georgianisation policies in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the 1930s and 40s, knowledge of the Georgian language among ethnic minorities remained "abysmally low". The census of 1970, for instance, indicates that there was very little, if any, linguistic assimilation between Georgians and the Abkhaz and the Ossetians. 97.8% of Abkhaz claimed the Abkhaz language as their native language, 1.7% listed Russian, and only 0.6% claimed Georgian. Furthermore, only 1.4% of the Abkhaz stated that they had a good command of the Georgian language as a second language, while the figure for Russian was much higher – 59.8%. This is when there were more than twice as many ethnic Georgians living in the Abkhaz ASSR as Russians (RFE/RL, 26 June 1978, p.5). The situation was not much different in South Ossetia. Virtually the entire ethnic Ossetian population of South Ossetia considered Ossetian as their native language. In 1980, approximately 50% claimed fluency in Russian as a second language and only 14% claimed knowledge of Georgian (RFE/RL, 8 December 1989, p.17).

Once again scholars have proposed various explanations for this shift in policy from "brotherhood" to the "merging" of peoples. Proponents of the modernist school of though within the field of nationalism studies have long argued that a modern state required "a mobile, literate, culturally standardised, interchangeable population" (Gellner, 1983, p.46). The Soviet leadership recognised this and engaged, rather successfully, in what Victor Zaslavsky (1992, p.101) calls "forced modernisation" of the state. Amidst the already changing demographic structure of the USSR, "it made sense for everyone to have command of a single language and to owe their primary loyalty to the Soviet state rather than to a particular republic or nationality" (Smith, 2004). Thus, according to some observers, contrary to popular opinion, Russification of the non-Russian peoples took on a much more systematic character during the Khrushchev period than had ever been attempted by Stalin (Smith, 2004; n.d.).

The Khrushchev period was followed by Leonid Brezhnev's (in office 1964–82) "years of stagnation", largely characterised by the so-called stability of cadres (Roeder, 1991, p.212). During the Brezhnev era, Moscow further intensified its efforts to make sure that all its citizens had a good command of the Russian language (Gorenburg, 2006, pp.281–2). In its pronouncements on the language policy, the Kremlin underlined that the goal was "national language – Russian bilingualism" (RFE/RL, 3 May 1978, p.11). The notion of the "Soviet People" was further elaborated during this period and the 1977 Soviet Constitution now proclaimed the emergence of a "new historical community of people, the Soviet people" (Parsons, 1982, p.547).

As already mentioned, the language issue had always been very sensitive in Georgia and some

members of the Georgian intelligentsia were publicly voicing concerns about the promotion of the Russian language and its extensive use in Georgian universities. It is therefore no surprise that the 1975 decree of the Soviet Ministry of Education was met with strong dissatisfaction in Georgia. According to this decree all PhD dissertations written in the Soviet Union were now required to be submitted in Russian. This decision led to several petitions signed by 365 members of the Georgian intelligentsia arguing that such a move would result in a reduction of Georgian language scholarship and lead to its impoverishment (RFE/RL, 3 May 1978, p.8; Cheterian, 2008, p.159). A few years later, attempts to deny Georgian the status of the state language in the draft constitution of the Georgian SSR led to outbursts of public discontent and unprecedented mass demonstrations in Tbilisi in spring 1978 (discussed in Chapter 5).

As a result of these policies, fears of Russification became increasingly prominent among the Georgian public. Abkhaz and Ossetians traditionally maintained close links with Moscow and the Russian language served as the main tool of communication in these regions (much more important than Georgian, especially in Abkhazia). In fact, as Aleksandre Maisuradze, a Georgian IDP from Sokhumi (Sukhum) admits, "we spoke in Russian even with Georgians. … Russian was the main language of communication in Abkhazia" (author's interview).[160] The Georgian side continuously complained about the dominant position of Russian, arguing that Georgian was deliberately neglected and discriminated against, whether in the educational, public or cultural

[160] For more on the state of the Georgian language in Abkhazia see also author's interviews with Guram Odisharia and Levan Berdzenishvili (November 2011). A philologist by training, Berdzenishvili taught history of antique literature and Greek and Latin languages at Tbilisi State University and Abkhaz State University. He was one of the founders of the Republican Party of Georgia in 1978 and had been in volved in dissident activities since 1979. In 1984–87, he was imprisoned for "Anti-Soviet Agitation and Propaganda". He served as a Member of Parliament in 2004–2008 and again since 2012.

spheres (RFE/RL, 7 April 1981).[161] The same arguments were voiced against South Ossetia. Georgians complained that Georgian was official language only on paper in the autonomous *oblast*, and that reportedly there were no Georgian-language kindergartens in Tskhinvali, while there were 24 Ossetian and Russian-language ones (1 Arkhi TV, 18 November 2010). Thus, Russification became increasingly central to the discourse of inter-ethnic relations in Georgia.

Mikhail Gorbachev's accession to power in 1985 and his policies of *glasnost* ("openness") and *perestroika* ("restructuring") did little to address these concerns and the issues concerning language and demography continued to dominate ethnic politics in Georgia for much of the 1980s. Zviad Gamsakhurdia's speech at a founding meeting of the Popular Front of Georgia in June 1989 sums up and reflects much of the concern of many ordinary Georgians at the time. The former dissident and one of the most prominent leaders of Georgia's national movement noted with regret that the Popular Front had begun its existence by publishing articles in two languages – Russian and Georgian – which he considered unacceptable:

> In most regions of Georgia there are newspapers published in two languages already; not only in Abkhazia, not only in South Ossetia, but in other places too. [In certain regions we have] newspapers in two and three languages, even in four languages. I am telling you soon we will have four official languages in Georgia. … Once again here we have the Kremlin's policy of privileging Ossetians and Abkhaz in Georgia. For some reason Abkhazia and [South] Ossetia are emphasised and the Popular Front is fighting for the rights of the Abkhaz and for the rights of Ossetians. Abkhaz and Ossetian interests have a very good defender in the shape of the Kremlin [applause] … You [Popular Front] defend Georgia's interests. (1 Arkhi TV, 23 April 2010)[162]

Even Merab Kostava, a long-time dissident and one of the most popular (and relatively moderate)

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[161] For more on this, see also RFE/RL (10 March 1989, p.26); *Literaturuli Sakartvelo* (26 May 1989, p.2); Coppieters (2002, pp.96, 102).
[162] See also 1 Arkhi TV (27 February 2010). For a fuller extract from his speech from this meeting, see Appendix 4.

leaders of the national movement of Georgia, argued that while Georgians could not forbid anyone from speaking their native language and ethnic minorities had a right to learn their own languages, "they were also obliged to learn Georgian and receive citizenship only through this means" (1 Arkhi TV, 2 December 2010).

At the time there was also a strong perception among many Georgians that Abkhaz and Ossetians were more concerned with the state of the Russian language in their autonomous territories than with the Abkhazian or Ossetian languages themselves. According to Tamar (Tamriko) Chkheidze, one of the founders and a chairwoman of the Ilia Chavchavadze Society,[163] moderate segments of the national movement of Georgia were ready to support ethnic minorities in their quest to defend their group identities and to promote minority languages in schools. However, their response to this proposal often was that they wanted to be schooled in Russian rather than in Abkhaz or Ossetian (author's interview). In fact, in Sokhumi (Sukhum) in particular, for instance, even among ethnic Abkhaz, "almost no-one knew Abkhaz language" (author's interview with Levan Berdzenishvili, Nov. 2011, Tbilisi). "This is why Georgians did not believe that the Abkhaz and Ossetian popular movements were genuine and considered them as Russian movements from the very start", argues Tamriko Chkheidze (1 Arkhi TV, 13 March 2010; see also author's interview). Since language played such an important part in the Soviet understanding of an ethnic group, lack of commitment to their native languages was perceived by Georgians as a sign that the Abkhaz and Ossetians were, in fact, advancing Russia's interests

[163] Generally considered a more moderate wing of the national movement, Ilia Chavchavadze Society was one of the first "informal" organisations formed in Georgia in 1987. It was named after the prominent Georgian writer Ilia Chavchavadze (1837–1907), who took an active role in the revival of Georgian national movement in the nineteenth century and was canonised as Saint Ilia the Righteous by the Georgian Orthodox Church in 1987.

rather than their own. The two issues therefore soon became closely intertwined and almost inseparable, and the Georgian–Abkhaz and Georgian–Ossetian conflicts were now viewed as "part of the increasingly tense Russo–Georgian relations" (Coppieters, 2002, p.96).

When it comes to the Russsian-Georgian relations, however, most western commentators fail to acknowledge, or give due credit to, this aspect of the relationship. They mainly focus on Russian involvement in the military campaigns in South Ossetia and Abkhazia and while no scholar would go as far as denying Kremlin's influence on the events in Georgia, the general conclusion tends to be that the Georgian side often dramatically exaggerated this influence (Zürcher, 2005, p.12, 19). What the above examples demonstrate, however, is that from the Georgian perspective, Russian involvement in these conflicts goes far back, and far beyond Moscow's political and military assistance to the Abkhaz and Ossetian sides in the early 1990s. As Vladimer (Lado) Papava, Georgia's Minister of Economic Development in 1994–2000, points out, "there is Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, there is Georgian-Ossetian conflict, but there is also Georgian-Russian conflict and it has existed from the very beginning. These conflicts are all intertwined. … They are all together … [and] they do not exist separately" (author's interview).

6. Concluding Remarks

As already discussed, there has been much speculation about the real intentions as well as unintended consequences of the Soviet Union's nationality policies. Some scholars have argued that there really was no coherent nationality policy in the USSR, certainly not in the later era (Smith, n.d.; 2006). Others maintain that the consequences brought about by this uniquely Soviet phenomenon – an "institutionalised multi-nationality" – were unintended (Brubaker, 1996, p.7;

Cheterian, 2008, p.45). In fact, the views of Western scholars on this issue have gone through considerable changes over time (Gorenburg, 2006, p.275).

During the Cold War period, it was widely believed that the Kremlin was engaged in a deliberate policy of assimilation (i.e. Russification) of different nationalities of the Soviet Union. However, after the collapse of the USSR and the end of the Cold War scholars have increasingly argued that Soviet nationality policies were more interested in promoting and strengthening the ethnic identities of minority groups rather than assimilating them. While no scholar would go as far as denying some level of linguistic and cultural assimilation among the minorities, especially in the post-Stalinist years, they do not consider this issue to be a determining factor. Smith (2006, p.511), for instance, views this process as "natural assimilation rather than a deliberate policy [of Russification]" – although he does admit that during the Khrushchev era some national minorities, particularly in the RSFSR, were victims of a clear policy of linguistic Russification.[164] However, such views seem to oversimplify the essence of these policies. According to Charles Ziegler (1985, p.29), by the 1980s nation-building in the Soviet Union had already become "more a process of assimilation to the dominant Russian culture, than a process of creating a new Soviet identity," which in his view remained one of the central dilemmas of Soviet nationality policies. Gorenburg (2006) also maintains that recent Western scholarship on Soviet nationality issues has overlooked the overall success of Soviet nationality policies when it comes to assimilating ethnic minorities. He is convinced that, "had Soviet nationality policies remained in place for another 20–30 years", many more groups would have become entirely assimilated with Russians

[164] For a similar view, see also Roeder (1991, p.229); Suny (1993, pp.155–6); Kaiser (1994, pp.262, 295); Slezkine (1994); Brubaker (1996, p.37).

(Gorenburg, 2006, p.298).

Over seven decades, Soviet nationality policies indeed went through some significant and at times even contradictory shifts. Many aspects of these policies often seemed to be the result of the whims of whoever was in charge in the Kremlin rather than any coherent policy. It is also true that the treatment of individual nationalities varied greatly – some autonomous territories appeared more autonomous than others and different nationalities often "found themselves placed arbitrarily in a hierarchy of 'favour'" (Wolczuk and Yemelianova, 2008, pp.179, 186).[165] However, as Armstrong (1992, p.40) points out, despite some obvious signs of irrationality, shifts and inconsistencies in Soviet nationality policies "do *not* indicate that the Soviet regime was formally inconsistent or instrumentally irrational" (emphasis original). After all, certain elements of these policies remained largely intact until the collapse of the USSR in 1991, such as the Union's federal structure (Smith, 2006, p.495). The continuous struggle of the Soviet state apparatus against any manifestations of nationalism was also one of the aspects of the nationality policies that remained "surprisingly persistent" throughout the existence of the Soviet Union (Shnirelman, 2001, p.3).

According to Gorenburg (2006, p.298), however, one of the most interesting (and paradoxical) facets of Soviet nationality policies was that they were characterised by two opposing poles – policies promoting separate ethno-territorial and linguistic identities existed alongside policies that encouraged the gradual assimilation of different nationalities.

[165] Valerie Bunce (2005, p.427) also calls this "a hierarchy of dependencies". For more on this, see also Slezkine (1994, p.419); Bunce (1999); Gorenburg (2006, p.278); Smith (2006, p.495).

> Though changes in Soviet nationality policy over time resulted from minor shifts toward one or the other of these poles, at no time during the Soviet period was one of these poles completely removed from the ideology of the Soviet government. (Gorenburg, 2006, p.278)

In other words, it could be argued that these policies incorporated both the (socio-biological) primordialist and constructivist views. On the one hand, ethnicity was largely viewed as "natural, innate and inescapable"; ethnic groups were perceived as "objective entities", "ancient, self-contained bodies" that came with particular characteristics "such as territory, language, recognisable membership, and even a common mentality" (Tishkov, 1997, p.1, 3).[166] On the other hand, there has always been an underlying constructivist element to these policies that also seemed immune to any change – promoting ethnic harmony and a gradual merging of different nationalities "into a single internationalist whole", the thinking that was largely based on the supposedly "scientific doctrine" of Marxism–Leninism (Karklins, 1986, p.11; Armstrong, 1992, p.40; Gleason, 1990, p.36).

In this way, it *can* be argued that Soviet nationality policies did, in fact, represent a coherent set of policies (Slezkine, 1994, p.415). Ideology and pragmatism both played an important role in moulding these policies – they "were the result of massively ideological and often utopian politics on the one hand and tactical concessions … on the other" (Zürcher, 2007, pp.23–4; see also Suny, n.d.). It is not surprising, therefore, that they were often being modified over time according to political, social and economic developments and realities within the Soviet Union as well as at the international level. However, in the end, Soviet nationality policies produced quite the opposite outcome to what was originally expected (and intended) by the founders of the

[166] For more on this, see Bromley (1981); Gumilev (1989).

USSR. Their efforts at transforming the multitude of nationalities into "one socialist nation" failed and, as Ronald Suny (1993, p.87) notes, "rather than a melting pot, the Soviet Union became the incubator of new nations".[167] Probably nowhere in the former Soviet Union demonstrates this better than Georgia.

When it comes to Georgia's conflicts, Soviet nationality policies are generally discussed in the context of Soviet ethno-federalism. In this literature, one of the central questions concerns the role of territorial autonomy in exacerbating conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Autonomies are viewed as a significant mobilisational factor that strengthened the ethnic consciousness of Georgia's minorities and provided them with counter-elites and state-like institutions (Cornell, 2002). In other words, the ethno-federal structure of the Soviet Union provided ethnic minorities with (institutional) means and resources to wage a war against the centre (George, 2009, p.29; see also Bunce, 2005, p.430).

However, as I show above, the institutional capacity of autonomous units was only one "side-effect" of the territorialisation of ethnicity. An equally important aspect of Soviet nationality policies was the "ranking" and "hierarchical ordering" of different ethno-linguistic groups.[168] In this way, in addition to resources, what these policies provided to Soviet Union's multitude of nationalities was resentments (Bunce, 2005, p.430). Under the Soviet ranking system, certain ethnic groups were privileged in some parts of the country and disadvantaged in others. As a titular nationality of the Union republic, ethnic Georgians held a privileged position at the central

[167] For more on this, see also Ziegler (1985, p.29); Seely (2001, p.11).
[168] I borrow these terms from Donald Horowitz (1985).

level in the Georgian SSR while being relatively disadvantaged in autonomous territories. On the other hand, ethnic Abkhaz, who were in a minority within the Abkhaz ASSR, were considered a titular nationality there and enjoyed a privileged position vis-à-vis the numerically much larger group – ethnic Georgians. The Ossetians of South Ossetia were also a titular nationality in their autonomous *oblast.* This "status pyramid" (Horowitz, [1985]2000, p.24) also set the rules of ethnic bargaining. This unequal, subordinated relationship between ethnic communities provided a framework through which inter-ethnic relations played out over time and played a decisive role in the formation of conflicting group identities among ethnic Georgians, Abkhaz and Ossetians. Relations between these groups were marked by resistance to, and victimisation by, the "other" group which further intensified feelings of insecurity and vulnerability among them (Slider, 1985; Coppieters, 1998; 2002; Bunce, 2005). As a result, inter-ethnic relations in Georgia were largely characterised by visceral mutual suspicion between different groups.

However, while I consider Soviet nationality policies a necessary factor in the formation of conflicting group identities, they were by no means a sufficient factor on their own – after all, Georgia was one of the few places in the Soviet Union where inter-ethnic relations turned violent. As some scholars rightly point out, nationality policies had a "different effect on different ethnic groups" (Wolczuk and Yemelianova, 2008, p.187). Even within Georgia, some national identities, such as the Abkhaz and the Ossetian, "solidified", while in other cases, like Adjara, "more fluid identities came to prevail" (Wolczuk and Yemelianova, 2008, p.187).[169] Thus, as I argue, nationality policies played a decisive role in the construction of antagonistic group

[169] Wolczuk and Yemelianova (2008) do not discuss the case of Georgia specifically but talk about Soviet nationality policies in general.

identities in Georgia but they did so *in combination* with other factors. In the next chapter, I explore the role of the discourses in the processes of identity construction.

Chapter 5 – Discourses and the Construction of Conflicting Identities

1. Introduction

Some scholars have expressed scepticism over how much of a role discourses played in Georgia's conflicts. Zürcher (2007, p.149), for instance, maintains that "the construction of antagonistic nationalist discourses" started in the Georgian SSR only in 1988 and that "the emergence of this discursive friction … was not relevant for the organization of ethnic violence". On the contrary, as I argue, these discourses were not only relevant but also instrumental in mobilising the masses (which, in turn, was instrumental in the outbreak of violence). In terms of intensity, while these discourses indeed reached a peak towards the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, they were by no means the outcome of the post-1988 period only, which is demonstrated particularly well in the case of Abkhazia.

The main aim in this chapter is to inquire into the role of these discourses – "supra-individual things" such as myths, symbols, and metaphors in the construction of conflicting group identities in Georgia. My research findings largely confirm the conclusions reached by proponents of ethno-symbolist approaches within the nationalism studies field, which I consider under Fearon and Laitin's (2000) umbrella term of "discourse constructivism". Unlike socio-biological primordialists, ethno-symbolists do not search for the roots of ethnic identities in biology or evolutionary psychology. Instead, they locate them "in history and cultural symbols" (Kaufmann, 2008, p.2) and, in so doing, they share the same intellectual domain as cultural primordialists.

When it comes to ethnic conflicts, the main claim of ethno-symbolists is that rival, sometimes incompatible, ethnic myths are a necessary condition for conflicts to emerge (Smith, 1992, p.62). In this regard, Georgia is indeed an excellent case study for uncovering how conflicting myths of origin, "overlapping 'claims to indigenousness'" (Smith et al., 1998, p.48), and rival "guest–host" metaphors aligned Georgian, Abkhaz and Ossetian communities into opposing groups of "us" versus "others". As I demonstrate in this chapter, the "logic" (or "structures of reasoning") behind these myths and metaphors acted as an important, indeed necessary, factor in the mobilisation of the masses in Georgia, which was detrimental in the eventual outbreak of violence. These myths and metaphors prepared the ground on which inter-ethnic relations played out, they added force to mobilisation of people and steered the situation in a particular direction (Kapferer, 1988, p.22).[170]

Ethno-symbolists are, of course, not the only ones who acknowledge the power of discourses. Rational choice (instrumentalist) theorists are also well aware that elites often resort to "symbolic resources" of an ethnic group in order to justify their nationalist claims. Erik Kaufmann (2008, p.2) calls this process "dipping" into the "layering" of a nation's past while Robin Jeffrey (1994) compares it to choosing certain ethnic characteristics from "an identity basket" of a group (see also Esman, 1994, p.14). However, while instrumentalists continue to attribute agency to the actors, ethno-symbolists argue that, once adopted and transmitted, these "symbolic layers" (such as myths, metaphors) assume a "directive power" of their own and limit the "options for actors in

[170] Kapferer (1988) does not discuss Georgia but makes a similar argument in the case of Sri Lanka. All his arguments (and quotes) here and below hence refer to the Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka, although I apply them to the cases in Georgia throughout the thesis.

such a way as to produce the path dependency effects" (Wimmer, 2008, p.13).[171] Ascribing agency to these discourses, however, does not mean arguing that it is discourses as such that "force parties to take a particular action" (Ross, 2007, p.44). Rather, it is to argue that often they can limit the range of possible choices and can act as powerful constraints on the actions and decisions of the elites and the masses, significantly shaping their political behaviour (Kapferer, 1988; Shnirelman, 2001; Ross, 2007). Equally importantly, however, as I argue, these discourses also played a constitutive role, informing the very interests of the actors involved. In this way, it can be said that discourses do "play a causal role in conflict" (Ross, 2007, p.44).

It is this aspect of ethno-symbolism, however, that gets criticised the most, as many within academia question the "directive power" and the "real social force" of discourses (Kaufmann, 2008, p.2). How can discourses act as agents of social construction? ask the critics. In other words, how is it possible for discourses to construct identities in such a way as to potentially cause violence "if discourses themselves are complex, multifaceted, and subject to all manner of interpretations"? (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, p.852). Moreover, how are these discourses sustained and "'carried' into the modern era"? (Hutchinson, 2005, p.41). These are some of the questions that are often posed to discourse constructivists, and admittedly "they are difficult questions" (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, p.854; see also Özkirimli, 2008, pp.6–9).

In recent writings, ethno-symbolists have tried to address some of this criticism by recognising "the limits of continuity and path-dependency" – some of the central claims in ethno-symbolist research (Kaufmann, 2008, p.2). John Hutchinson's work has been particularly instrumental in

[171] For more on the concept of path dependency, see Collier and Collier (1991); Mahoney (2000).

this regard. Hutchinson (2005, p.135) argues that "nationalism as an ideological movement is *episodic*, triggered by a sense of crisis that the nation is in decline or under threat" (emphasis added). According to him, these resurgences of nationalism are activated by sudden threats to what are often believed to be the primary segments of a group's identity (Hutchinson, 2005, p.136).[172] In Georgia's case these have been the "homeland, language and religion" (*mamuli, ena, sartsmunoeba*) identified by writer Ilia Chavchavadze[173] in one of his earlier essays as the three defining elements of a Georgian identity. "We are left with three holy treasures from our ancestors", argued Chavchavadze (1860), "Homeland, language, religion. If we do not take care of these, what kind of men [*sic*] will we be?"

As I argue, political and social developments that followed Stalin's death in 1953 acted as a trigger for the emergence of "metaphorical and mythical modes of [thinking]" among Georgians (Edelman, 1971, p.65).[174] In the post-Stalinist period the Abkhaz and Ossetians were increasingly regarded as posing a direct threat to two important aspects of Georgian identity – Georgian territory (homeland) and Georgian language. The same was true with these ethnic minorities, however. According to one Abkhaz saying, for instance, "He [*sic*] who has lost his homeland has lost everything" (cited in Toft, 2005, p.87). Thus, Abkhaz and Ossetians perceived any threat to their homeland and culture as a threat to their ethnic identity and their very existence.

The absence of religious aspect of an identity here is particularly telling. Religion has not played a significant role in Georgia's conflicts and as some have argued this could be due to lack of

[172] For a similar argument, see also Edelman (1971, p.65); Esman (1994, pp.13–15); Wolff (2003, pp.4–5).
[173] Considered by many as the "founding father" of the Georgian nation.
[174] While quote is from Edelman (1971) his discussion does not concern Georgia.

politicisation of religion-based identities (Derluguian, 1999).[175] Indeed, the atheist nature of the Soviet Union (at least in theory), meant that religion-based cultural groups never acquired the *same* political recognition as ethno-linguistic groups. While the Adjar ASSR within Georgia and the Jewish Autonomous *Oblast* within Russia were exceptions in this respect, neither Adjars nor Jews were considered a titular nationality in their autonomous territories. In this way, the role of the discourses in Georgia cannot be considered outside of the context of the Soviet nationality policies. While not created by these policies, discourses were nurtured in, and by, the Soviet institutional context.

In the following sections, I first briefly define these discourses – myths, symbols and metaphors. I proceed to examine the "guest–host" metaphor and its applicability to the cases in Georgia. I further explore in more depth some of the issues concerning the two key dimensions of ethnicity that I identified as the main players in the construction of conflicting group identities – territory and language. I discuss in detail their presence in "successive mythic structures" (Smith, 2009, p.24) of the Georgian, Abkhaz and Ossetian people, their recurrence in public and political discourses, and how they shaped, and were shaped by, these discourses. I then trace the events that led to heightening and escalation of inter-ethnic tensions in the post-Stalinist period in Georgia, before summarising the main arguments of the chapter.

[175] While many Ossetians living in North Ossetia are Sunni Muslims, Ossetians of South Ossetia consider themselves predominantly Orthodox Christians, like the majority of ethnic Georgians. However, Sunni Islam, Orthodox Christianity and pagan traditions can all be found among ethnic Abkhaz (Derluguian, 1999, p.276).

2. The Power of Emotions: Myths, Symbols and Metaphors

I understand the concept of a "myth" as a set of unquestioned beliefs and ideas, put forward as a narrative that a group holds about itself and its surrounding universe. Myths are not historical accounts, even though they are often portrayed and treated as such by those who use them (Schöpflin, 2000, pp.80, 84). Instead, they are perceptions through which a group views and interprets certain actions and events (Edelman, 1971, p.53). In other words, myths provide an insight into "the covert part of thinking and the biases, slants and prejudices [of a group]" (Schöpflin, 2000, p.79). Symbols, on the other hand, constitute important "building blocks" of myths; they are "an emotionally charged shorthand reference to a myth" (Kaufman, 2001, p.6).[176] "Metaphor" is another closely related term. Similarly to myths, metaphors help simplify and explain "complex and bewildering sets of observations that evoke concern [among the group]". They provide a language through which "the unknown, the new, the unclear, and the remote" is transformed into the more "familiar" story to which a group can relate and respond (Edelman, 1971, pp.65, 67). Thus, in Georgia, the "guest–host" metaphor framed inter-ethnic relations in a way that was easily accessible and understandable to the public by invoking one of the most cherished cultural references in the Caucasus – the issue of hospitality. Indigenous myths of origin further called upon some of the most important symbols of Georgian ethnic identity – territory and language – that had been significantly politicised during the Soviet rule. As a result, any threat (whether real or perceived) to Georgia's territorial integrity and language was understood as a direct threat to the Georgian nation and Georgian nationhood and the defence of the latter became associated with the defence of territory (i.e. homeland) and language.

[176] For more on the conceptual utility of the term "myth", see Edelman (1971, p.34); Schöpflin (2000, p.80).

However, despite overwhelming evidence of the importance of myths, symbols and metaphors in shaping human political behaviour, within academia scholars remain largely sceptical about the explanatory power of these "supra-individual things". They are generally viewed as cultural and historical resources that can be manipulated and used as "instruments" in order to provide legitimacy and/or gain support for various political or cultural claims (Kapferer, 1988, p.33; see also Edelman, 1971, p.68). Thus, the question that is often posed is whether these "half-baked and artificially constructed" stories about ethnic homelands can be taken seriously (Toft, 2005, p.16).[177] Many consider such an endeavour as a sign of reaffirming nationalists' claims to ethnic distinctiveness and special needs but this is not necessarily the case. Acknowledging that historical and cultural discourses and narratives play an important and active role in inter-ethnic relations does not mean scholars will succumb to ethnic manipulation (Tilley, 1997, p.507).

As Monica Duffy Toft (2005, p.16) points out, even if myths "are not 'real', they have real, material consequences … and … they often resonate with those who tell them and those who listen to them" (see also Kapferer, 1988, p.33). It is therefore important that scholars take due notice of "the content of the myth" (Schöpflin, 2000, p.80; see also Kaufman, 2001, p.16). Uncovering the objective validity of the stories people tell about their past is not the aim here but, rather, finding out the impact of these stories on inter-ethnic relations. After all, as Ernst Cassirer (1944) eloquently points out,

> [t]o inquire into the "truth" of the political myth is … as meaningless and as ridiculous as to ask for the truth of a machine gun or a fighter plane. Both are weapons; and weapons prove their truth by their efficiency. (cited in Kapferer, 1988, p.27)

[177] For more on this, see also Hutchinson (2005, p.1); Ross (2007, p.24).

An inquiry into the myths and metaphors, and the symbols they evoke, however, does provide us with some answers to why ethnicity often arouses such strong feelings among conflicting groups (Kapferer, 1988, p.22; Ross, 2001, p.162; Smith, 2009, p.18). In other words, it gives us some understanding of the rationale behind strong emotional attachments of the Georgians, Abkhaz and Ossetians to the territories they claim as “ours”.

In recent years some scholars have once again raised the question of the importance of emotions in explaining “why people do what they do politically” and have called for more research in this area to “supplement narrowly rationalist explanations of human action” (Suny, 2006, p.3). It is true that some rationalist explanations are more careful about pointing out the “microfoundations that connect structure with action”, and some of them do take note of the importance of myths and symbols, and of norms and beliefs in which certain actions arise (Suny, 2006, p.3).[178] Nevertheless, as Ronald Suny (2006, p.3) notes, the majority of the scholarship on this subject still falls short of acknowledging cultural and historical peculiarities of a given case and “the emotional connection that arises in a particular context”.

As confirmed by many psychological studies, emotions play a much larger role in people’s decision-making processes than any rational thinking (Kaufman, 2001, p.27). While few might question the suggestion that emotions play an integral part in human belief and value systems and are indeed central to human behaviour, emotions nevertheless are largely missing from most

[178] Among these rationalist explanations, see for instance, Lake and Rothchild (1996a; 1996b).

accounts of ethnic violence (Suny, 2006, p.3). There are some notable exceptions, of course.[179] However, more often than not, the existence of emotions either is assumed or is simply taken for granted. At other times, scholars just register the importance of emotions without any further in-depth exploration of the issue (see Lake and Rothchild, 1996b). Thus, by large, emotions remain at the margins of ethnic conflict studies.

In 1999, social scientist Jon Elster observed that the violence that was raging in the former Yugoslavia at the time

> may to some extent be explained in terms of rational pre-emption, but that is a very incomplete explanation and a very impoverished account. To fully explain the mass slaughters we must take into account the emotions of fear, anger, contempt, hatred, and resentment. (Elster, 1999, p.404)

The emotion of fear has long occupied a prominent place within the security studies field and many scholars have also explored its role in inter-ethnic violence. However, in ethnic conflicts, not only emotions of "fear, anger, contempt, hatred, and resentment" are at play, but also emotions of empathy and love, and, most importantly, emotions of pride and honour (Suny, 2006, p.1). The latter have played a particularly crucial role in the conflicts in Georgia. This is why, as the archival material demonstrates, the issues concerning territory and language, and the ethno-genesis (i.e. origins) of Georgia's ethnic groups seemed much more important to conflicting parties and featured more often in various protest letters than more "material" grievances that would have had a more immediate effect on ordinary people on a daily basis.

[179] See for instance, Horowitz (1985); Finlayson (1998); Kaufman (2001; 2006); Hale (2004); Suny (2006); Petersen (2002; 2010; 2011; 2012).

3. One Territory – Two Homelands

When it comes to Georgia's relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, one question that puzzles many (especially in the West) is why Georgia refuses to allow these territories to secede when the Abkhaz and Ossetians clearly no longer want to live side by side with Georgians within a single state. In fact, as some point out, they already have been *de facto* independent for two decades. Leaving aside the issue of IDPs, the answer to this question seems rather simple – territory is generally considered "the lifeblood and defining characteristic of the state", while secession means, first and foremost, a "territorial withdrawal" (Bishai, 1998, p.94).[180]

Indeed, in the contemporary state system one of the most fundamental aspects of state sovereignty has been the principle of territorial integrity (or territorial sovereignty), which implies full exercise of authority over a piece of territory (O'Leary, 2001, p.6; Taras and Ganguly, 2006, p.46). Allowing a region to secede would thus violate this basic condition of state sovereignty, also enshrined in Articles 1 and 55 of the UN Charter. In other words, as James Mayall (1990, p.20) argues, "the value which sovereign states cannot sacrifice, without, as it were, committing suicide, is their independence. What this means in practice is that they cannot surrender their territorial integrity".[181] This is why the principle of territorial integrity has

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[180] In fact, because of the centrality of territory in secessionist claims, Lea Brilmayer (1991, p.189) has even argued in favour of recognising groups' "territorial right" (i.e. their right to a particular territory) under international law. She has argued that by recognising the relevance of a territory, territorial approaches are far better at explaining many aspects of secessionist claims than are the standard national self-determination arguments. For more on the links between secession and territory, see also Moore (1998, p.136). For more on the centrality of territory to the concept of ethnicity, see Smith (1986, p.163).

[181] Nevertheless, some states do allow certain regions to secede under certain circumstances. Such incidents are generally termed as "partitions". Partition occurs when separation of a territory is jointly decided "by the responsible powers: either agreed between the two sides (and not under pressure of imminent military victory by one side), or imposed on both sides by a stronger third party" (Kaufmann, 1998, p.125). Some scholars also term the changes of internal and external state boundaries agreed upon by the political elite of that state – the "right-sizing" the state (O'Leary, Lustick and Callaghy, 2001).

generally remained "an overriding norm of international law" and the international community has opposed contested secession, with few exceptions (Brilmayer, 1991, p.183; Simpson, 1996, p.42).[182]

The argument that the Georgian side advances against Abkhazian and South Ossetian secession is that losing over 18% of its territory (the combined area of these two regions) would not only weaken Georgia economically or politically (by losing two geographically strategic and economically viable regions, or by setting a precedent and potentially making the country vulnerable to further territorial losses), but would also redefine "the very meaning and identity of the state" (Bishai, 1998, p.94). The main question arising here is therefore whether states can "remain themselves" even if they lose parts of their territory. Or are states' identities intrinsically linked and dependent on their territories? (O'Leary, 2001, p.3). In the case of Georgia, it was further argued that losing these territories would also redefine "the very meaning and identity" of the Georgian nation per se for ethnic Georgians, as state and national identities largely coincided. This was principally due to the Soviet nationality policies discussed in Chapter 4. In the Soviet Union, national and territorial identities were intrinsically linked and often coincided – officially recognised nationalities, for instance, were generally entitled to a particular territory. This practice was further aggravated by the institution of "titular nationalities". It was believed that as a titular nationality of the Georgian SSR, the Georgian state in fact "belonged" to ethnic Georgians. Any threat to the Georgian state was therefore perceived as a threat to Georgian national identity. Similarly it was believed that, ethnic Georgians were entitled to the territory of

[182] For more on the issue of secession in the cases of Kosovo, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, see Kemoklidze (2009).

Georgia and just like Georgian statehood, Georgian national identity depended on the integrity of its territories and could not "survive" their loss.

The problem, of course, is that these territories are claimed as "ours" by the Georgians, the Abkhaz and the Ossetians alike and serve as inseparable parts of not only Georgian but also of Abkhaz and Ossetian identities. In other words, the issue at stake is the "indivisibility" of these contested territories. In this case – "[w]hen both sides in a conflict regard control over a disputed territory as indivisible" – the likelihood of the outbreak of violence increases significantly, as argued by Toft (2005, p.2).

In this context, "territory takes on a meaning that far exceeds its material and objective description. It becomes not an object to be exchanged [or divided] but an indivisible component of a group's identity" (Toft, 2005, p.1). Thus, rather than being based on any rational calculation, people's attachment to a given territory is based on more emotional, symbolic meanings. When Guram Odisharia's *Far Away Sea* – an autobiographical play about the Georgian writer's brief return to his native Sokhumi (Sukhum) years after being forcibly displaced, was performed in Zugdidi, in the Samegrelo region of Georgia, many Georgian IDPs among the audience would often take stones from the stage. These stones were parts of the stage decoration and were meant to represent the seaside of Sokhumi (Sukhum) in the play. According to the cast, "people thought that these stones were indeed from Abkhazia. They would put them in their pockets and take them home as memorabilia" (Studio Re, 2010).[183] This further demonstrates the strong symbolic

[183] The play was performed by the Konstantine Gamsakhurdia Sokhumi Theatre. It premiered in 2005 in Tbilisi and featured on Studio Re in 2010 as part of the TV discussion.

meaning of, and the emotional attachment to, the "soil" (*mitsa*) – in this case represented by the Black Sea stones from Abkhazia.

This is why, while Georgia might have lost *de facto* control over the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, many Georgian IDPs "would rather die than lose the hope or right of return" (Toft, 2005, p.1) to what they consider to be their "ancestral lands" (*mama-papata mitsa*). For instance, in Mamuka Kuparadze's 2009 documentary film about Georgia's conflicts – *Absence of Will* – an ethnic Georgian IDP temporarily living in Zugdidi, maintains that "this [Gali, Abkhazia] is the land of my ancestors; [ancestral] graves are there that I cannot abandon by any means".[184] The importance of ancestral graves and the desire to be buried alongside them is central to many Caucasian cultures including Georgian, Abkhaz and Ossetian, and is linked to the idea of "rootedness". In fact, this tradition has been respected in the case of Gali Georgians, where even in the post-war period Georgian IDPs are generally allowed to bury their dead in this traditionally ethnic-Georgian populated region in Abkhazia.

The issue of graves is an important part of the ongoing dispute along the so-called administrative border between South Ossetia and Georgia proper. South Ossetia's *de facto* authorities and Russian forces currently stationed in South Ossetia have resumed building fences alongside this border, which cuts through many ethnic-Georgian populated villages, often affecting people's private property, water supply for entire villages and grazing fields for cattle. However, what

[184] The areas around Gali and the Kodori Gorge (or Kodori Valley) in Abkhazia had traditionally been predominantly populated by ethnic Georgians. Kodori Gorge was the only part of the post-war Abkhazia controlled by the Georgian government in Tbilisi; however, as a result of the August 2008 Russo–Georgian war in South Ossetia, Georgian authorities lost control of this territory too.

seems to evoke the most outrage among the villagers is the fact that this new "border" would leave people without access to their graveyards (Maestro TV, 17 September 2013; 18 September 2013).

A number of scholars have suggested various explanations for why groups (and states) come to view a particular territory in indivisible terms. Among these, Barbara Walter (2003) has put forward a rather "rational" explanation. According to her, the "intractability of territorial claims", as she calls it, is closely linked to the issue of "reputation-building". Material or symbolic value of a given territory has little to do with the reasons why states consistently refuse to negotiate over them. The main reason is the fear that, if governments concede to one group's separatist demands, they might open up a Pandora's box and invite future secessionist demands from others. Thus, "even though seemingly irrational in the short term", waging a war against secessionists "becomes part of a very rational strategy to eliminate the higher long-term costs of multiple future wars" (Walter, 2003, pp.138, 147).

Toft (2005), whose research incorporates statistical analysis of settlement patterns in Abkhazia and Adjara, makes a similar rational choice argument. She suggests that territorially concentrated ethnic groups have higher capability and legitimacy for mobilisation and are therefore more likely to view territory in indivisible terms and demand sovereignty. States, on the other hand, have different reasons for viewing "control over the same piece of … [territory] … as an indivisible issue". Most likely, this will happen if there is a danger of setting a precedent for further secessions, even if a territory is "worthless or costly". Thus, according to her, there is a

need to differentiate between different political actors involved in Georgia's ethnic disputes – the Georgian state on one hand and ethnic Abkhaz on the other (Toft, 2005, pp.2–3).

However, while to a certain degree this may indeed be the case and the opposing sides might have had rather different interests in Georgia's conflict, it is nevertheless an understatement to argue that the only reason why the Georgian state opposed Abkhazia's (or South Ossetia's) separation was that it was afraid of setting a precedent. Moreover, in this case the Georgian state was represented by its titular nationality – ethnic Georgians – and one could therefore argue that the conflict was between two ethnic groups rather than between a state and a group. In other words, Georgians and Abkhaz both considered the same piece of land an indivisible territory for the very same reasons – they both viewed their rights over this territory as morally (as well as legally) legitimate. They both considered it as part of their national identity.[185] Thus, any discussion of the indivisibility of Georgia's disputed territories that does not take into account the symbolic value and significance of these territories to the groups concerned will be incomplete.

Ethnic Homeland and the "Guest–Host" Metaphor in Georgia

In order to emphasize the role and significance of a territory, or "soil", in Georgia's conflicts, Ghia Nodia (1996, pp.8–9) even refers to the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia as "ethnic

[185] It must be noted here, however, that before the August 2008 Russo–Georgian war the Georgian side had allegedly offered the Abkhaz and Russian sides a proposal to divide the territory of the former Abkhaz ASSR between upper and lower Abkhazia. According to this plan, the Abkhaz would reportedly retain upper Abkhazia and the Georgian side would settle for lower Abkhazia – the territory that is largely composed of the Kodori Gorge and the Gali district, traditionally more ethnic-Georgian populated regions of Abkhazia (Kommersant, 2008). Generally speaking, however, when the Georgian side talks about the indivisibility of Abkhazia, this in fact means the indivisibility of Georgia as a whole, of which Abkhazia is taken to be a part.

territorial wars" rather than simply "ethnic wars".[186] This is an accurate observation since these conflicts are effectively conflicts over "disputed territories" – defined by Stefan Wolff (2003, p.3) as "an area over which two or more actors (states or ethnic groups) claim sovereignty". Moreover, in Georgia's conflicts, ethnic and territorial dimensions have always been closely connected. While attachment to a particular territory is an important constituent part of any ethnic group, the links between ethnic, linguistic and territorial identities in the Soviet Union were further strengthened through various nationality policies that politicised and institutionalised these identities, as argued in Chapter 4.

In the Georgian SSR territorial belonging had a particularly strong resonance and was arguably entrenched in the very "fibre" of its every citizen. To ask someone where they came from, for instance, was, in fact, an inquiry about their ethnic identity (Jenkins, 2012, p.576).[187] In this regard, Nyokabi Baiya's observation about tribalism in Africa could also well be applied to the case of Georgia: "[Y]ou have not introduced yourself *properly* until you have answered the question 'where are you from?' This seemingly innocent question … is for the purpose of establishing your origin" (Baiya, 2008, p.5, cited in Jenkins, 2012, p.576, emphasis original). In other words, what mattered most was where one *originated* from, not where one had been living (Jenkins, 2012, p.578; see also Horowitz, 1985, p.6). One might have been "born and bred" in a certain place, but more important was where one's ancestors came from, where one's "roots"

[186] For more on this, see also author's interview with Nodia.
[187] Jenkins (2012) does not discuss Georgia but makes a similar argument in the case of Kenya. All her arguments (and quotes) below hence refer to Kenya, although I apply them to the cases in Georgia throughout the thesis.

were.[188] In this context, "rights in and 'ownership' of a territory" were "inextricably linked" to the idea of one's "rootedness" (Kolstø and Blakkisrud, 2012, p.1; see also Jenkins, 2012, p.578).[189] This issue came up repeatedly in almost all the Abkhaz protests. The 1977 Abkhaz protest letter, for instance, mentioned how the leaders of the Georgian Communist Party often emphasised that "the Abkhaz gained a second homeland 'under the Georgian sky'". "The question that arises, then, is – where was their first homeland?" inquired the Abkhaz ('Statement of the Abkhaz Intelligentsia', 10 Dec. 1977).

Such thinking was not unique to the case of Georgia, however, but rather was a widespread phenomenon across the Soviet Union, intrinsically linked to its ethno-federal and ethno-linguistic hierarchy. According to Stalin's ([1914] 1942, p.12) definition of a nation, historical "ownership" of a territory was one of its main "objective" characteristics and a group's privileges largely depended on it. "Indigenousness" (i.e. first occupancy of a territory) was viewed as a sign of superiority, and it was widely believed that "older was better" and the longer an ethnic group "owned" a territory, the more privileged a position it held (*Literaturuli Sakartvelo*, 26 May 1989, p.2). Thus, as natives (and, therefore, the oldest inhabitants) of the territory of Georgia, it was believed that Georgians were the carriers of "a superior culture". Other, smaller cultures, "which shared Georgia's historical territory", on the other hand, were considered inferior and were excluded from the formation of the new Georgian state amidst the break-up of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s (Jones, 1997, p.522). It was such thinking, coupled with incompatible myths of

[188] The issue of "roots", which effectively means "ethnic-territorial roots", is also deeply engrained in Georgian popular culture. One of the most iconic Georgian films, for instance, is called *Roots* (*Pesvebi*) (1987), and tells a story of a Georgian immigrant in France. The saying "remember where you come from" (*gakhsovdes visi gorisa khar*) by the nineteenth-century Georgian writer Aleksandre Kazbegi (1848–1893) is also a popular phrase in everyday Georgian discourse.
[189] For more on the issue of "rootedness", see also Jenkins (2012, p.578); Wolczuk and Yemelianova (2008, p.182).

homeland that gave rise to the "autochthonous discourses of belonging", and provided justification for the "exclusionary citizenship discourses" (Jenkins, 2012, p.581) directed towards the Abkhaz and Ossetians.

Such thinking was also at the heart of the emergence of the so-called host–guest metaphor. The latter has largely been applied in the literature on immigration. Marianne Gullestad (2002), for instance, uses this concept in respect of immigration in Norway,[190] while Sarah Jenkins (2012) uses a similar "immigrant–guest" metaphor in the case of Kenya. While I borrow this analytical concept from these authors, I prefer to use the term "guest–host" (*stumar-maspindzeli*), which is more appropriate in the Georgian language and which also serves as the title of a famous nineteenth-century Georgian poem that talks about the phenomenon of Caucasian hospitality (Vazha-Pshavela, [1893] 1987, p.78).

According to the "guest–host" metaphor, the relationship between the ethnic Georgian majority and Georgia's various ethnic minorities is largely viewed through the framework of "a host receiving guests in his [*sic*] home" (Gullestad, 2002, p.54).[191] The views supporting the idea that the Abkhaz and Ossetians immigrated to Georgia from the North Caucasus only in the last few centuries justified labelling them as "foreigners", "newcomers" or, more commonly, "guests".[192] Thus, from the Georgian perspective, they and their ancestors have "'welcomed' or 'invited' other ethnic groups into their homeland" (Jenkins, 2012, p.583); they have allowed them to settle

[190] All arguments (and quotes) from Gullestad (2002) below hence refer to the case of Norway, although I apply them to the cases in Georgia throughout the thesis.
[191] It must be pointed out, however, that the scholarly term "host state" implicitly has similar connotations.
[192] In the Georgian language some of the commonly used terms would be *chamosakhlebuli*, *gadamtieli* and *stumari.*

freely on their territory and have always treated them as friends and brothers (author's interview with Tengiz Sigua).[193]

These ideas had also been present in the literature on national self-determination. According to Margaret Moore (1998), many groups that claim the right to national self-determination and the right to secede from an existing state base their arguments on indigenousness. The indigenous people are viewed as the "rightful owners of the land", while more recent arrivals are "engaged in 'theft'" or illegal occupation of somebody else's land. As a result, it is believed that the former have a right to evict unwelcome guests from their home, or to set the terms under which they can stay on their land as guests (Moore, 1998, pp.142–3). Such ideas are common among almost all secessionist groups as they try to establish their claims to a particular piece of land on which they would like to set up a new state (Brilmayer, 1991, p.188).

The "guest–host" or "immigrant–host" metaphor also features, albeit implicitly, in the so-called sons of the soil argument in civil war literature. The term was first used by Myron Weiner in his 1978 book *Sons of the Soil*, where he writes about the potential for violent conflict between the indigenous "sons of the soil" population of a given territory and relatively recent migrants, either from other parts of the state or from abroad (Weiner, 1978, p.79). Recent large-scale cross-national statistical studies largely support Weiner's overall conclusions (Fearon and Laitin, 2011, p.199; Forsberg, 2011, p.1).

[193] Sigua was a Prime Minister of Georgia in 1990–91 in Zviad Gamsakhurdia's cabinet and then again in 1992–93 in Eduard Shevardnadze's cabinet. An engineer by training, he played an important role in the *coup* that ousted President Gamsakhurdia and was one of the four key members of the interim government – the State Council (preceded by the Military Council) alongside Tengiz Kitovani, Jaba Ioseliani and Eduard Shevardnadze, that effectively ruled the country in 1992.

Among Georgia's conflicts, Abkhazia could be considered as the "sons of the soil" conflict depending on how one defines "recent migrants". As mentioned, the number of ethnic Georgians in the Abkhaz ASSR indeed increased significantly in the 1930s and 1940s, and this immigration of Georgians and other nationalities into Abkhazia caused considerable discontent among the Abkhaz, who were in a minority in the autonomous republic (see Appendix 3, Factbox 2). Fearon and Laitin acknowledge Abkhazia as a potential "sons of the soil" conflict despite the fact that the definition of "recent migration" in their statistical analysis – "migration within a generation of the violent conflict's onset" – effectively excludes it as one of their case studies (Fearon and Laitin, 2011, p.200).

I agree with these authors that Georgia's conflicts do not fit the classic "sons of the soil" analytical framework, albeit for different reasons. The central issue in the conflicts in Abkhazia, as well as in South Ossetia, was that both conflicting groups there perceived themselves as "sons of the soil". In other words, the "guest–host" metaphor was present in Abkhazia and South Ossetia too. Leaders of these minority ethnic groups had very similar arguments against ethnic Georgians in their autonomous territories, viewing them as "immigrants", "occupants" or "guests", the understanding of "immigration" ranging anywhere from the start of the twentieth century to the Middle Ages (*Literaturuli Sakartvelo,* 26 May 1989, p.2).[194] Some ethnic Georgian IDPs recall that in conflicting situations, even other nationalities living in Abkhazia would often say to them that Abkhazia was not their (i.e., Georgian) land and that therefore, ethnic Georgians had no rights there (author's interviews with Tsitso Lomaia-Dadiani and Zizi Dadiani). Thus,

[194] See also author's interviews with Lali Khutsishvili and Avto Gugeshashvili whose parents had immigrated to Abkhazia from other parts of Georgia.

conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, in effect, were conflicts between rival "guest–host" metaphors and rival myths of origin.

These were conflicts between two indigenous populations (real or perceived) rather than between an indigenous population and a migrant one. This dynamic is also well manifested in present-day Abkhazia, where inter-ethnic relations between the Abkhaz and especially ethnic Armenians, one of the largest ethnic minority groups currently present in Abkhazia, remain generally peaceful. The main reason for this seems to be the acceptance on behalf of Abkhazia's other ethnic minorities that the Abkhaz are the sole "sons of the soil" group now since the absolute majority of the pre-war ethnic Georgian population of Abkhazia remain displaced (Kolstø and Blakkisrud, 2012, p.1).[195] In other words, conflict ceased (or rather turned from an "active conflict" into an "unsettled conflict") once one of the two "sons of the soil", or indigenous populations, was "eliminated".

The theme of viewing inter-ethnic relations in Georgia through the framework of the "guest–host" relationship also came up in many of the interviews I conducted. Its presence in speeches at public meetings or at demonstrations in Georgia in the late 1980s and early 1990s is also overwhelming. The storyline sits well with the idea of "Georgian hospitality" (or Caucasian hospitality in general). Georgians (as well as almost all the other peoples in the Caucasus, including the Abkhaz and Ossetians) have always considered themselves as "generous and benevolent hosts" and have viewed hospitality as one of their national characteristics (RFE/RL, 8

[195] For more on the pre- and post-war population of Abkhazia see UNHCR (2001, p.215); IIFFMCG (2009, p.83). For more on the post-war population census in Abkhazia see ICG (2010, pp.8–9).

December 1989, p.20). Georgians have also been proud of the multicultural composition of their country and have largely viewed themselves as tolerant towards other nationalities (Tsotniashvili, 1998, pp.20–1). For instance, one often hears in Georgian popular discourse that Georgia was one of the few places where Jews have never been persecuted.[196] However, both of these concepts – hospitality and tolerance – came with certain conditions when understood in the "guest–host" framework.

As Gullestad (2002) explains, in this case, as "guests", minority groups are to follow a set of "rules of hospitality" and, more importantly, "to be grateful for the hospitality received". On the other hand, "hosts" have the full "control [of] the resources of the home"; they have the right "to decide on the rules of the visit, and, accordingly, to 'put their foot down' when the guest does not conform" (Gullestad, 2002, p.54; see *Literaturuli Sakartvelo*, 26 May 1989, p.2). The problem with this understanding of inter-ethnic relations, of course, is that it often has serious repercussions for "the distribution of power" among different ethnic groups within the state (Gullestad, 2002, p.54; see also Jenkins, 2012, p.577).

What this meant in practice in the Georgian context is that, as "hosts", or the "landlords" of the Georgian land, ethnic Georgians believed they had more say and that "guests" were to comply with the political wishes of the majority. For instance, it was often emphasized by Georgians that the Abkhaz and Ossetians comprised only 1.8% and 3% respectively of Georgia's total population and "they were expected to behave accordingly" (author's interview with Guram

[196] See author's interviews with Irakli Tsereteli and General Zauri Uchadze.

Odisharia; see also *Absence of Will*, 2009).[197] In other words, the understanding was that 1.8% and 3% of the population cannot demand and have the same rights as 70.1% – the share of ethnic Georgians in Georgia by 1989 (see Appendix 3, Factbox 1). Georgians were ready to tolerate ethnic minorities present on their territory as long as the latter "knew their place" in society and did not cause any trouble.

Thus, being the "owner" of a territory was understood in Georgia as follows: this territory belongs to "us" – "Georgians"; this is "our" country, and "we" have the right to decide who lives in this country and who does not (Gullestad, 2002, p.49). Professor Nodar Natadze, one of the founders and a Chairman of the Popular Front of Georgia, conveyed this message best when he declared at a meeting in 1989 that "towards Georgia's territory, towards Georgian territory, no one has any rights other than [ethnic] Georgians" (1 Arkhi TV, 18 November 2010).[198] Zviad Gamsakhurdia also talked about Georgians' "special" rights to and in Georgia at the founding meeting of the Popular Front of Georgia in 1989:

> Georgia is a country of Georgians – this axiom should be presented and manifested in this programme [of the Popular Front], and constitution [of Georgia] should reflect the interests of the Georgian nation. And at the same time [it should reflect] the interests of every *individual* despite their nationality [applause from the audience], and not the interests of *nations*. We are not here to defend Azerbaijan's interests, my friends. And if there is anyone who does, then they will no doubt be defeated [applause]. (1 Arkhi TV, 23 April 2010)[199]

[197] See also author's interview with Aleksandre (Alika) Rondeli. Rondeli serves as the President of the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (GFSIS) in Tbilisi. He holds a PhD degree in Geography as well as a diplomatic rank of an Ambassador. In 1991–96, he was the Head of the Department of International Relations at Tbilisi State University as well as the Director of the Foreign Policy Research and Analysis Center at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia in 1997–2001 (GFSIS.org, n.d.).
[198] For more on this, see also author's interviews with Natadze (August 2006; October 2010).
[199] See also 1 Arkhi TV (27 February 2010). For a fuller extract from his speech from this meeting, see Appendix 4.

Ever since, different variations of the first part of this speech have often been used to demonstrate a supposed intolerance by Gamsakhurdia (and by Georgians in general) towards ethnic minorities. Even though, in the latter part of his speech, Gamsakhurdia does emphasize the importance of the rights of all the other nationalities, he underlines *individual* rights rather than *group* rights. To this day leaders of the national movement of Georgia insist that their statements were misinterpreted to mean that the (independent) Georgian state was *only* for ethnic Georgians. They claim their understanding was that the individual rights of all citizens would be respected in Georgia but when it came to group rights only those of the Georgian nation would be recognised.[200] In other words, Georgia was a "home" to many *peoples* but only one *nation* – the Georgians.

This line of thinking is noticeable even among those who were very critical of Gamsakhurdia and others and their extreme nationalist discourses. Journalist and writer Elga Poladishvili, who was a student at the time,[201] argues, for instance, that the elites managed to mobilise the masses "by making everything Georgian the superior. This is how it should be, in any country the superior position should be held by [the culture of] those, who constitute the core of the nation [of that country]. But in order to demonstrate this superiority they [Georgian elites] created an enemy [image] out of Russia, out of the Abkhaz, out of the Ossetian" (author's interview). Once again, the very roots of such thinking go back to the Soviet nationality policies and their emphasis on the "historical" entitlement of the nations to territories. Ethnic Georgians were believed to

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[200] See author's interviews with Nodar Natadze (August 2006; October 2010); Irakli Tsereteli; Nino Ratashvili; Zaur Uchadze.

[201] An ethnic Georgian herself, Poladishvili comes from Bolnisi, the majority ethnic Azerbaijani populated region in Shida Kartli. As a 17-year old she was taking part in the 9 April 1989 demonstrations together with her younger brother who was a school boy at the time (author's interview).

constitute the very "core" of the Georgian state and were therefore entitled to this very state and its territory. Everyone else was welcome but only as "guests". There was place for only one "host" in the Georgian SSR.

Similar sentiments are documented in the diplomatic cables of the United States Embassy in Moscow. Avtandil Imnadze, Deputy Chairman of the Popular Front of Georgia, reportedly told a representative of the US Consulate that Georgians would never violate the rights of other ethnic groups. However, his understanding of these "rights" seemed rather limited and gave non-Georgians little, if any, political power. "After all", Imnadze reportedly said, "they [ethnic minorities] do not belong here. They are only our guests" (cited in National Security Archives (U.S.), Doc. 4, 13 February 1990).[202] When talking about South Ossetia, Dodo Gugeshashvili (also known as "Magnolia"), one of the leaders of the paramilitary organisation "Mkhedrioni" and a member of the National Democratic Party of Georgia at the time, argued along the same lines. According to her, there was no doubt that any ethnic group in Georgia had to have "comfortable living conditions". Nevertheless, she maintained that "here there was one issue, that once and for all Georgian people had to have pride that they were masters of their ancestral land" (1 Arkhi TV, 2 December 2010).[203]

The question arising in this case is how long does one continue to be a "newcomer" and a "guest"? How long does one have to wait to be eligible for the "full rights" of a "host" on a given territory? The answer often was – "all your life". As Levan Berdzenishvili remarks, being the

[202] For more on this, see also Gachechiladze (2011, p.342).
[203] For more on this, see also Ioseliani ([1996] 2007, p.55).

"owner" of a piece of land for a few centuries was never enough in the Soviet Union, as one had to be there for millennia in order to have any legitimate rights to it (author's interviews, July 2006; November 2011). In other words, Georgia's minorities were "locked" into being perpetual "guests" for almost "all their lives"; they were not people who once might have migrated and "entered" a certain territory, but rather, as Gullestad (2002, pp.50–1) argues, they were in the process of "perpetual entering".

While the fears of Russification encouraged Georgia to develop a nationalism that was "defensive and integrative in its intent", at the same time this "proved threatening to national minorities within Georgia and disintegrative in its consequences" (Toft, 2002, p.123). Ethnic insecurity drove the Georgians to take the side of those elites who saw a new independent Georgia as a state dominated by ethnic Georgians and, as Stephen Jones (1997, p.513) argues, any opposition to this idea was seen as a national betrayal and a threat to national unity.

When the Georgian national movement gained momentum in the late 1980s and early 1990s and the independence of Georgia became a realistic possibility, it found itself in opposition to the political wishes of many of Georgia's ethnic minorities, who preferred to remain part of the Soviet Union. In 1989, for instance, Alan Chochiev, a lecturer in history at the Tskhinvali Pedagogical Institute and chairman of *Ademon Nykhas* (South Ossetian Popular Front), publicly expressed his support for Abkhaz demands for separation from Georgia and admitted that South Ossetia saw "its future in close unity with Russians and other peoples of the USSR" (cited in

Literaturuli Sakartvelo, 5 May 1989, p.3).[204] This was widely regarded by many Georgians as "an abuse of hospitality" that could not be tolerated. Thus, the view of some of these ethnic minority groups soon changed from "accepted guests" to "unwelcome occupiers" or "traitors" as Georgians spoke about the "ungratefulness", "greed", and "betrayal" by their "guests" (Jenkins, 2012, p.584; see Tsotniashvili, 1998, pp.20–1).[205]

Leaders of the Georgian nationalist movement often made statements that minorities had taken advantage of Georgian hospitality and were now "stabbing Georgians in the back" by asking them "to once again dismember Georgia's integrity [i.e. Georgian territory]" (1 Arkhi TV, 13 March 2010).[206] Furthermore, Georgians seemed to be convinced that many of the ethnic minorities had lived in Georgia in much better conditions than in their "historic homelands"; their demands were therefore discarded as "unfounded". It was often pointed out, for instance, that Ossetians in Georgia had many more rights than those in North Ossetia, where reportedly there were no Ossetian schools until 1988 (Tsotniashvili, 1998, p.18–9). In contrast, however, it was emphasised that there was an Ossetian-language school even in Tbilisi (1 Arkhi TV, 18 November 2010). In fact, as Georgian analyst Mamuka Areshidze has argued, Ossetian literary language was kept alive and was further developed by Ossetians of South Ossetia due to the

[204] For more on *Ademon Nykhas* in the late 1980s and early 1990s, see also Tsotniashvili (1998, pp.32, 37); 1 Arkhi TV (2 December 2010).
[205] For more on this, see National Security Archives (U.S.) (Doc. 3, 5 June 1989; Doc. 12, 10 April 1991).
[206] This statement was made at a demonstration in Sokhumi (Sukhum) on 25 March 1989 in protest at the most recent Abkhaz demands to separate the Abkhaz ASSR from the Georgian SSR and to upgrade it to the status of a Union republic (1 Arkhi TV, 13 March 2010). At a mass gathering in Lykhny [Lykhni] on 18 March 1989 the Abkhaz authorities drew up a petition addressed to the Kremlin, reportedly signed by some 30,000 people (RFE/RL, 27 April 1990, p.12; see also *Literaturuli Sakartvelo*, 18 August 1989, p.2). Lykhny is a village in Gudauta region of Abkhazia. As a former seat of the rulers of Abkhazia it has a particularly important symbolic meaning to the Abkhaz and has served as a gathering place for many previous Abkhaz protest rallies (RFE/RL, 20 August 1980; 7 April 1989a, p.28).

enormous literary work and research that was going on in Tskhinvali at the time (1 Arkhi TV, 18 November 2010; see also author's interview[207]).[208] As a result, some Georgian historians even proposed that Ossetians of South Ossetia should be campaigning for the transfer of North Ossetia to Georgia, not the transfer of South Ossetia to the RSFSR (*Sakhalkho Ganatleba*, 25 October 1989, p.12). Similar arguments were often raised in respect of the Abkhaz as well – reminding them of *mohajirstvo* under Tsarist Russia, Georgians argued that if it were not for Georgia, the Abkhaz would have long ceased to exist under the Russification policies of the Tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union (author's interview with Nodar Natadze, October 2010).

In other words, the general attitude towards the minorities was along these lines: "we [Georgians] have hosted you, we have befriended you, we have adopted you", and all we are getting in return is ingratitude (*Literaturuli Sakartvelo*, 26 May 1989, p.2). In an open letter, Guram Panjikidze, a well-known novelist and Chairman of the Georgian Writers' Union, noted with regret that following the tragic events of 9 April 1989, for instance, the Union had not received a single letter of condolence from Abkhazia or South Ossetia. This is when more than 300 letters were sent from Armenia alone (with over 70 signatures on each letter), and hundreds more from other parts of the Soviet Union, and 600 writers had signed a petition in Moscow denouncing this act of violence (*Literaturuli Sakartvelo*, 26 May 1989, p.2).

[207] Areshidze worked at the Georgian Tele-Radio Committee in 1981–95. As a war journalist he has worked in several conflict zones and is the author of a number of TV programs and documentary films. He served as a member of the Parliament of Georgia in 1995–99. Since 2003 he has served as the Director of the Caucasus Strategic Studies Centre.

[208] For more on the perceived privileged position of Ossetians in Georgia, see *Komunisti* (20 May 1989, p.2; 15 October 1989, p.3); *Literaturuli Sakartvelo* (26 May 1989, p.2); RFE/RL (8 December 1989, p.20); Tsotniashvili (1998, pp.17–9); 1 Arkhi TV (2 December 2010).

One prominent Georgian poet, Jansugh Charkviani, also talked about the ingratitude of "guests" in his speech at the 25 March 1989 demonstration in Tbilisi:

> Today the patience of Georgians has come to an end. Today they [ethnic minorities] have already trampled on us, they have crossed over us. Foreigners have disrespected the land that has always been "watered" with Georgian blood. The Georgian character of hospitality has been contrasted with a greedy and possessive provincial character. As Ilia [writer Ilia Chavchavadze] has said, a nation will fall and will start degenerating when it forgets its history. The "homeless" person who no longer remembers who she is or where she comes from will be doomed. No, we cannot let our ancestors say that we could not take care of the land that is ours, that belongs to us, that gave birth to Rustaveli,[209] [David] The Builder,[210] and Ilia [Chavchavadze]. Unfortunately there appeared certain tribes on our land that … had left their own motherland and now they have ungratefully forgotten that [adopted] mother who took them in when they were poor and with nothing, and gave them life. (1 Arkhi TV, 13 March 2010)

The speech echoes many of the general themes raised above. Georgians are portrayed as hospitable, albeit naïve, people who are taken advantage of by "greedy provincials". Provincialism is here equated with backwardness and the message conveyed is that Ossetians had nothing before coming to the Georgian lands – they were poor peasants who worked as serfs on the estates of Georgian nobility. In other words, they were given both a "home" and jobs by the Georgians – it was Georgia who "turned them into men".[211] Thus, Georgia gave them everything and in return, received only a lack of appreciation. Evoking an idiom of a parent, especially of a "mother", is also important since disrespecting one's mother is the biggest insult in Georgian culture. The speech also touches upon the issue of "rootedness" and the linkage of ethnicity and territory – we are "rooted" on this land because our ancestors have died for it, their blood is

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[209] Shota Rustaveli (1172–1216) is regarded as one of the greatest poets of Georgia and his epic poem *The Knight in the Tiger's Skin* (*Vepkhis-Tkaosani*) is considered a fine representation of the Golden Age of Georgia.

[210] King Davit IV Aghmashenebeli (David IV the Builder) (reigned 1089–1125) is considered one of the greatest leaders in Georgia's history and is canonised as a saint by the Georgian Orthodox Church. He reunited present-day Georgia and beyond and his rule is believed to have laid the foundations of the Golden Age of Georgia.

[211] This Georgian expression – *kacad gakcia* – means that someone helped to turn you into the kind of person you are now, implying that now you are much better off than before.

everywhere, they are buried in these lands; therefore, it has always belonged to "us" and we can never abandon them (i.e. abandon ancestral graves). The role of history is also highlighted – those who forget their nation's history (i.e. who forget their "roots") are doomed to become eternally "homeless".

This theme of a guest taking advantage of their host's hospitality is explored in Mikheil Javakhishvili's[212] famous novel *Jaqo's Dispossessed* (*Jaqo's khiznebi*), in which the main character, Jaqo, an ethnic Ossetian, takes away not only estates from his former Georgian patron but also his wife. In other words, he becomes the master in somebody else's "home" (Javakhishvili, [1925] 1957).[213] Thus, another issue emphasized in the "guest–host" metaphor was the idea that one needed to defend one's "home" (i.e. homeland) from intruders or it would be taken away – Georgians would soon turn into "guests" in their own territory if nothing was done. "In Samachablo [South Ossetia] Georgians are not allowed into the Georgian lands" – such statements were often heard at demonstrations at the time (1 Arkhi TV, 18 November 2010). As Iza Orjonikidze (1938–2010), a poet and a literary scholar, argued, "if the Georgian nation does not defend its land today, its very existence will be under question mark by the end of the [twentieth] century" (1 Arkhi TV, 18 November 2010). In other words, evoking the "guest–host" metaphor also justified the use of violence if there was a need for it.

[212] Javakhishvili (1880–1937) is considered one of the most renowned Georgian novelists of the twentieth century. He was executed in 1937 during Stalin's Great Purges and his writings were banned for almost two decades after that.

[213] For more on this, see also author's interviews with Levan Berdzenishvili (July 2006; November 2011); 1 Arkhi TV (14 October 2010).

In 1989, in his short poem dedicated to inter-ethnic conflicts in Georgia, Murman Lebanidze (1922–2002) not only implied that Ossetians were "guests" on Georgian "soil", hinting that they arrived there from the lands of the river Volga on the other side of the Caucasus (i.e. North Caucasus in Russia), but also reminded Ossetians and Abkhaz alike that Georgians would respond accordingly and would not shy away from "spilling blood":

> I would like to tell *Ademon Nykhas* [Ossetians] that
> It leads its people down the wrong path,
> And remind the gathering of Lykhny [the Abkhaz][214]
> Of a wise law – blood for blood.
> Hey you, Ossetian, the Volga [river in Russia] is following you,
> It will write a will for you and the Abkhaz,
> My Liakhvi [river in Georgia] is not bothering you,
> The big river will carry you away, Ossetian.
> Once more, I will tell *Ademon Nykhas* that
> It leads its people towards destruction,
> And remind the gathering of Lykhny
> Of our unbroken law – blood for blood. (1 Arkhi TV, 13 March 2010)

The tendency to view Georgia's conflicts through the "guest–host" metaphor continues to the present day. According to a young Georgian student, Teona Mchedlishvili, for instance, it is not enough for Georgian IDPs to be able to return to Abkhazia and live there freely, as some propose. The aim of the Georgian side should be to "have the territory back" – "How am I supposed to live there, where I know that I am a guest and that my ancestors had lived there once [as hosts]?" asks Mchedlishvili (*Absence of Will*, 2009). In this way, the "guest–host" metaphor once again highlights the centrality of "territory" (and its "indivisibility") in the conflicts in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

[214] Referring to the Abkhaz gathering at Lykhny on 18 March 1989 mentioned above.

4. The Many (Hi)Stories of the Georgian, Abkhaz and Ossetian People

So what explains this "indivisibility" of territory in Georgia's conflicts? The answer, as Anthony Smith (1992, p.61) eloquently points out, lies "in the often elusive and unquantifiable field of myth and symbolism". It is these myths and symbols that provided the basis for the development of the "guest–host" metaphor and prepared the ground on which it played out.

The main issue at stake in Georgia's conflicts has always been the legitimacy over the control of the territories concerned – which side has a (more) legitimate right to the "ownership" of Abkhazia and South Ossetia? Which side stands on a morally higher ground to claim these territories as "ours"? Who are the true "sons of the soil" on these territories – Georgians or Abkhaz (in Abkhazia) and Georgians or Ossetians (in South Ossetia)? In other words, who are the real "guests" and who are the real "hosts"?

Each conflicting side has unanimously claimed ownership of these territories, using very similar arguments – "because *historically* this territory has always belonged to us". Such thinking was commonplace in the Soviet Union, where history, like many other intellectual domains, was heavily politicised. A strict ideological censorship at different levels and the system of controls over the production of knowledge (including the publication of historical writings) meant that the state effectively maintained a monopoly over what constituted the "historical truth" and what did not. Thus, in Georgia (as elsewhere in the Soviet Union), it was believed that the purpose of a history as an academic discipline was to act as a "neutral" arbiter. As a result, scholars from both conflicting sides often ventured into endless, and tireless, journeys into the ancient and medieval histories of their peoples in order to uncover the "historical truth" about the origins of Abkhazia's

and South Ossetia's first inhabitants and in this way discover the real "owners" of these territories (Shnirelman, 2001; Coppieters, 2002; Cheterian, 2008). In fact, it could be argued that conflicts in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia have largely started out as arguments between historians, and a particularly interesting facet of these conflicts has always been how they evolved from intellectual conflict to actual physical violence.[215]

4.1. The Many (Hi)Stories of Abkhazia

Historians, linguists and archaeologists on both sides of the conflict in Abkhazia have long been concerned with the origins of the Abkhaz tribes – who were the Abeshla, Apgasians (Abazgs), Apsils, Apsar, Apsua and Abazs/Abazians (Absne) mentioned in various Georgian and foreign ancient and medieval sources? (Gamakharia, 2011, pp.68–93). Even today, there is no consensus among scholars about the ethnic composition of Abkhazia. Some Georgian historians have argued that both Abkhaz and Kartvelian (i.e. proto-Georgian)[216] tribes inhabited this region. Others distinguished between the "ancient" and "modern" Abkhaz, arguing that the Abkhaz living in Abkhazia in ancient times were, in fact, part of the Kartvelian tribes, while the modern-day Abkhaz were originally from the North-West Caucasus, from where they had been driven out by the Cherkessians.[217] Some have suggested that over time these Abkhaz tribes merged with the local Kartvelian population, while others still have supported the view that after coming down from the highlands, these tribes drove out the local Svan and Chano-Megrelian (i.e. Kartvelian/Georgian) population. As a result, the Abkhazian language also supposedly replaced

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[215] I thank Timothy Blauvelt for bringing this issue to my attention (personal communication, September 2012, Tbilisi).

[216] *Kartveli* is a self-designating name for a "Georgian" and *Sakartvelo* is for "Georgia".

[217] The Cherkessians live in what is now Karachay-Cherkessia – one of the federal republics of the Russian Federation in the North-West Caucasus, bordering Abkhazia.

the Megrelian and Svan languages originally spoken in this region (Gamakharia, 2011, p.83). Different scholars have proposed different "theories" about when this migration of the Abkhaz might have taken place, with the date set anywhere from the eleventh to the seventeenth centuries (Gamakharia, 2011, pp.78–9, 83; Hewitt, 1999, p.18). Despite these conflicting views, however, almost all Georgian scholars consider Abkhazia to be part of the Georgian cultural and linguistic "space" from time immemorial. Therefore, up to present time, this region is widely believed to be an inseparable part of Georgia.[218]

However, these views were not restricted to academia but were also rather popular among some of the most vocal elites of the time. At many of the frequent demonstrations in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Georgia, it was common to hear the leaders of the national movement making similar statements. At one demonstration in April 1989, for instance, Zviad Gamsakhurdia made the following speech:

> The Abkhaz *nation* has never existed historically. Abkhazia was a name given to western Georgia [the audience agrees] … and the Abkhaz were western Georgians, so the Abkhaz nation was the same Georgian nation, western Georgian nation [applause]. Nowadays the Abkhaz *people*, i.e. people that were called the Abkhaz, no longer exist; there are only the descendants of the Adyghe tribes left, northern Caucasian Adyghe tribes, who had emigrated in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries. But those ancient Christian Abkhaz, Georgian Abkhaz, do not exist anymore. But the name "Abkhaz" is misused today when it comes to this Apsua tribe. "Apsua" or "Apsarni" is a northern Caucasian, Adyghe tribe and we are not against national self-determination of any tribe, any group of tribes, if it is trying to become a nation, especially if it has certain characteristics of a nation today, but this needs to be done on their *historical territory* in northern Caucasus [applause]. If this tribe … or tribes understand this then we will support them, but only if they carry out *historical justice* and let us have our land and they settle where they came from. (Rustavi 2 TV, "At the Crossroad of Choice", n.d.; Rustavi2 TV, 27 September 2002; emphasis added)

[218] See author's interviews with Georgian historians Mariam (Marika) Lortkipanidze and Zurab Papaskiri; IIFFMCG (2009, p.66).

Such statements by Gamsakhurdia and other nationalist leaders were largely rooted in the Soviet linkage of ethnicity and territory. Georgians supported Abkhaz national self-determination as long as it was done "properly", i.e. on Abkhaz "historical territory" in the North Caucasus and not in Abkhazia per se, which was considered Georgian land. Nodar Natadze, leader of the Popular Front of Georgia, further argued that these statements were misunderstood (or deliberately misrepresented) as if the actual existence of the Abkhaz (or Ossetians) was doubted or denied by the Georgians. "No one has said that the Abkhaz did not exist," he argued. "What they said was that the Abkhaz were not a *nation*." According to him, this did not mean that the Abkhaz *people* did not exist. "Personally I believe that the Abkhaz are a nation," Natadze maintained, "a small nation, but they have national consciousness. When it comes to nations, the most important thing is national consciousness, and not reality" (author's interviews, August 2006; October 2010). Natadze's statements further point to the significance of Soviet nationality policies in the development of such discourses. Whether the Abkhaz were classed as a nation (*natsiya*) or a people (*narod*) had enormous influence on their standing in the ethno-linguistic hierarchy of the Soviet Union – nations were of higher status and were therefore granted more privileges, as argued in Chapter 4.

Such viewpoints found resonance among the wider public too. In the interviews conducted, many of my respondents seemed convinced of the historical "reality" of the claims made by academics (and politicians). The main themes that emerged in these interviews largely coincided with the above-mentioned historical narratives – that the present-day Abkhaz were not "the aboriginal people of Abkhazia" (author's interview with Rapiel Gelantia), or that the "real" Abkhaz were, in

fact, descendants of Georgian tribes rather than related to the Adyghes (Circassians) in the North Caucasus, as claimed by the Abkhaz themselves (author's interview with Elene Kavlelashvili).

Furthermore, many in Georgia seemed convinced that, because of the privileged position of the Abkhaz as a titular nationality of the Abkhaz ASSR, ethnic Georgians living in the autonomous republic were often registering as ethnic Abkhaz. According to one of my respondents, for instance, because the Abkhaz were exempt from mandatory army service, many ethnic Georgian men were obtaining Abkhaz documents in order to avoid conscription. As a result, it was common in Abkhazia to have members of the same family with different last names – some Georgian, some Abkhaz[219] (author's interview with Gela Gurgenidze).[220] Tamriko Chkheidze, leader of the Ilia Chavchavadze Society, also argues that "Georgians never bullied anyone in Abkhazia. It is a historical fact that the absolute majority of the Abkhaz were Georgians who had Abkhaz *propiskas* because being Abkhaz equalled higher social status there. … The victims there [in Abkhazia] were always Georgians" (1 Arkhi TV, 13 March 2010; see also author's interview). Vazha Adamia, leader of the Merab Kostava Society, makes the further claim that of 90,000 ethnic Abkhaz, 70,000 were Georgianised Abkhaz (i.e. Georgians who had adopted Abkhaz last names) (author's interview). Rapiel Gelantia, a Georgian IDP from Abkhazia, also maintains that out of about 400 surnames in Abkhazia 370 were Megrelian (i.e. Georgian) (author's interview).

[219] Generally, according to the patrimonial line all siblings in a family in Georgia would share the same last name.
[220] For more on this, see also *Literaturuli Sakartvelo* (26 May 1989, p.2); author's interview with former Georgian politician and Ambassador Vazha Lortkipanidze.

In other words, whether at the academic, political or popular levels, the underlying theme of all these different narratives on the ethno-genesis of the Abkhaz was that the majority of Georgians largely considered Abkhaz and Abkhazia to be part of their identity, i.e. part of the Georgian national identity (author's interview with Irakli Menagharishvili[221]). The content of ethnic identity here was once again comprised mainly by territory and language – key elements in the Soviet understanding of ethnicity. If the territory of Abkhazia was inhabited by Megrelians and Svans – part of the proto-Kartvelian (Georgian) tribes in the ancient times, and the linguistic composition of Abkhazia was also largely Megrelian and Svan (part of the Kartvelian (Georgian) language family) – then it was safe to assume that every "Georgian is an Abkhaz and an Abkhaz is a Georgian", as noted by Jansugh Charkviani (1 Arkhi TV, 10 April 2010).

This sentiment is well manifested in a speech by the philologist and writer Mikheil Kurdiani (1954–2010), a founding member of the Ilia Chavchavadze Society, at a demonstration in the late 1980s:

> And now we have to do everything we can to make them [the Abkhaz] understand, only through brotherhood, only through love, that the Abkhaz language cannot possibly have a better defender and supporter than a Georgian nation … No one should be defending the Abkhaz from Georgianisation or Russification as much as a Georgian nation because it [the Abkhaz nation] is our *blood*. (1 Arkhi TV, 13 March 2010, emphasis added)

While such moderate statements were relatively rare and were overshadowed by more radical proclamations such as the previously-mentioned speech by Gamsakhurdia, the general mood

[221] Trained as a medical doctor, Menagharishvili served as Georgia's Minister of Public Health in 1986–91 and in 1992–93. In 1993–95 he was Deputy Prime Minister and in 1995–2003 Minister of Foreign Affairs. He holds a diplomatic rank of an Ambassador. At the time of the interview he served as the Director of the Strategic Research Centre.

among the wider public was nevertheless that Abkhazia was "flesh and blood" (*siskhli da khortsi*) of the Georgian nation. These sentiments are echoed in the statements of the Georgian Communist Party leadership as well. During his visit to Abkhazia in April 1989, for instance, the Party First Secretary Jumber Patiashvili stated – "Georgia does not exist without Abkhazia and Abkhazia does not exist without Georgia" (author's interview).

These ideas were also at the heart of Georgian national mythology, which considers Abkhazia part of the ancient kingdom of Colchis, which existed from about the sixth to the first centuries BC and which included the territory of the present-day western Georgia (Gamsakhurdia, 1990a; 1990b). This ancient Colchian civilisation has been portrayed as linguistically and ethnically Kartvelian and the Kingdom of Colchis is therefore generally "presented as the first Georgian state" (Kaufman, 2001, p.91). Georgian national mythology also considers Abkhazia to have been part of the next state that emerges on this territory – the Kingdom of Egrisi (Lazika), which existed from about the second to the sixth centuries AD (Lortkipanidze, 1990, pp.3–10; see also Kaufman, 2001, p.91). However, from the Georgian perspective, one of the most important aspects of the history of the Georgian and Abkhaz peoples is the period in the late tenth century when King Bagrat III (960–1014) of the Bagrationi dynasty (Georgian royal family) began the unification of different kingdoms and principalities on the territory of present-day Georgia and beyond. After inheriting first the throne of Kartli in 975 and then that of Abkhazia in 978, by 1008–10, Bagrat managed to bring the rest of the territories under his direct rule and was crowned as the King of Georgia. Thus, by the time Queen Tamar[222] ascended the throne, the

[222] In Georgian Queen Tamar is, in fact, referred to as King Tamar (reigned 1184–1213). She is considered one of the greatest leaders in Georgian history and is canonised as the Holy Righteous Saint Queen Tamar by the Georgian

official title of Georgian kings was "The King of Abkhaz, Kartvels, Rans, Kakhs and the Armenians, Shirvan-Shah and Shah-in-Shah" (Lortkipanidze, 1990).

Thus, even if it was not immediately clear who exactly were the present-day Abkhaz and what exactly was the ethnic and linguistic composition of present-day Abkhazia, it was largely believed by Georgian nationalists that these two communities – Abkhaz and Georgians – created the Georgian state together and were therefore inseparable.

However, while Georgians believed Abkhazia to be an inseparable part of Georgian culture and Georgian statehood, the feeling was not mutual. For the Abkhaz, Georgian insistence that "we [Georgians and Abkhaz] are the same" was a further demonstration of their assimilationist tendencies. It was interpreted as a denial of Abkhaz history, their separate identity and, ultimately, their very existence (Gamsakhurdia's above-quoted speech was often brought up as an example in this respect). In other words, Georgia and Georgians had no place in the Abkhaz national identity. Their mythology also had a very different view on the history of Abkhazia and the development of the Abkhaz nation.

From the beginning of the twentieth century, a number of books on the history of Abkhazia started to appear, published by Abkhaz and Russian scholars. Some of these titles have since

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Orthodox Church. Her rule coincided with the Golden Age of Georgia. It is during this period that the current name of the country – "Georgia" (*sakartvelo* in Georgian) – enters official discourse.

become the driving force for the Abkhaz nationalist movement.[223] These writings would resurface in the late 1980s and would play an important role in the escalation of inter-ethnic tensions in Georgia. Documentary film footage from 1989, for instance, shows a meeting with ethnic Georgian teachers in Abkhazia where they express their outrage about Voronov's (1907) *Abkhazia is not* Georgia. In these and other writings, contrary to their Georgian counterparts, Abkhaz and Russian scholars asserted that the Abkhaz were not only indigenous to the territory of Abkhazia, but were, in fact, descendants of one of the most ancient tribes in the Caucasus and that they had lived there since at least the fifth century BC (IIFFMCG, 2009, p.66).

While Georgians argued that the reason the Abkhaz were the first to be mentioned in the title of the Georgian kings was that Abkhazia was the first estate in the most north-western part of the united Georgian Kingdom at the time, the Abkhaz interpreted this in a very different way. According to their version, the Abkhaz role in the Georgian Kingdom "was not restricted [only] to their formal place in the title [of the kings]" (Shnirelman, 2001, p.225). It was the Abkhazian kings that united all the Georgian tribes and territories and established an "Abkhazian state" rather than a Georgian one. Some authors go so far as to argue that even as late as the end of the fifteenth century present-day Georgian territories were united under "the Abkhazian Kingdom, and its kings, including David the Builder and Queen Tamar, the Abkhazian kings" (Ashkhatsava, 1925, cited in Shnirelman, 2001, p.220). One of the Abkhaz arguments in support of this claim was the name of Queen Tamar's son – Lasha-Giorgi. "Lasha" ("alasha") is an Abkhaz word meaning "light", "clear" (Lortkipanidze, 1990, pp.10–1).

[223] See, among others, *Abkhazia is not Georgia* by Russian scholar N. Voronov (1907), and *On the Groundlessness of Georgian Claims on the Sukhumi District (Abkhazia)* by another Russian scholar Nikolai Vorobiev (1919), in which the author asserts that Russia had more rights over the territory of Abkhazia than Georgia.

In this way, not only did the Abkhaz found a state of their own but they also claimed to have ruled over the Georgian territories. They argued that the Abkhaz were superior to their neighbours in terms of socio-political and cultural development and that they significantly influenced the development of the Georgian language. In other words, the Abkhaz were not only claiming "their own past", but were also appropriating some of the most important and symbolic "part[s] of the Georgian historical heritage" (Shnirelman, 2001, pp.222–3). Both King David the Builder and Queen Tamar are associated with the Golden Age of Georgia, are canonised as saints by the Georgian Orthodox Church and are considered two of the most iconic figures in Georgia's history. Thus, claiming them as "Abkhaz" was understood by Georgians as indicating that the Abkhaz were depriving them of the most essential symbols of their national identity.

The Abkhaz further argued that the large numbers of ethnic Georgians in Abkhazia were the result of immigration during the Georgianisation policies of the Stalinist period (IIFFMCG, 2009, p.66). Others went as far as to suggest that the work of the nineteenth-century Georgian historian Dimitri Bakradze on the ethno-genesis of the Abkhaz was meant to grant the Tsarist Russian Empire with a historical "justification" for resettling other peoples in the territory of Abkhazia amidst the Abkhaz *mohajirstvo*.[224] Others maintained that Stalin planned to deport the entire ethnic Abkhaz population in the late 1940s or early 1950s, as happened to Meskhetian Turks in Georgia and many other ethnic groups in the North Caucasus who were deported to Central Asia during World War II. Thus, Abkhaz believed that the major reasons behind the publications in the

[224] Bakradze (1826–90) argued that the modern-day Abkhazia was populated by Georgian tribes (Megrelians) and that it was the Megrelian and Svan languages that were spoken across this territory. In his later writings he further suggested that the Abkhaz were settlers from the North Caucasus rather than indigenous inhabitants of Abkhazia (Bakradze, 1873, pp.2–3; 1889, pp.271–3; see also Hewitt, 1999, pp.17–8).

late 1940s of another Georgian scholar, Pavle Ingorokva (1893–1983), who largely supported Bakradze's views on the formation of the Abkhaz nation, were very similar – to grant historical "legitimacy" and academic "justification" to the Abkhaz deportations (Hewitt, 1999, p.18; Shnirelman, 2001, p.208). While, to my knowledge, there is no evidence in Georgian archives that would support these claims, the issue of the Abkhaz ethno-genesis remained one of the most divisive issues among these two communities and was one of the most frequently recurring themes in Abkhaz protests against Georgians over the decades.

4.2. "Samachablo" or "South Ossetia"? – One Land, Many (Hi)Stories

The case of South Ossetia differs from that of Abkhazia. If some Georgian historians did consider the possibility that the Abkhaz might have been an indigenous population on the territory of the Abkhaz ASSR, the same was not the case with Ossetians. There was little doubt among Georgians that Ossetians had migrated to present-day Georgia only in the last few centuries. Thus, for the Georgian side, the creation of the South Ossetian Autonomous *Oblast* was a historic "injustice" and an "anomaly". Its abolition by the Georgian Supreme Soviet in December 1990 was justified based on the arguments that, unlike Abkhazia, there had never been a separate South Ossetian administrative unit within Georgia – this territory had always been part of the historic Samachablo (Shida Kartli) region of Georgia. The term "South Ossetia" was considered a purely Russian invention. Reportedly, its first documented use was only in 1802, in an official Russian report. Even then, Georgian sources argue, the term referred only to Java region (the northern part of the South Ossetian Autonomous *Oblast*) and never included Tskhinvali (which would become the capital of the *Oblast*). According to Mamuka Areshidze, "'South Ossetia' was a geographical term and not a historical one" (1 Arkhi TV, 14 October 2010; see also author's

interview). This is why Georgians still often refer to South Ossetia as “Samachablo” or “Tskhinvali region”.

The ethno-genesis of the Ossetian people was also a contentious topic. Most Georgian and Ossetian authors viewed Ossetian origins “as a complex process of mixing between Iranian-speaking newcomers and local residents”, and North Ossetia (in the North Caucasus) was generally “represented as the main site of this mixing, i.e. the Ossetian homeland” (Shnirelman, 2001, p.371). Thus, it was widely believed in Georgia that Ossetians had no right to claim historical Georgian territory as “South Ossetia”. The first Ossetian population was believed to have appeared in the mountainous Shida Kartli region in the northern part of central Georgia towards the end of the seventeenth century. According to the Georgian side, they were driven out of their historic homeland in North Ossetia by the Kabardins and the Ingushs. From the eighteenth century Ossetians started migrating to the lowlands of Shida Kartli and mostly worked for the Georgian nobility as serfs (Topchishvili, 2009, p.4; 1 Arkhi TV, 14 October 2010).

Not surprisingly, however, Ossetians have a different view of their people’s history. Their national mythology emphasizes the autochthonous roots of the Ossetian people, while at the same time maintaining close association with the ancient Iranians (Scythians, Sarmatians and Alans).[225] The latter “were unquestionably newcomers in the Caucasus”, but the timeframe of when exactly they might have first appeared in the Caucasus is more debatable (Shnirelman, 2001, p.379). Ossetians try to put the presence of these ancient Iranian tribes in the Caucasus as far back as possible but, as Kaufman (2001, p.97) points out, much of the genealogy concerning the ancient

[225] For more on these ancient tribes, see Littleton and Malcor (1994).

roots of these tribes remains rather "dubious". On the other hand, the existence of the powerful Alan Kingdom in the North Caucasus from the seventh century is better documented and Ossetian authors continue to identify Ossetians with these ancient Alans. In fact, some Ossetian intellectuals have even proposed changing the Ossetian "self-designation from 'Ossetians' to 'Alans'" (Guriev, 1989, cited in Shnirelman, 2006, p.41; 2001, pp.379–80). Most importantly, however, Ossetian authors assert that the historical homeland of the Ossetian people is South Ossetia rather than North Ossetia. They do so by tracing the roots of present-day Ossetians to ethnic identification of the so-called Koban culture which existed in the central Caucasus between the fifteenth and sixth centuries BC and which Georgians believe to be part of "their" Colchian (i.e. ancient Georgian) culture. These "findings" are based on the contentious reading of ancient written sources, linguistic and archaeological data including the distribution of the catacomb burial rites (Shnirelman, 2001, p.372; see also Topchishvili, 2009, p.72). In analysing this material, Ossetian scholars and political elites tend to downplay possible links with Georgia and maintain that the territory of present-day South Ossetia has never been part of a Georgian kingdom. According to Alan Chochiev, for instance, at the time of the signing of the Treaty of Georgievsk between the Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti and the Russian Tsarist Empire in 1783, "Georgia as a [unified] kingdom did not [even] exist: it was only a province in the Persian Empire and nothing else" (*Literaturuli Sakartvelo,* 28 Sept. 1990, cited in Tsotniashvili, 1998, p.36). In so doing Chochiev and others deny any possibility of Ossetians of the South Caucasus ever being "a part of the Georgian people" (Shnirelman, 2001, p.372) or, therefore, part of the Georgian national identity. They further argue that "historically Ossetian people have never been divided" and therefore consider it a historic "injustice" to have Ossetians scattered across two

political entities – North and South Ossetia within Russia and Georgia respectively (*Literaturuli Sakartvelo,* 28 Sept. 1990, cited in Tsotniashvili, 1998, p.36).

The importance of these national mythologies in the production of conflicting group identities cannot be overemphasized. They formed an important part of a group's cultural and historical resources and were often treated by academics and politicians alike as "constituting legitimations of different political claims and perceptions of reality" (Kapferer, 1988, p.33). But why was this so? What explains this near fixation with the ancient history and ethno-linguistic composition of the Georgian, Abkhaz and Ossetian peoples? The answers to these questions are, once again, intimately linked to Soviet nationality policies. Through a complex system of ethno-federal and ethno-linguistic hierarchy, the Soviet nationality policies strengthened the links between ethnicity, language and territory, effectively turning them into "an irreducible component of ethnic group identity" (Toft, 2005, p.2). This is why it was vital for the Georgian side to "prove" that linguistically, culturally and politically Abkhazia had always been part of the Georgian sphere of influence, and that the "real" Abkhaz – the ancient Abkhaz – were, in fact, "Christian, Georgian Abkhaz", as noted by Zviad Gamsakhurdia. Establishing this link between language (culture), territory and ethnicity was supposed to establish the "historical truth" that Abkhazia was, in fact, Georgia. Similarly, it was important to "prove" that "South Ossetia" was, in fact, Samachablo, part of the Shida Kartli region of Georgia. On the other hand, it was equally vital for the Abkhaz and Ossetians to "prove" their continuous presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia respectively as autonomous groups, distinct from Georgians. Thus, the real struggle between these communities, at least initially, was about "historical priority" (Shnirelman, 2001, p.372) in these territories, which all the groups concerned considered as "theirs". This struggle over

"historical truth" and calls for the "restoration of historical justice" are well exemplified by various protests that swept across Georgia after Stalin's death.

5. In Defence of National Identity – Symbolic Meaning of Territory and Language

5.1. Georgian Protests of 1956: From Stalinism to Nationalism?

Scholars have long argued that it is during periods of anxiety caused by "complex and ambiguous" social and political developments that a group is particularly prone to resorting to its "symbolic resources" and to "metaphorical and mythical modes of viewing the political scene" (Edelman, 1971, p.65; see also Hutchinson, 2005, pp.135–6). For many, the "source of anxiety" (Edelman, 1971, p.65) among Georgians, Abkhaz and Ossetians was the political upheaval in the Soviet Union during Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika*. These authors argue that until 1988, for instance, inter-ethnic relations between Georgians and Abkhaz and Ossetians were "notably relaxed" and largely "untroubled" and that it is only around this time that we see the resurgence of nationalism (Zürcher, 2007, p.149). However, while to a certain degree this may indeed be true, especially in the case of relations between Georgians and Ossetians, a close look at Georgian–Abkhaz relations, on the other hand, paints a rather different picture. I therefore argue that it is misleading to assume that the "source of anxiety" that ultimately acted as a trigger for inter-ethnic conflicts in Georgia only lies in the events of the 1980s. In my analysis, it goes back to events that unfolded in Georgia in the 1950s. As I argue, it was the death of Georgia's then "most adorable son" – Joseph Stalin (Kldiashvili, 2012, p.9) – that served as the "critical juncture" by setting off one of the major episodes of Georgian nationalism during the Soviet era.

Indeed, Stalin's death on 5 March 1953 and the accompanying major shifts in Soviet nationality policies marked the beginning of a new era in the history of inter-ethnic relations in Georgia. The post-Stalinist period here was characterised by a series of upheavals, starting with mass public unrest in Tbilisi and other cities across Georgia (including Sokhumi (Sukhum) and Stalin's birthplace Gori) on 4–10 March 1956 (Kldiashvili, 2012, p.3). These demonstrations were largely sparked by reports about Khrushchev's so-called Secret Speech at the 20th Congress of the CPSU in February 1956 in which he denounced Stalin's personality cult and dictatorship.

This incident demonstrates well the central role of the emotions of pride and honour in Georgia's conflicts. Even though Georgia-born Stalin himself was a strong opponent of any manifestation of nationalism, including Georgian, Khrushchev's move "against the personality cult became mixed up with anti-Georgian prejudices, and de-Stalinisation was therefore interpreted in Georgia as an essentially anti-Georgian move" (RFE/RL, 23 July 1958, p.9). Georgians argued that in disrespecting Stalin by speaking ill of a dead person (considered unacceptable in Georgian culture), Khrushchev infringed "upon Georgians' national pride" (Kldiashvili, 2012, p.6).

These demonstrations started as pro-Stalin gatherings to mark the third anniversary of his death. However, over the course of the subsequent few days they developed "a clearly nationalistic character" and eventually were severely suppressed (Blauvelt, 2009, p.651).[226] At its peak, by 9 March, the number of protesters in Gori reportedly reached 70,000 people. According to official figures, 21 people were killed and a further 55 wounded as a result of the crackdown on

[226] For more on this, see also RFE/RL (23 July 1958, p.9); Smith (2008); Kldiashvili (2012).

demonstrators in Tbilisi by Soviet troops. The majority of those killed or injured were students and schoolchildren (Avalishvili, 2012, pp.18, 27).[227]

These events have not been much covered in the literature on Georgia's conflicts but their implications cannot be overstated. Not only were they "the first significant expressions of public protest and civil disobedience in the Soviet Union for decades" (Blauvelt, 2009, p.651), but arguably these events also marked the beginning of the emergence of the national independence movement in Georgia (Kldiashvili, 2012). Moreover, they also marked a new stage in the development of the national movements among certain of Georgia's ethnic minorities, particularly among the Abkhaz, as they intensified their efforts in expressing their grievances against the Georgians. In fact, as some have argued, the events of March 1956 in Tbilisi provoked an "outburst of Georgian nationalism", which further contributed to exacerbating ethnic tensions in the Georgian SSR (Kozlov, [1999] 2002, pp.133–4).

The impact of the March 1956 events for Georgia could be compared to the crackdown on demonstrators in Tbilisi on 9 April 1989 by Soviet troops, which significantly radicalised the Georgian nationalist movement and eventually paved the way to the outbreak of violence (Wheatley, 2005). Similarly, the events of March 1956 intensified Georgian fears towards the Kremlin, now dominated by Russians (and other Slavic nationals). Moreover, these events were followed by the first open declarations of protest by the Abkhaz side, which further increased Georgian suspicions that every time there were disturbances in Tbilisi the Kremlin countered

[227] Based on extensive archival research Avalishvili (2012, p.27) argues that the number of injured could be much higher, since many of them avoided seeking help at hospitals due to fear of persecution by the authorities.

them by stirring up trouble among Georgia's ethnic minorities. In particular, this concerns demonstrations of 1956 and 1978, which almost coincided with, or were closely followed by, disturbances in Abkhazia.

5.2. Abkhaz Protests of 1957: The Emergence of Counter-Nationalism?

Indeed, shortly after the March events in Tbilisi, on 10 July 1956 the Central Committee of the CPSU adopted a decree in which it criticised the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party for failing to adequately address past mistakes of the former head of the NKVD – Lavrenti Beria – regarding the implementation of Soviet nationality policies in Abkhazia. Georgians have interpreted this move as a sort of a "punishment" for the March disturbances. In contrast, however, the Abkhaz have argued that their grievances date back further and are unrelated to the events taking place in Tbilisi at the time. According to them, for many years Lenin's principles on questions of nationality had been ignored in Abkhazia and the rights and interests of the Abkhaz people had been seriously violated (Sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 32, d. 281a, l. 14).[228] In this way, the Abkhaz claim they simply seized the opportunity and took advantage of the political space offered by Stalin's death and the move towards de-Stalinisation. Indeed, while a series of Abkhaz protests emerged shortly after the March events in Tbilisi, they were by no means the first demonstration of Abkhaz discontent. According to Timothy Blauvelt (2007, p.221), for instance, the first signs of "the emergence of … Abkhaz nationalism" were already visible in the second part of the 1940s, if not before.[229]

[228] For more on this, see also Sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 31, d. 115; Coppieters (2002, p.93).

[229] The Abkhaz side further argues that national sentiments were also involved in the 1931 peasant uprising in Abkhazia. According to Georgian and some western scholars, however, this uprising was little more than a resistance against the mass collectivisation in Abkhazia (Blauvelt, 2013).

The main reason for Abkhaz dissatisfaction and the immediate trigger for their protests in the 1950s, however, was the publication of an article in the Georgian-language journal *Mnatobi* by the prominent Georgian historian Professor Nikoloz (Niko) Berdzenishvili about Pavle Ingorokva's previously-mentioned thesis on the formation of the Abkhaz nation. Berdzenishvili questioned the historical past of the Abkhaz people and largely supported Ingorokva's ideas on their ethno-genesis.[230] The latter argued that the Abkhaz were not indigenous to Abkhazia, but that they were North Caucasian tribes that migrated to the present-day Abkhazia only in the seventeenth century, and that the "real" Abkhaz mentioned in ancient sources belonged to the proto-Kartvelian (Georgian) culture. Ingorokva's thesis was first published in a 1949 journal article and was later included in his 1954 monograph *Giorgi Merchule* (Sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 32, d. 281a, l. 14).[231]

In response to these publications, the Abkhaz organised mass protests, which reportedly took place in Lykhny and Mokvi on 10–13 April 1957.[232] In a letter addressed to the Kremlin, some prominent Abkhaz intellectuals also openly voiced demands to separate the Abkhaz ASSR from the Georgian SSR and to join it to the RSFSR (Sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 32, d. 236, l. 305).[233] Official reaction from Tbilisi was to criticise the journal's editor for failing to adequately review the published material. "Instead of giving an objective, all-round analysis of P.

[230] Berdzenishvili's (1894–1965) article in 1956 was followed by a series of articles in the same journal by other prominent Georgian historians over the course of the next year. Like Berdzenishvili, these authors also largely supported Ingorokva's thesis about the origins of the Abkhaz people (Sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 32, d. 281a, l. 14).
[231] For a detailed outline of Ingorokva's "thesis" on the Abkhaz ethno-genesis, see Ingorokva (1954, pp.114–295). The chapter on Abkhazia was entitled "The Feudal State of Western Georgia ("The Kingdom of Abkhazia") and Information about it in Giorgi Merchule's Work".
[232] According to official archival documents, there were only *attempts* at mass gatherings, making it unclear whether these protests actually took place (Sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 32, d. 236, l. 305).
[233] For more on this, see also Coppieters (2002, p.93).

Ingorokva's work in *Giorgi Merchule*," the statement read, "all the discussion in these publications was solely focused on the part of the book that gave a mistaken view on the main questions concerning the historical past of the Abkhaz people". It was also decided to reprimand the head of the section of the Communist Party responsible for propaganda and agitation for failing to provide due supervision of the work of *Mnatobi.* These organs were further ordered to significantly strengthen oversight and control over the republican press (Sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 32, d. 49, l. 11). Archival material demonstrates that these issues remained at the centre of concern of both local and central authorities in Sokhumi (Sukhum) and Tbilisi respectively.[234] Developments in Abkhazia over the next few decades also indicate that relations between Georgians and the Abkhaz remained somewhat strained (interview with Shota Gorgodze).[235]

5.3. Abkhaz Protests of 1965 and 1967: The Issue of Ethno-Genesis

The emotional and symbolic aspect of inter-ethnic conflicts in Georgia is also highlighted in the wave of protests that swept across Abkhazia in the 1960s. Abkhaz officials continued to criticise the Communist Party leadership in Tbilisi for their continuous "erroneous policies" towards ethnic minorities and their failure to address some of the Abkhaz grievances (Coppieters, 2002, p.94). However, rather than any particular, more immediate material grievances, what sparked renewed Abkhaz protests in 1965 was the publication of a book by the director of the Abkhaz Research Institute, Khukhut Bgazhba. In his 1964 book philologist Bgazhba argued that the

[234] See Sakartvelos shss arkivi (II), f. 14, o. 49, d. 237; f. 14, o. 53, d. 237; f. 14, o. 59, d. 237; f. 14, o. 48, d. 237; f. 14, o. 61, d. 238.
[235] For more on this, see also *Zarya Vostoka* (27 April 1973, p.2; 23 January 1976, p.8; 24 January 1976, p.3); RFE/RL (1 June 1978, p.4; 26 June 1978, p.5; 10 March 1989, p.25).

Abkhaz language had been greatly influenced by Georgian. This argument, however, was interpreted by the Abkhaz side as another sign of Georgian intentions to claim Abkhaz culture and territory as Georgian (Shnirelman, 2001, p.209). Depriving the Abkhaz language the status of an indigenous language risked downgrading the Abkhaz people in the ethno-linguistic hierarchy of the Soviet Union, upon which many of the privileges granted to various nationalities depended. More importantly, however, it risked depriving the Abkhaz of their very identity as a distinct nationality. Since language was an important ingredient of "ethnicity" in the Soviet Union, saying that the Abkhaz language was influenced by or closely affiliated with Georgian was similar to arguing that the Abkhaz were, in fact, Georgians. There is not much information available in Georgian archives about this incident but according to Abkhaz sources a meeting reportedly took place in Sokhumi (Sukhum) and a letter of protest was then sent to the Central Committee of the CPSU detailing Abkhaz grievances and demanding action from the central authorities in Moscow (Shnirelman, 2001, p.209; see also Akaba, 2011).

Similar issues were at the heart of the protests of 7–11 April 1967 in Sokhumi (Sukhum). In a letter, this time addressed directly to the General Secretary of the CPSU, six Abkhaz signatories claiming to represent thousands of demonstrators outlined once again Abkhaz grievances against the Georgians. The list of complaints was similar to those of earlier years and concerned the dominant presence of ethnic Georgians in Abkhazia, the teaching of the Georgian language in Abkhazian schools, and the exploitation of Abkhazia's natural resources. The trigger of the protests also remained the same – the issue of the Abkhaz ethno-genesis discussed in the recently published volume of the Institute of History in Tbilisi. The latter publication included two papers by then already deceased Professor Niko Berdzenishvili in which he outlined Ingorokva's

"thesis" in a somewhat modified form.[236] A review published in *Komunisti*, the official newspaper of the Communist Party, in March 1967 praised Berdzenishvili's contribution to Georgian historiography, which further enraged ethnic Abkhaz. This issue was discussed at the highest official levels in Tbilisi but it was concluded that Berdzenishvili's work did not include anything to offend the Abkhaz.[237] As a result, the Abkhaz once again raised the demand for the separation of Abkhazia from Georgia, arguing that as long as the authorities in Tbilisi showed no interest in resolving these issues, the Abkhaz ASSR could not remain within the territorial boundaries of the Georgian SSR ('To the General Secretary of the CC CPSU', 12 April 1967).

Evidence suggests that in the years following these protests some of the issues raised by the Abkhaz were addressed. According to some sources, by the mid-1970s, for instance, "the Abkhaz seemed to fare no worse and probably rather better with respect to book publication in the native tongue than some other national groups of comparable size in the RSFSR". A newspaper in the Abkhaz language also "had a very respectable circulation relative to the size of the Abkhaz population" (RFE/RL, 26 June 1978, p.5).[238] Nevertheless, Georgian–Abkhaz relations remained tense and one of the major contributing factors to this tension continued to be Ingorokva's views on the Abkhaz ethno-genesis. According to a study presented to the Communist Party of Georgia by two prominent Abkhaz historians, by 1978, 32 mostly scientific publications in one way or another outlined a thesis similar to that of Ingorokva (Coppieters, 2002, p.94).

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[236] For a detailed outline of Professor Berdzenishvili's views on the Abkhaz ethno-genesis, see Berdzenishvili (1990, p.538-621).
[237] See 'To the General Secretary of the CC CPSU' (12 April 1967); Coppieters (2002, p.94); author's interview with Mariam Lortkipanidze.
[238] For more on this, see also *Zarya Vostoka* (23 January 1976, p.3); *Pravda* (27 June 1976, pp.1–2).

News reports and documentary film footage from the late 1980s show that, even a decade later, these issues continued to be particularly sensitive and were of utmost importance to both Abkhaz and Georgian communities. In 1989, for instance, ethnic Abkhaz residents in Lykhny complained to a journalist about reports in the Georgian mass media that talked about Abkhazia as a Georgian land occupied by the Abkhaz. Many of them blamed members of the Georgian intelligentsia for the deteriorating situation, arguing that Georgian scholars were "in the way [of the Abkhaz]" and were "interfering with their lives". In an interview given in Russian, one resident further stated, "I personally blame Georgian scholars in all of this. They made this mess. In all publications they reacted badly." Another resident made a similar statement, arguing that "every Georgian thinks they are better than any other nationality … Everyone else is below us, that is how they [Georgians] think, starting from scholars and ending with newborns – they have it in their blood" (1 Arkhi TV, 13 March 2010). Once again, these interview extracts demonstrate that what mattered most to these people was not so much economic grievances but more symbolic issues which had little, if any, material basis.

5.4. Georgian and Abkhaz Protests of 1978: The Issue of Language

Symbolic issues were also at the centre of the next wave of protests that took place in Abkhazia and in Tbilisi towards the end of the 1970s. These protests coincided with discussions over the new Abkhaz and Georgian constitutions, and this time the main issues were language and education policies (Coppieters, 2002, p.95). In December 1977, 130 members of the Abkhaz intelligentsia and party officials sent a letter to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, once again outlining their grievances and requesting that the Abkhaz ASSR be separated from the Georgian SSR ('Statement of the Abkhaz Intelligentsia', 10 Dec. 1977; Coppieters, 2002, p.95). This was

followed by a series of demonstrations in spring 1978 and by late April mass meetings in at least three cities in Abkhazia reportedly involved up to 12,000 people (*The New York Times*, 25 June 1978).[239] This time the Moscow leadership intervened more directly, sending Ivan Kapitonov, a secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU, to Georgia to calm the situation down.[240]

While acknowledging that some of the Abkhaz complaints were not entirely without foundation, Kapitonov rejected several other demands, such as transferring Abkhazia to the RSFSR; including a special article in the new constitution of the Abkhaz ASSR about the right to such a transfer; and removing the Georgian language from the new constitution as one of the state languages of the Abkhaz ASSR. Kapitonov argued that such claims were inconsistent with the constitution of the Soviet Union and were “from the roots, in contradiction to Leninist nationality policy” (cited in *Zarya Vostoka*, 26 May 1978, p.1). Yet he promised all-Union assistance to Abkhazia to further help the socio-economic development of the autonomous republic (*Sovetskaya Abkhaziya*, 23 May 1978, p.1; 24 May 1978, p.1).[241] Despite Kapitonov’s visit, however, the situation in Abkhazia remained tense and the first anniversary of the adoption of the new constitution of the Soviet Union was marked by further protests and strikes (RFE/RL, 20 August 1980).[242]

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[239] For more on this, see also RFE/RL (26 June 1978, p.6); *Zarya Vostoka* (20 April 1978, p.2).
[240] Kapitonov was an influential figure within the Party, responsible for cadre policy throughout the Soviet Union (RFE/RL, 1 June 1978).
[241] Shortly after Kapitonov’s visit, a joint resolution was adopted by the CPSU and the USSR Council of Ministers, the implementation of which would reportedly cost an estimated $750 million at the time (*The New York Times,* 25 June 1978). For more on Kapitonov’s visit, see RFE/RL (1 June 1978, p.3; 26 June 1978, pp.8–9; 20 August 1980, p.2).
[242] A new Soviet Constitution of 1977 replaced that of 1936 (RFE/RL, 26 June 1978, p.7).

The Abkhaz protests of spring 1978 coincided with the Georgian protests. The issue of contention here was similar to those raised by the Abkhaz, and concerned the status of native languages. As discussed in chapter 4, under Brezhnev, Moscow further intensified its efforts to ensure fluency in Russian across the Soviet Union. These efforts were manifested in modifying the articles concerning the status of native languages in the drafts of the new republican constitutions published in March 1978. Overall, the changes made in these drafts did not seem that dramatic, as they merely brought certain provisions, especially those concerning the language of judicial proceedings, into line with what was already in practice. Perhaps for this reason, the authorities in Moscow did not expect much resistance. Indeed, the drafts did not provoke much opposition, even though the national languages of the Union republics were to lose their exclusive (at least on paper) status in the courts. In the republics of the South Caucasus, however, the changes also meant the omission of the articles from the drafts that proclaimed Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani as the state languages of those republics – articles that were unique to the constitutions of these three Union republics. Furthermore, not only were these languages losing their status as *state* languages, but in addition Russian and other minority languages were to be given equal status in these republics (RFE/RL, 3 May 1978, pp.2, 4, 11).

In the Georgian SSR, Article 6 – which proclaimed Georgian as the state language of the republic – first appeared in the 1922 constitution.[243] However, this Article also stated that "[n]ational minorities of the Georgian SSR are assured of the right of free development and use of their native tongue both in their own national cultural institutions as well as in all-state institutions"

[243] The constitutions of Armenia and Azerbaijan acquired an almost identical Article in 1937 and 1956 respectively (RFE/RL, 3 May 1978, p.3).

(RFE/RL, 3 May 1978, p.2). However, this was different from granting them equal status to the Georgian language. A slightly amended version of the Article continued to appear in both the 1927 and 1937 constitutions of the Georgian SSR. Allowing such an article to appear in Georgia's constitution in the first place seems to have been a concession to Georgian national feelings, which were running rather high in the years following Georgia's annexation by the Red Army. However, even though these articles only served a nominal purpose and none of the republican languages (whether Georgian, Armenian or Azerbaijani) enjoyed any special treatment in practice – at least in the sense that they were never the only languages used in official documents or in the courts – they were, nevertheless, "of important emotional and symbolic significance" to the Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani people (RFE/RL, 3 May 1978, pp.2, 3). This is why this decision was met with much hostility, especially in Georgia and Armenia.

In Tbilisi, large demonstrations were held on 14 April to protest the proposed constitutional changes and in the end the decision was made by officials to preserve Georgian as the state language of the republic.[244] Furthermore, according to the draft constitution, the emblem of the Georgian SSR was to feature initials in both Georgian and Russian, but in the final text only the Georgian version was preserved. While these were minor changes and seemingly small details mostly concerned with formalities that did not necessarily reflect the reality on the ground, they highlighted the highly sensitive nature and the utmost importance of symbolic issues to the

[244] However, while Georgian retained the status of the state language, it nevertheless lost the formal status as the sole language for judicial proceedings and the publication of laws and decrees (RFE/RL, 26 June 1978, p.7).

Georgian public (RFE/RL, 3 May 1978, pp. 6–7, 10).[245] In fact, two years after these demonstrations, 14 April was declared as the Day of Language in Georgia and a statue of *Deda Ena* (*Mother Tongue*) was erected in Tbilisi to commemorate Iakob Gogebashvili's (1840–1912) comprehensive 1876 primer in the Georgian language (Gachechiladze, 2011, p.115).

In the years following the 14 April protests, the authorities in Tbilisi paid particular attention to the question of the Georgian language. In April 1979, a resolution was passed "On the State of Teaching Georgian Language and Literature in the Republic's Educational Establishments and Measures to Improve It", followed by analogous resolutions on teaching minority languages – Abkhaz, Ossetian, Armenian and Azerbaijani – in the republic's schools (*Komunisti*, 13 April 1979, p.3). Despite these efforts, however, official and unofficial expressions of concern over the future of the Georgian language continued well into the 1980s. Concerns were also raised about the future of teaching Georgian history in schools and universities. At a demonstration in Tbilisi in March 1981, for instance, one of the main demands was the introduction in schools of a course in Georgian history, which at the time was taught as part of a course on the history of the USSR (RFE/RL, 7 April 1981; 12 December 1988; 28 July 1989).

5.5. The Issue of Victimisation

The 1978 protests were of particular importance to the further development of inter-ethnic relations in Georgia. Firstly, the Abkhaz campaigns of 1977–8 were much more successful than any previous protests. In the following years considerable progress was made in reviving the economy and promoting Abkhaz history, literature and culture, as well as in granting the Abkhaz

[245] For more on the constitutional changes, see also *Zarya Vostoka* (15 April 1978, p.1; 16 April 1978, p.1).

"greater institutional autonomy in the fields of science, education and the media" (Coppieters, 2002, p.95). In 1979, the Pedagogical Institute of Sokhumi (Sukhum), for instance, was transformed into State University of Abkhazia, which, as Coppieters has pointed out, "was one of the most important projects in the Soviet authorities' attempt to pacify the region". Together with the Abkhazian Research Institute, the University also provided a hub for the development of the Abkhaz intelligentsia (Coppieters, 2002, p.102).[246] In fact, a decade later, it turned into the epicentre of the Georgian–Abkhaz confrontation.

In April 1989 ethnic Georgian students in Sokhumi (Sukhum) began a hunger strike with the demand that "the Georgian branch of the [Abkhaz State] university be made a branch of Tbilisi State University" and be administered directly from Tbilisi (RFE/RL, 27 April 1990, p.13). Despite Abkhaz protests and appeals to Moscow, the decision was made to establish the Sokhumi (Sukhum) branch of TSU (*Sabchota Apkhazeti*, 7 July 1989, p.4). On 15 July Abkhaz attempts not to allow the university to hold entrance exams resulted in inter-ethnic clashes in the capital of Abkhazia, and sporadic fighting between the Abkhaz and Georgians continued over the next few days, resulting in the deaths of 15 civilians (*Komunisti*, 18 July 1989, pp.1, 3). These would be the first casualties of inter-ethnic violence in Abkhazia prior to the outbreak of war in the region some three years later.

The issue of dividing the State University of Abkhazia along ethnic lines once again highlights the real "battlefield" on which Georgian–Abkhaz relations were playing out. This was the

[246] Some Abkhaz and western sources at the time also confirm these arguments. See, for instance 'Statement of the Abkhaz Intelligentsia' (10 Dec. 1977); RFE/RL (26 June 1978, p.9).

"battle" for preserving (or increasing) the dominance of the respective languages of these groups in the Abkhaz ASSR. In the eyes of the Georgians, Abkhazia was part of Georgia – moreover, Abkhazia *was* Georgia – therefore, it only made sense to have a branch of TSU there just as in other regions of the country. In contrast, Abkhaz viewed themselves as more autonomous, and having a section of their university transformed into a branch administered from Tbilisi was perceived as a sign of dominance from the centre (i.e. authorities in Tbilisi) and an attack on Abkhaz language and national identity.[247]

In the 1970s, alongside the university, the Abkhaz also got their own television station – a privilege denied to much more numerous ethnic minorities in other parts of the Soviet Union (RFE/RL, 26 June 1978, p.9).[248] In fact, as some argue, this signalled a period of Abkhazianisation in Abkhazia that seemed a response to the Georgian leadership's Georgianisation policies of the 1930s and 1940s (Webber, 1996, p.233). As one Western observer pointed out,

> [i]t would also seem safe to assume that the concessions granted to the Abkhaz since 1978 have served to reinforce their perception of the strength of their position vis-à-vis Georgians living in the autonomous republic, who are increasingly on the defensive against any further erosion of their rights. (RFE/RL, 10 March 1989, p.27)

However, what exacerbated the situation further was that the Georgian leadership, who considered inter-ethnic relations in Abkhazia "a most tender and sensitive sphere", made "the

[247] For more on the division of the University in Abkhazia see author's interview with Jumber Patiashvili. Patiashvili believes that the decision to segregate the University along ethnic lines was a "grave mistake" and blames leaders of the Georgian national movement for making such demands. "There should not have been any division between us and dividing the University meant dividing the people as well. In the contrary, we should have stayed together", he says.
[248] For more on this issue, see also Goldenberg (1994, p.89); Lakoba (1999, p.98); Coppieters (2002, p.96).

Abkhazian question taboo", arguing that openly discussing these issues would only aggravate already existing tensions (RFE/RL, 10 March 1989, p.26). This left the underground *samizdat* literature one of the few channels through which the complaints and concerns of the Georgian and Abkhaz communities could be voiced (Coppieters, 2002, p.96).[249] Occasional reports in the media, however, as well as announcements and speeches by the Georgian leadership, signalled that "suspicion and hostility still pervade[d] the field of interethnic relations" in Abkhazia (RFE/RL, 7 April 1989a, p.27).[250]

Starting from the mid-1980s, however, *glasnost* and *perestroika* provided the necessary political space and opened up an arena for differences along ethnic lines to be played out in the open. As a result, inter-ethnic relations in Georgia took a new turn, escalating into the so-called media war ("war of words") between ethnic Georgians on the one hand and the Abkhaz and Ossetians on the other (Coppieters, 2002, p.97). By this time, inter-ethnic tensions in Georgia were already being viewed and interpreted by the Georgian side through the prism of growing Georgian–Russian tensions, understood and portrayed as a conflict between the centre, represented by the Kremlin/Moscow and the periphery – Tbilisi. Thus, many members of the Georgian national movement believed that the problems concerning Georgia's minorities were "fabricated" and "imagined" and were used only as a tool by the Kremlin to "weaken" and "distract" the movement from its ultimate goal – "independent Georgia" (author's interview with Tamar Chkheidze).

[249] It should be pointed out, however, that such practice was not peculiar to the Georgian SSR. In fact, one could argue that the issue of inter-ethnic tensions in Georgia in the 1980s was no more "taboo" than in any other period or in any other part of the Soviet Union (Coppieters, 2002, p.96).
[250] See, for instance, *Pravda* (16 August 1980, p.3); *Zarya Vostoka* (17 February 1985, p.3); RFE/RL (20 August 1980).

As one of the leaders of the Ilia Chavchavadze Society argues, it was often proclaimed at demonstrations at this time that the problem of Abkhazia and South Ossetia did not exist, and that there should be only one aim – to achieve Georgia's independence. It was widely believed among large segments of the national movement that after gaining independence problems concerning Georgia's ethnic minorities would disappear by themselves (author's interview with Tamar Chkheidze).[251] This sentiment is well-captured in one of the speeches given by Giorgi (Gia) Chanturia – a prominent leader of the national movement and the head of the National Democratic Party,[252] who states at a demonstration in 1989 that

> the problem of Abkhazia does not exist for Georgia because Abkhazia was, is and will remain an inseparable and organic part of Georgia, and the Georgian nation will always exercise full sovereignty over the territory of Abkhazia. This problem, of course with "problem" in quotation marks … is only, so to speak, manufactured by the Kremlin. This whole business is inspired entirely by the Kremlin in order to divert the national movement along a completely different path, to shift the centre of attention to completely different problems, completely different issues, in this case to non-existent issues. (Rustavi2 TV, 9 April 2001)

At a different demonstration, another leader of the Georgian national movement, Irakli Tsereteli, who headed the National Independence Party,[253] made a similar statement:

> The National Independence Party of Georgia considers that Abkhaz separatism, as such, in fact, does not exist. There exists a Kremlin imperialism, which hides behind Abkhaz separatism. This is why our concerns are directed towards the Kremlin and not to a small group of Apsuas [i.e. Abkhaz]. (Rustavi2 TV, 9 April 2001)[254]

[251] See also Rustavi2 TV, "At the Crossroad of Choice" (n.d.).
[252] Chanturia (1959–94) revived the National Democratic Party of Georgia in 1981. He was arrested several times by the Soviet authorities in the 1980s. He was assassinated in a 1994 attack, which left his bodyguard dead and his wife, Irina Sarishvili – also an active member of the national movement – severely wounded (Civil.ge, 2002).
[253] Tsereteli was a philologist and literary critic. He was first arrested in 1983 and served four years in prison for protesting against the Soviet commemoration of the bicentenary of the Treaty of Georgievsk.
[254] For more on this, see also author's interview with Tsereteli.

These statements were not entirely without foundation – without doubt, the Kremlin played a decisive role in the conflicts in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia. One of the important, but probably less acknowledged, aspects of its involvement was that Soviet authorities in the Kremlin often exerted pressure on ethnic minorities through Union republics. Whether this concerned collectivisation or other policies, such measures often led to genuine grievances on the part of minorities – not against Moscow, however, but in the case of Georgia against the authorities in Tbilisi, who were perceived largely through ethnic lenses (Derluguian, 1998, p.272). In this way, the Kremlin redirected Abkhaz and Ossetian grievances towards Georgians, "instead championing itself as the arbiter" when conflicts between these communities arose (Wolczuk and Yemelianova, 2008, p.182). Discussing similar issues within the framework of colonialism in Africa, Horowitz (1985, p.163) argues that colonial powers also have a tendency to exhibit certain favouritism towards those groups who are less likely to threaten their interests in the region. In this way, the relationship that develops between them is more of patronage than conflict (see also Wolff, 2003; Blauvelt, 2007). In the Georgian SSR, it was the Abkhaz and Ossetians that best fit this category.

Indeed, a "special relationship" between the Abkhaz and Soviet authorities in particular, was clearly observable. The Abkhaz elites generally maintained good connections with Moscow and enjoyed direct access to some of the key political figures at the highest levels of authority. Many of the high-ranking officials often spent holidays in summer houses (*dachas*) in the Abkhaz ASSR, giving Abkhaz elites direct access to the powerful decision-makers in the Kremlin. As a result, Abkhaz *nomenklatura* and intelligentsia often addressed their complaints directly to Moscow, bypassing Georgian authorities. As some have argued, this was beneficial for Moscow

elites as well, as they successfully used this arrangement "as a balance to the Georgian elite" (Blauvelt, 2007, p.224). It could be argued that this was one of the reasons why in Pavle Ingorokva's previously-mentioned 1000-page monograph, no section was singled out and given as much attention as the 182-page chapter on Abkhazia. This also partly explains the noticeable absence of large-scale Ossetian protests in the pre-*perestroika* and *glasnost* period. In comparison to their Abkhaz counterparts Ossetians significantly lacked the means and opportunities necessary in order to mount such major protests. However, occasional reports do suggest that Ossetian grievances against the Georgians were rather similar to those of the Abkhaz.[255]

In any case, instead of shifting "responsibility from Georgia's leadership to the Russian authorities," however, the above-mentioned statements by leaders of the Georgian national movement further exacerbated the already existing tensions between Georgians and ethnic minorities (Coppieters, 2002, p.111).[256] The latter argued that by belittling or discarding their problems altogether, Georgians were refusing to take ethnic minorities seriously, treating them as second-class citizens. In the post-war period, as one ethnic Abkhaz resident of Sokhumi (Sukhum) remarked, "Abkhazia proved that it is no one's slave and we deserve to be talked to and treated as equals. You [Georgians] should not talk to us as if we were disabled or some run-away criminals" (Studio Re, 2010).[257]

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[255] According to some sources, for instance, in the 1950s, some members of Ossetian intelligentsia demanded to substitute the subjects of Georgian language, literature and history with Ossetian language, literature and history at Tskhinvali Pedagogical Institute. They also expressed dissatisfaction about ethnic Georgian cadres sent from Tbilisi (Tsotniashvili, 1998, p.28).
[256] For more on this, see also Nodia (1996, p.11); 1 Arkhi TV (13 March 2010).
[257] This is an extract from Guram Odisharia's play *Far Away Sea*, performed by the Konstantine Gamsakhurdia Sokhumi Theatre in Tbilisi in 2006.

6. Concluding Remarks

Very few social scientists would deny the importance of discourses discussed in this chapter in mobilising the masses. However, very few of them would place these discourses at the centre of their research and treat them as explanatory variables. One of the main reasons for this, as Hutchinson (2005, p.1) argues, is the desire to rid the social sciences of "the authority of myths". In other words, social scientists overwhelmingly prefer to talk about more concrete, easily measurable variables such as per capita income, the number of soldiers on the ground or different regime types (Kaufmann, 2008, p.2). There are, of course, some notable exceptions in this regard (see Kaufman, 2001; Ross, 2007). Nevertheless, despite much criticism, rational choice (instrumentalist) approaches remain the dominant explanation of ethnic violence, whether emphasizing various security concerns of ethnic groups, economic grievances or economic resources as mobilisational factors for group action. "Non-rational" factors such as myths, symbols, metaphors, memories and emotions, on the other hand, continue to be treated as secondary factors and remain at the margins of ethnic conflict studies.

However, as the cases of Abkhazia and South Ossetia demonstrate, what mobilised the masses in these regions were not the "concrete, easily measurable" and observable solids (Kaufmann, 2008, p.2), as argued by some rational choice theorists. Rather, the tipping point for mobilisation and the ultimate outbreak of violence in both cases had more to do with ethnic symbolism. As I have argued in this chapter in line with ethno-symbolist thinkers, these ethnic symbols not only served ornamental purposes, but rather, once activated, developed a "real social force" (Kaufmann, 2008, p.2) and therefore, need to be taken seriously. Issues concerning territory and language – both important ethnic markers in Georgia – were particularly important and remained at the heart

of Georgian, Abkhaz and Ossetian ethnic myths and “guest–host” metaphors that played a decisive role in mobilising people into opposing groups of “us” versus “them”. In this way, these myths and metaphors were intrinsically linked to Soviet interpretation of “ethnicity” and cannot be understood unless placed within the Soviet institutional context. It was the interaction between these discourses and Soviet nationality policies that created a particular “social reality” in which various actors operated in Georgia in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It is to the role of these actors that I now turn in the next chapter.

Chapter 6 – Lead Actors?: The Role of the Elites and the Masses

1. Introduction

Nowadays most scholars acknowledge that ethnic identities are largely "constructed", "flexible" and "manipulable", while at the same time conceding that these identities are also often rooted in and shaped by "primordialised" cultural elements (Hale, 2004, p.461). Indeed, as Milton Esman (1994, p.14) points out, "every ethnic collectivity and solidarity can be located on a spectrum between (primordial) historical continuities and (instrumental) opportunistic adaptations". Similarly, in literature on ethnic conflicts, most scholars recognise both material (rational) and non-material (non-rational/symbolic) drivers of inter-ethnic tensions. The main issue is: which end of this spectrum do they usually favour and how much "weight" do they attribute to each of these different (material and non-material) factors in the outbreak of violence? The key here seems to be the agency of the actors involved. Many remain sceptical of the extent to which demagogic politicians or other elite groups influence the masses, for instance. How free are the elites in manoeuvring within the "symbolic and cultural systems" of a given group, or how constrained are they by these systems? In this way, the question posed by Robert Dahl (1961, p.325) still remains relevant today – "do leaders lead or are they led?"

In this thesis I adopt Cris Shore's (2002) definition of "elites" as members of a society with some of "the most influential positions or roles in the important spheres of life". As he argues, elites are "makers and shakers" – individuals whose cultural and political capital "positions them above their fellow citizens and whose decisions crucially shape what happens in the wider society" (Shore, 2002, p.4). George Marcus (1983, p.9) further maintains that "elites" do not need to

recognise themselves as such in order to acquire this label; in other words, "*elite* is a term of reference, rather than self-reference" (emphasis original).

In order to distinguish between various types of elites in Georgia, I use different qualifying adjectives, such as "political" or "military". I use the term "intelligentsia" to refer to "cultural" elites – a segment of a society engaged in the development and dissemination of culture, including people engaged in educational and scientific spheres of a society.[258] In the Soviet context, I also use the term *nomenklatura* to refer to Communist Party functionaries who held various key administrative positions in the Soviet Union.

I use the term "masses" to refer to a general public within a society, i.e. "ordinary folk", or people "on the ground", as Fearon and Laitin (2000) would have it. According to Shore (2002, p.9), elites "require a general public to affirm their position of superiority; a mass citizenry that belongs to the same culture or imagined community". In other words, without the masses there would be no elites (see also Kuran, 1998, p.41). Despite their importance, however, masses are surprisingly missing from much of the literature on ethnic conflicts; their presence is usually acknowledged only in passing. Instead, scholars often put forward a rather strong rational choice (instrumentalist) argument that puts more emphasis on the role of the elites and their "instrumental rationality". According to these accounts, ethnic conflicts are largely "the product of deliberate elite efforts to mobilise latent solidarities behind a particular political program" (Snyder and Ballentine, 1996, p.10).[259] Even when masses are taken seriously and are given

[258] For more on different categories of elites, see also Watson (2002).
[259] For a similar argument, see also Lake and Rothchild (1998, pp.5–6); Kuran (1998); Saideman (1998, p.132).

“voice” in scholarly analysis, however, as is the case with the elites, the main emphasis here too is on self-interested individuals in pursuit of their own agendas (Brass, 1997; Fearon and Laitin, 2000).[260]

In this chapter I aim to go beyond these widely accepted elite centred analysis in ethnic conflict studies and probe the question of whether elites are indeed the lead actors in Georgia’s conflicts. There is no doubt that elites “play an important role in exacerbating ethnic tensions”, as many have argued before (Lake and Rothchild, 1996b, p.55). In the case of Georgia too, certain decisions and actions by some elites unquestionably contributed to the actual outbreak of violence. However, the main point of disagreement among scholars seems to be over the question of how much agency should be attributed to these various actors. In other words, are they the main agents in the construction of conflicting group identities or do they play a secondary role?

While most scholars do recognise that elites are often constrained by social, historical and cultural environments in which they operate, much of the scholarship on ethnic conflicts takes elite interests for granted and simply assumes their “instrumental reasoning” (Sanin and Wood, 2014, p.223). In other words, there is too much emphasis in the literature on “deliberate elite efforts”, to use Snyder and Ballentine’s (1996) above-mentioned quote, while not enough attention is given to the “latent solidarities” to which these elites resort in order to mobilise the masses. Or more importantly, hardly anyone questions whether (or how) these “latent solidarities” shape elite interests and preferences in the first place. Thus, what is largely missing

[260] There are some exceptions in this regard, of course. Most notably, in the field of ethnic conflicts, see Kaufman (2001).

in this analysis is the acknowledgement that at least some elites and some members of a society may be motivated by "sincere beliefs" rather than by pure self-interest or personal aggrandizement (Sanin and Wood, 2014, p.222).[261] When such feelings are acknowledged, however, they are often caricatured and are seldom taken seriously (see Kuran, 1998, p.41; Kaufman, 2001, p.114).

In contrast, while I recognise that some actors in the case of Georgia may have indeed acted "rationally", I view this "rationality" as "context-bound" (Nee, 2001). In other words, these elites are "boundedly rational individuals", shaped by their social environment (Checkel, 2011, p.8). Empirical evidence provided in this chapter supports the conclusion that, by the late 1980s, the understandings of ethnicity and ethnic solidarities in Georgia had already been significantly influenced by Soviet nationality policies and what ethno-symbolists have termed the "myth–symbol complex" – the combination of various discourses (whether historical myths, cultural narratives, symbols and/or metaphors). In this way, as I argue, both elite and mass beliefs and preferences were informed and constrained by these understandings of ethnicity.

In the first half of the chapter I start out by examining the validity of the elite-centred explanations of Georgia's conflicts, describing some of the different players in these conflicts and their various motives, and probing the question of whether elites were indeed the lead actors in these conflicts. The second half of the chapter deals with the role of the masses – people on the "ground" who "follow" these elites. It examines the rationale behind ordinary citizens' participation in and support of violence. As part of this section, I focus on Georgia's paramilitary

[261] Sanin and Wood (2014) make a similar general argument in regards to the role of ideology in civil wars.

organisations and explore in some depth their role in instigating violence and motivations behind why people took up arms and joined these groups.

2. Elites: Leading or Being Led?

The rational choice approaches to ethnic conflicts have largely argued that political and military elites successfully manipulated inter-ethnic hostilities in Georgia and fuelled negative attitudes among Georgians, Abkhaz and Ossetians. The intelligentsia also played an important role in this process. In fact, as some scholars point out, it was the work of writers, historians, philologists, linguists, ethnologists, archaeologists and the like who successfully shaped the ethno-historical myths of their respective ethnic groups and "sold" them to the masses as "historical truth" (Hewitt, 1995, p.56; Smith et al., 1998, p.49).

Most of these approaches acknowledge that discourses can serve as powerful mobilisational tools and that elites often resort to the symbolic resources of their groups in order to rally the masses. However, instrumentalist scholars such as Paul Brass (1979) maintain that the persistence of certain symbols and cultural elements merely suggests that different ethnic groups can be mobilised using different appeals and that the pre-existing values, institutions and practices of a particular group will indicate which appeals and symbols will work and which will not. In this way, "the leaders of ethnic movements invariably select from traditional cultures only those aspects that they think will serve to unite the group and that will be useful in promoting the interests of the group as they define them" (Brass, 1979, p.40).

One of the major problems with these accounts is that they seem to suggest that elites use the symbolic and cultural resources of a group for instrumental purposes only and are not themselves constrained, at least not significantly, by them. It appears that historical and cultural narratives, myths of the origins of their nations, and metaphors carry no weight and have no force among these different elite groups. As Francis Robinson (1979) points out, we are asked to believe that "[t]heir thoughts, all of a sudden, owe nothing to their past". Elite actions are viewed as *rational* and *deliberate* – they select symbols and manipulate them, but at all times their main consideration remains "how best to serve their material interests" (Robinson, 1979, p.90). In other words, it seems as if the symbols themselves play little, if any, role in forming elite interests. In the eyes of the elites they are merely "tools" to be used in order to mobilise the masses. In this way, it appears that "their rational pursuit of power is constrained only by the cultures of the groups they hope to lead and not by their own culturally determined preferences and beliefs" (Robinson, 1979, p.81).[262] In this context, it becomes of secondary importance whether identities are constructed based on some pre-existing cultural elements or harden and become fixed once formed (Kaufmann, 1996; Schöpflin, 2000, p.3). The prime issue in relation to the onset of violence becomes how these identities (whether constructed, primordial or other) are *used* to incite violence – a question which is, in effect, an instrumentalist one.

This kind of argument is often advanced in relation to Pavle Ingorokva, the author of a controversial 1954 book, and others writing on the ethno-genesis of the Georgian, Abkhaz and Ossetian people. It is argued that these scholars or, rather, "self-proclaimed scholars" as they are often labelled, used (socio-biological) primordialist approaches to ethnicity instrumentally. Most

[262] For a similar argument, see also O'Leary (2001, p.150); Hutchinson (2008, p.25).

likely, the argument goes on, they were instructed "from above", following the orders (*zakaz/ustanovka*) of the Communist Party apparatus in order to provide historical justification for nationalist claims and to promote a certain political agenda. This is the view shared by the Abkhaz and Ossetians, as well as a number of western commentators.[263] In other words, in these accounts primordialism is, in Shnirelman's (2003, p.79) words, "at the service of instrumentalism".

It is undeniable that, in a totalitarian state like the Soviet Union, authorities both at the Union republican level and at the central level (i.e. the Kremlin) exerted strict control over what was said and published, whether in media, academia or literature. Yet, at this point it is hard to prove or disprove whether Ingorokva and others were indeed acting on the orders of the authorities.[264] Based on the interviews I have conducted and the analysis of memoirs, personal letters and writing of some of the elites and members of the intelligentsia, however, it seems more likely that many of them were genuine in their aspirations. In other words, these people were not only using primordialism instrumentally, they *were* often themselves primordialists and believed in the ideas (and ideals) they were advancing.[265]

A particularly good demonstration of this point is Professor Mariam Lortkipanidze's account of the events of spring 1967 discussed in Chapter 5. In her interview, Lortkipanidze, one of Georgia's most prominent historians, recalls the Abkhaz protests in Sokhumi (Sukhum)

[263] See Hewitt (1999, p.18); Shnirelman (2001, p.208; 2003, p.83); Cheterian (2008, p.85); author's interview with Gia Anchabadze.
[264] To my knowledge those files in the Georgia Security Archives that might shed some light on this issue are not yet open to the public.
[265] For a similar argument, see also Gil-White (1999); Horowitz (2004, p.80).

concerning the publication of Professor Niko Berdzenishvili's work on the issue of the ethnogenesis of the Abkhaz. In response to these protests, the editor of this collection, Babulia Lominadze, was summoned to a meeting of the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party in Tbilisi alongside other historians, including Lortkipanidze herself, in order to provide an "explanation" of the content of Berdzenishvili's work (the latter was already deceased at the time). Lortkipanidze remembers that upon entering the grand hall where the meeting was taking place, Vasil Mzhavanadze, the then Party First Secretary of Georgia, greeted them by shouting "you historians have stirred up turmoil in my well-organised republic" ("*amiriet dackobili respublika istorikosebma*"). Lortkipanidze recounts that they were met with such hostility at this meeting that she felt as if they "were standing by the wall in order to be executed by a firing squad" (author's interview). Nothing in this account indicates that the historians had been given any orders beforehand regarding the content of these publications. If anything, authorities in Tbilisi seemed rather unprepared to be faced with such an incident again (following previous Abkhaz protests), and were certainly not interested in further exacerbating inter-ethnic tensions in Georgia. Thus, it seems more likely that Ingorokva, Berdzenishvili and others genuinely believed in the historical claims they were making rather than merely "following" directives or simply acting out of their own self-interest.

Lortkipanidze recalls another instance in the early 1950s when she was asked to contribute a chapter in an edited collection of the history of the Abkhaz ASSR to be published in Sokhumi (Sukhum) in the Russian language. Her chapter concerned the history of Abkhazia in the 6th to 10th centuries. According to her, after reviewing the paper, the editorial board in Abkhazia demanded the inclusion of a section on the formation of the Abkhaz people as a historical

category in the 7th to 10th centuries. Lortkipanidze argues that she took into account some of the comments but refused to include this particular section since, in her view, there was not enough historical evidence to support the arguments that the Abkhaz indeed constituted a separate historical category by that time. Later on, however, she discovered that this paragraph had nevertheless been included in the pre-publication copy of the paper, but under the authorship of the Abkhaz historian Zurab Anchabadze. "What I went through back then was horrible, it makes me feel dizzy even now when I remember those days", says Lortkipanidze.

> It is since this incident that my torture regarding the Abkhaz question started. It was after that that I wrote [the book] *Abkhazia and the Abkhaz* and published a few articles [on this issue]. I remember I was told once that there had been a list of the "Enemies of the Abkhaz" and that number one on this list was Pavle Ingorokva – and I was listed as number two. (Author's interview)

There seems to be little self-interest in Lortkipanidze's account, however. More than anything, it seems that these events caused her enormous worry and anxiety – still evident when she recalled that period of her life in greater detail during the interview. The same is true with many members of the national movement of Georgia and other political and military elites. They seem to have indeed believed in what they were saying and doing at the time, rather than merely following orders or acting purely in self-interest.

But one might ask whether these two aspects are necessarily irreconcilable. Many have argued that just because actors might genuinely believe in their "ethnic" quests, this does not make their decisions or actions in pursuit of "ethnic" goals "any less rational or calculated" (Rothchild, 1981, p.250; see also Horowitz, 2004, p. 75). Scholars usually point to an often complex interplay between various goals and at times conflicting motivations of the many different actors involved

in ethnic conflicts (Melberg, 1998; Snyder and Jervis, 1999; Wolff, 2006). Kaufman (2006, p.50), for instance, argues that there is a need to differentiate between a "cultural entrepreneur", "who promotes a given interpretation of ethnic identity", and a "politician" (or a "political entrepreneur") who *exploits* these interpretations. Timur Kuran (1998, p.41) further differentiates between "ethnic activists" and non-activists (or "ordinary individuals", as he calls them). Individuals belonging to the latter category participate in political activities "only in response to social pressures" from more extremist groups. Ethnic activists, on the other hand, are the extremists – the "self-motivated individuals" with particularly strong needs of ethnic belonging who actively encourage their co-ethnics to engage in more vigorous "public ethnic behaviours". In line with other rational choice theorists, Kuran (1998, p.41) argues that "many of them expect to reap material benefits or achieve political power through their efforts". Lake and Rothchild (1996a; 1996b) further maintain that ethnic activists are often indistinguishable from political entrepreneurs. However, even though they too are actively engaged in the polarisation of societies, political entrepreneurs need not necessarily share the radical beliefs of ethnic activists. In this way, free from any ideological undertones, one is tempted to believe that political entrepreneurs are entirely motivated by self-interest alone – often seeking out "political office and power", as many have argued (Lake and Rothchild, 1996a, p.16; 1996b, pp.53–4; see also Rothchild, 1981, p.2).

Many of these scholars do recognise that it would be very hard, if not near-impossible, to rally the masses behind a certain political agenda without pre-existing political memories, hostile myths and emotions that "magnify" the polarisation of societies. However, the majority of these accounts still treat these concepts as largely "mobilisation tools" only and do not engage with

them in any greater detail. Nevertheless, a small number of scholars do consider the possibility that the elites themselves might be driven by emotions derived from the myths, symbols and metaphors they "use" for mobilisation purposes (Lake and Rothchild, 1996b, p.55; Kaufman, 2006, p.51). Once again, to use Esman's (1994, p.14) above-mentioned comparison, most of these scholars can be located on a spectrum depending on how much agency they attribute to the actors on the one hand and to institutions and the discourses that enable and/or constrain the political behaviour of the elites and the masses on the other. This is the key question and this issue will be examined in the rest of this chapter.

Manipulation, Belief or Both?

At first glance, the role of the political and military elites (whether one calls them ethnic activists or political entrepreneurs), who "exploited" symbolic resources of their respective groups in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Georgia, indeed seems overwhelming. Anyone who takes a closer look at that period would be amazed by the exceptional charisma of some of the leaders of the national movement and their extreme popularity among the masses (this was particularly true in the case of the Georgian leader, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, and the Abkhaz leader, Vladislav Ardzinba).

From the Georgian perspective, Abkhaz separatism has always been entirely an elite creation, manufactured by "self-appointed intellectuals" – a view shared by some western commentators.

Paul Henze,[266] for instance, is convinced that the Abkhaz "pseudo-elite adventurism", as he calls it, had very "little mass feeling behind it" and argues that, in order to sustain the separatist movement, the Abkhaz elites were doing their best "to keep their people whipped up" (Henze, [1997] 1998, p.102, 109, 111). Similar views are also often voiced in relation to South Ossetia, arguing that initially the Ossetian leader Alan Chochiev was "the only separatist" in the region (author's interview with Giorgi Khaindrava).

Some of the Georgian leaders are also rather vocal about their own role in the events taking place in Georgia at the time. Many of my interviewees admitted that they often deliberately sought to escalate the situation and increase tensions as strategies to delegitimise and weaken the credibility of the Soviet Union and promote the idea of Georgia's independence among the wider public. According to Irakli Tsereteli, leader of the National Independence Party of Georgia, members of the national movement "were provocative too and were sometimes exaggerating events. If we would say that Merab Kostava was killed, then we would make people even angrier at the communists"[267] (cited in *Kviris Palitra*, 2006, p.15).[268] Roman Gotsiridze, a member of the Popular Front of Georgia, also argues that "masses had nothing to do with this; the most important role was played by the elites who were manipulating these masses. After 70 years of

[266] Henze (1924–2011) was part of the Radio Free Europe management team in 1952–8. In 1992 he took part in international observer missions in Chechnya and Abkhazia. After this he made a number of further visits to Georgia (Cold War Radio Broadcasting, 2011).
[267] A former dissident and a popular leader of the national movement of Georgia, Kostava died in a tragic car accident in October 1989. It is still widely believed in Georgia that the "accident" was a deliberate act to weaken (and possibly even radicalise) the national movement of Georgia. Kostava was seen by many as a more moderate figure and a unifying force among different factions within the national movement. In the same accident, another prominent leader of the national movement and a member of the Ilia Chavchavadze Society – Zurab Chavchavadze – was critically injured. His subsequent death in hospital is also widely perceived as suspicious (Natadze, 2002, pp.91–4).
[268] For more on this, see also author's interview with Tsereteli.

Soviet rule people knew nothing until you told them. Zviad [Gamsakhurdia] managed to rally them" (author's interview). Irakli Batiashvili, one of the other prominent leaders of the national movement who served as Minister of Information and Intelligence in 1992–3, further states that "people did not even know that May 26th existed.[269] People knew nothing, and we, leaders of the national movement, awakened these nationalist feelings in them" (1 Arkhi TV, 27 February 2010; see also author's interview). Ramaz Todua, a history teacher at a Tbilisi school, confirms that the first time he heard of the Georgian national hero Kaikhosro (Kakutsa) Cholokashvili[270] was when he saw his portrait and the tricolour flag of Georgia[271] on display at a demonstration in Tbilisi in the late 1980s (personal communication, n.d., Tbilisi).

The role and the power of these leaders was evident even on the night of 9 April 1989 amidst the crackdown by Soviet troops on the peaceful demonstration in Tbilisi. Ilia II, Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia and the leader of the Georgian Orthodox Church, went to speak to the demonstrators gathered in front of the Parliament building that night and warned them of the possibility of a crackdown. However, the leadership of the demonstration decided not to heed his warning and refused to relocate people into a neighbouring church instead. Giorgi Khaindrava, a Georgian film director who served as the State Minister of Abkhazia in 1992–3, confirms that the elites played a very important role that night. He argues that the decision not to follow the

[269] The date in 1918 on which the Mensheviks declared the independence of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. It is celebrated as the Independence Day of Georgia up to the present day.

[270] Colonel Kakutsa Cholokashvili (1888–1930) was a leader of a series of uprisings against Soviet rule in Georgia in 1921–4. After his last failed uprising he fled to France in 1924.

[271] A "tricolour" flag was the national flag of the Social-Democratic Republic of Georgia in 1918–21. Abolished during Soviet rule, it was revived in November 1990 by the newly elected Supreme Council of Georgia (*Zarya Vostoka,* 15 Nov. 1990a,b,c, pp.1, 3). In January 2004 it was substituted again with the current "Five-Cross" flag.

Patriarch "did not come from the people, it came from the leaders. … People stood silently and quietly … and waited for the decision to be made" (Rustavi2 TV, 8 April 2007).[272]

Even some of Gamsakhurdia's loyalists and close associates admit today that the leaders of the national movement were not trying to calm the situation. As Zviad Dzidziguri[273] states, emotions were running very high at the time. He admits that Gamsakhurdia "was a dissident so he was not trying to lower the temperature [of emotions]. ... The whole USSR resembled one big 'cauldron'" (author's interview). The emphasis here is on dissidents since many of the members of the national movement were former dissidents. Therefore, it was believed that they were used to fighting against the Soviet regime with all means possible rather than engage in any constructive dialogue with the government officials. In other words, they were seen not as politicians but rather as street activists prepared to take risks. In this case, as some have argued, the Communist Party *nomenklatura* in Georgia should have taken a more proactive role to stabilise the situation. However, as writer Davit (Dato) Turashvili, a student activist and a member of the national movement at the time, argues, unlike in the Baltics, Communist leadership in Georgia failed to adequately assess the newly emerging political realities of the late 1980s. It was unable to realise that the times were changing and the Soviet Union was quickly disintegrating. As a result, it was left to political dissidents and young activists like him to take control:

[272] For more on this, see also author's interview with Khaindrava.

[273] Dzidziguri served as *prepekti* (representative of the central government in the regions) in Samtredia (Samegrelo region) in 1991 in the Gamsakhurdia administration. He fled Georgia with Gamsakhurdia after the latter's removal from office in January 1992 and acted as his envoy for Samegrelo region in exile (Civil Georgia, 2010). At the time of the interview he was a leader of the Conservative Party of Georgia and was elected to The Parliament of Georgia in 2012.

> These people [Party officials] did not take the initiative so it was left to us. We were street [activists] … how could we have ever succeeded in managing [political] processes other than by being the most radical, so we were indeed the most radical ones. … How could we have been patient? I was a student – how would I have ever been able to be patient? … We were throwing ourselves under tank[s] … on Rustaveli [Avenue]. (Rustavi2 TV, 8 April 2007)

Indeed, not only were the leaders of the national movement not trying to defuse the situation, they were actively encouraging and praising more radical behaviour. At one of the demonstrations in the late 1980s, Gia Chanturia, the leader of the National Democratic Party, declared:

> Our national movement is at the height that even the national movements of the Baltic republics had not reached, we did not go down the Popular Front road. We chose a much more dangerous road. We even suffered casualties on this road, our brothers, our sisters, our mothers, and our fathers. But whether we want it or not, any national deed, any national issue, can be solved only by blood. Not because we like blood but because the nation is bloody, coldblooded, that is why [applause]. (Rustavi2 TV, "At the Crossroad of Choice", n.d.)

Irakli Batiashvili made a similar statement in his speech at another demonstration in Tbilisi:

> Our path has been and will remain an uncompromising, radical opposition road. The Georgian people, the Georgian national movement chose this path from the very beginning. Not a path of some "delicate" agreements, compromises and cooperation with immoral [Communist] authorities, traitor authorities … but a path of uncompromising opposition that the future, history and God will appreciate [applause]. (Rustavi2 TV, "At the Crossroad of Choice", n.d.)[274]

The problem was not that there were no moderate elites in Georgia but that they were outnumbered by radical groupings (McGarry, 1995, p.135). Unlike the Baltic States, a moderate, liberal intelligentsia in Georgia found itself completely marginalised and cut off from political activism (author's interview with Mariam Lortkipanidze).[275] No one from the party list of the

[274] For more on this, see also author's interview with Batiashvili.
[275] For more on this, see also 1 Arkhi TV (27 February 2010); Rustavi2 TV, "At the Crossroad of Choice" (n.d.).

more liberal Popular Front managed to get elected to the Supreme Soviet of Georgia in the October 1990 elections, for instance, receiving only 1.9% of the vote. Twelve of its members were elected on an individual basis (i.e. not on the party ticket) in first-past-the-post constituencies (author's interview with Roman Gotsiridze). Instead, Gamsakhurdia's nationalist Round Table–Free Georgia bloc won the elections with 54% of the vote, gaining 155 seats out of 250 (62%). Second party to have won seats on the party ticket was the Communist Party, gaining 29.6% of the vote and 64 seats (Slider, 1997, p.176; Wheatley, 2005, p.229).[276] In this way, Georgia was not only one of the first republics to hold free and democratic multi-party legislative elections, but was also "the only republic in the USSR where the *radical* opposition won the [majority]" (Wheatley, 2005, p.52, emphasis in original).[277]

As Aleksandre Rondeli recalls, many among the centrist political forces who did not share radical nationalist views were often labelled as "Kremlin's agents" (author's interview). Anyone who opposed the idea of Georgia's independence, or anyone even remotely opposed to Gamsakhurdia's policies after he came to power, was branded "a traitor" and "an enemy" of the country. The main Georgian TV channel, for instance, was even broadcasting a list of "Traitors of the Motherland" that included many ethnic Georgians (1 Arkhi TV, 16 February 2010). In other words, at the time, hostile attitudes were by no means restricted to ethnic minorities. However, since the Abkhaz and Ossetians largely supported maintaining the unity of the Soviet

[276] Following these elections, Gamsakhurdia was unanimously elected as the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet. He was, in fact, the only candidate on this post. On the same day, the name of the country was changed from the Georgian SSR to the Republic of Georgia (*Zarya Vostoka,* 15 Nov. 1990a,b,c, pp.1, 3).
[277] For more on the 1990 elections in Georgia, see also National Security Archives of the United States (Doc. 5, 2 Nov. 1990); Aves (1992, p.171).

Union and refused to be part of independent Georgia, they were targeted as entire ethnic groups rather than as individuals.

Anything or anyone that had any connection with the Soviet past was no longer needed – this was the attitude of the radical wing of the national movement. Officials from Gamsakhurdia's administration even paid visits to the State Opera, Ballet and Symphony Orchestra in order to "purify" them and rid them of everything Soviet, which at the time was synonymous with Russian (author's interview with Eldar Shengelia;[278] see also Rustavi2 TV, 29 November 2002). Guram Petriashvili, member of the Supreme Council of Georgia and a close associate of President Gamsakhurdia, was particularly active in this regard.[279] At a meeting in the Opera House in Tbilisi he is caught on camera stating: "The ballet that exists in the Soviet Union is not a ballet … This is accumulated art that Russian empire needs for politicisation. This is Russian ballet" (Rustavi2 TV, 29 November 2002). As a result of such attitudes, many moderate politicians and members of the intelligentsia were afraid to speak up in criticism (author's interview with Aleksandre Rondeli).

It is tempting to analyse the foregoing statements of nationalist leaders through the framework of material interests, as pure manipulation by the radical, self-interested elite. It would be easy to come to this conclusion if we were to look at certain events and statements on their own without

[278] An acclaimed Georgian film director and screenwriter, Shengelia was one of the founding members of the Popular Front of Georgia. He was a member of the Supreme Council and the Parliament of Georgia in 1990–2004. At the time of the interview, he served as the Chair of the Filmmakers' Union of Georgia – a post he has held since 1976.

[279] Petriashvili was a writer and has appeared in a number of Georgian films.

placing them in the wider context (Robinson, 1979, pp.91–2).[280] However, many of the interviews I conducted resonate with Robinson's observations and indicate that if we take a closer look at the life and work of the people involved in these events as a whole then a different picture emerges.

Batiashvili, Chanturia, Gamsakhurdia, Tsereteli and others may be criticised on multiple grounds about the decisions they made or did not make, but it is difficult to doubt that they believed in what they were saying or doing at the time. While they do fit the category of ethnic activists described above, it is mistaken to argue that their motivations were mainly due to self-interest and aggrandisement. They considered their decisions as the best for the greater good of the Georgian nation rather than for their own good. Even today, many of the former leaders of the national movement, for instance, are convinced that their radical stance was the best tactic they could have used at the time. Irakli Tsereteli does not regret the decision not to relocate from in front of the Parliament building on 9 April 1989 despite the casualties suffered among innocent civilians. According to him, "people fell on the battleground that night; they did not just die" ("*khalkhi daeca da ara daighupa*"). He believes that what happened on 9 April was what liberated Georgia from the Soviet Union. "Was not the independence of Georgia worth 20 lives?" he asks.

> It was totally possible [for the Soviet troops] to break up this demonstration peacefully but they opted for violence. If there is anything I am proud of, it is 9 April. No one will give you anything if you do not fight for it – other Soviet republics got their independence thanks to us. (Author's interview)[281]

[280] Robinson (1979) does not discuss Georgia but makes a similar argument in relation to the Muslim population of north India at the dawn of Pakistan's independence. All his arguments (and quotes) below hence refer to the case of "muslim separatism" in India, although I apply them to the cases in Georgia throughout the thesis.
[281] For more on this, see also Rustavi2 TV (8 April 2007); 1 Arkhi TV (27 February 2010).

However, Tsereteli and other leaders of the national movement are often portrayed as self-centred chauvinists, without any further probing of the real interests and motivations behind their actions. Zviad Gamsakhurdia, one of Georgia's most charismatic leaders, heads the list of the country's infamous key figures at the time. He is often depicted as a mentally unstable, zealous individual with messianic views, who used his popularity and social standing to rally the masses behind his overtly nationalist rhetoric.[282] He is largely blamed for outbreak of violence in South Ossetia in January 1991. His authoritarian tendencies and refusal to step down from office amid growing opposition led to a military *coup d'état* against him that devastated the central part of Tbilisi and led to the overthrow of his government in January 1992, followed by the civil war between his supporters and the so-called Military Council established after his removal from office. However, hardly anyone who knew him has ever questioned his "love and devotion to his country". In an interview with the author, one of his supporters, journalist Nino Ratashvili, a member of the national movement at the time, noted how Gamsakhurdia had once said that it would have been a great honour for him to have died on the night of 9 April (author's interview). Like Tsereteli, he also considered sacrificing his life for Georgia the greatest cause one could die for. Perhaps because of this, even his ardent opponents often pointed out that despite everything, "he did love his country" and that he had "good intentions".

Similar pictures emerge with many other elites of that period. After Georgia joined the CIS in 1993, Gia Chanturia reportedly remarked that if it were not for his religious beliefs he would have killed himself. For him, the CIS represented a renewed version of the Soviet Union and he

[282] See, for instance, National Security Archives of the United States (Doc. 3, 5 June 1989; Doc. 7, 11 January 1991; Doc. 9, 26 February 1991; Doc. 12, 10 April 1991).

considered it a great "personal tragedy" not to have been able to prevent Georgia from joining it. Irakli Tsereteli further mentions how everybody at school laughed at him behind his back "for believing since the early years of high school that one day Georgia would gain independence". As he argues, national feeling was "at the level of an instinct" for him (author's interview). Tamriko Chkheidze also maintains that the love of Georgia was "ingrained in [her] from a very early age" (author's interview). Retired Major General Giorgi (Gia) Karkarashvili[283] expresses similar views. With hindsight he argues that no war is ever worth the misery and destruction it brings. Nevertheless, even now that he is confined to a wheelchair, he is ready to take up arms whenever there is talk about Georgia's reunification:

> As soon as I hear the call to arms for a political reason … in order to reunite [Georgia], something inside me kicks in and suddenly I support it as well and something awakens in me. There are probably two sides in a human being – a human side on the one hand and on the other hand, motherland comes before a person. (*Absence of Will*, 2009)[284]

Davit Tevzadze, who served as Georgia's Minister of Defence in 1998–2004, further explains the rationale for abandoning his Ph.D studies in Logic in order to join the military in 1992 amidst growing tensions in Abkhazia.[285]

> I was 43 at the time so I cannot really blame it on my youth. …. There appeared a feeling, or rather, a sense of responsibility. I do not know why. We were all very patriotic at the time. … The environment was such that we were all patriots. (Author's interview)

[283] Karkarashvili was former Commander-in-Chief of Georgian armed forces in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. He served as Georgia's Minister of Defence in 1993–94 and as a member of the Parliament in 1999–2004. His younger brother Gocha Karkarashvili also participated in the Abkhazian war and died in the battle of Gagra in 1992. In January 1995 a gunshot wound received in an assassination attempt in Moscow left Karkarashvili paralysed. The same attack killed the former First Deputy Minister of Defence, General Paata Datuashvili.

[284] For more on this, see also author's interviews with Karkarashvili (June 2006; November 2011).

[285] Tevzadze was, in fact, born in Abkhazia. Before joining the military he worked at the Institute of Philosophy in Tbilisi as a senior researcher (author's interview).

These are not statements made by ethnic or political "entrepreneurs" who have turned identity politics into a business enterprise, embarked on the road of deception and manipulation, or used the symbolic resources of their ethnic groups strategically, motivated only by gaining public support and achieving personal or political goals (Hutchinson, 2008, p.26). As Horowitz (2004, p.80) argues, this "blanket assertion that political entrepreneurs are merely self-interested, cynical manipulators is just that: an assertion". For many of these people, their nation was their first allegiance; in fact, as many would argue, they were "intoxicated" with a love of Georgia. In other words, what the above examples show is "an outpouring of faith as much as … calculated and successful propaganda" (Robinson, 1979, pp.92, 93). Much of the literature on Georgia's conflicts, however, seems to discard the former too easily and puts more emphasis (often sole emphasis) on the latter.

It is of course true that these two aspects are often intertwined and it is often difficult to separate them. Actors involved in ethnic conflicts often have multiple, at times even conflicting, motivations. Many scholars now point to the importance of both security and non-security motivations of the actors. The former refer to physical and/or cultural security of groups, while the latter encompass the so-called predatory motivations that involve some level of "greed" (Glaser, 1992; Snyder and Jervis, 1999). Some scholars have argued that "in cases of ethnic civil war, 'greed' and 'security motives' are largely indistinguishable" (Kaufman, 2006, p.54). Others maintain that actors often move between politically and economically motivated violence (Zürcher, 2007, p.3). While these scholars recognise that very few conflicts are driven solely by "predatory" or "security" motivations, they are also aware of the importance of the ideas and social and cultural factors in shaping actors' motivations (Lake and Rothchild, 1996a; 1996b).

Nevertheless, the main argument of much of the rational choice literature on ethnic conflicts remains centred on the idea that the leaders often manipulate security concerns of their followers "for their own aggrandizement" (Lake and Rothchild, 1996b, p.54). As many have argued, this is done "in order to solidify their positions and extract additional resources from society" (Snyder and Jervis, 1999, p.23). According to these accounts, even when security motivations prevail in conflicts, the actions of the actors (mainly understood as elites) remain rational and calculated. In this way, inciting violence is a conscious decision on behalf of the elites that further hardens conflicting group identities. This is how these approaches would explain some of the above-mentioned statements that talk about "blood", "putting up a fight", "taking up arms" and maintaining an "uncompromising position" in Georgia. They view elites as "strategic ideologists" with "their own parochial agendas" and argue that their "exploitative desires" "would not necessarily diminish", even if their security concerns were to be addressed (Snyder and Jervis, 1999, pp.16, 25–6).

I do not altogether reject the idea that some elites in Georgia were indeed self-centred and motivated by material gain. Indeed, there is little doubt that many of them achieved certain material goals. By getting involved in the national movement, for instance, many of them became well known in the country and were widely admired by the general public. They also acquired political power and, in some cases, even an income, as will be discussed below (author's interview with Irakli Tsereteli). Nevertheless, I argue that these were not the *primary* (and in some cases not even secondary) reasons that leaders like Berdzenishvili, Chanturia, Gamsakhurdia, Kostava, Tsereteli and others, including many members of the intelligentsia, made at times enormous personal sacrifices, some of them also spending years in Soviet prisons.

For most of them, involvement in dissident activities and later in the national movement involved more sacrifices than gains.[286] In fact, according to many of these elites, they did not intend to get involved in politics on a long-term basis in the first place. Mamuka Giorgadze, a member of the National Democratic Party, for instance, argues that "people joined the national movement because they could not bear living in the Soviet Union any more, not because they wanted to enter politics" (Rustavi2 TV, "At the Crossroad of Choice", n.d.). Temur Koridze, a member of the Supreme Council of Georgia and Gamsakhurdia's close associate, also maintains that it was the unusual circumstances of those times that pushed them into politics. "Back then the situation was different, it was a fight for independence", he insists (1 Arkhi TV, 16 February 2010).

Moreover, many of the actions and decisions of Georgia's elites were constituted as well as significantly constrained by the institutional structure of the Soviet Union and the discourses (myths, symbols and metaphors). With a few exceptions, however, this aspect is not significantly addressed in literature on Georgia's conflicts (Coppieters, 2002; Zürcher, 2007).[287] While the security studies approaches usually emphasise the importance of a group's fear of extinction as one of the preconditions for ethnic violence, they do not explore in any depth the role of Soviet nationality policies in "constructing" these fears in the cases in Georgia (Kaufman, 2001). Instead, many analysts view some of the above-outlined statements of the Georgian elites as calculated moves to exaggerate the threats and sow the seeds of "hysteria" among the public, especially when it came to the role of the Soviet Union (and later the Russian Federation) in Georgia's conflicts (Lynch, 2002, p.835). In this way, some of the fears voiced by the elites in the

[286] For a similar argument in regards to Muslims in India, see Robinson (1979, p.97).
[287] Beissinger (1998; 2002) makes a similar but more general argument about nationalist mobilisation in the Soviet Union rather than focusing solely on Georgia's conflicts per se.

late 1980s and early 1990s are often discarded as "the familiar paranoia about the dark hand of the 'centre'" (Goltz, 1993, p.93). Many of the statements of these elites, however, often reflect and are closely linked to the development of inter-ethnic relations in Georgia in the post-Stalinist period.

Even today, many Georgians believe that what happened in Georgia in the early 1990s (as well as since then) has followed a "script" written in the Kremlin. They see the hand of the KGB (Committee for State Security) in everything that went wrong in the country, from the death of Merab Kostava in October 1989[288] and the demise of Gamsakhurdia's government in January 1992 to the military confrontations in South Ossetia and Abkhazia (author's interview with Nodar Natadze).[289] But Georgian elites' obsession with the "Russia factor" (since the Soviet Union was almost exclusively associated with Russia in Georgia) is intrinsically connected to how ethnicity was articulated in the Soviet Union through its nationality policies. People's experience of associating their identity with language and territory explains, at least in part, why the Georgian public was so concerned with the state of the Georgian language in the autonomous territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and why Russification policies were seen as an imminent threat to the very survival of the Georgian language (and by extension the Georgian nation). As confirmed by many of my respondents, the most victimised language in Sokhumi (Sukhum), for instance, was Georgian while Russian enjoyed the widest audience.[290]

[288] For more on this, see footnote 267.
[289] These views are further elaborated in Gasviani and Gasviani (2005).
[290] See author's interviews with Levan Berdzenishvili, Guram Odisharia, and Aleksandre Maisuradze.

During the election campaign in 1990 in Abkhazia, for instance, Zviad Gamsakhurdia reportedly declared at a meeting with local Georgians that as soon as his Round Table–Free Georgia would come to power, they would "take care of all those who were infringing their rights":

> Soviet authorities were discriminating against you [ethnic Georgians] here. They were privileging the minorities. The Abkhaz were practically untouchable. When we come to power, no one will dare say anything to you. … Do not be afraid, Georgians, we are the Georgian government and as soon as we come [to power] we will put everyone in their place. (As paraphrased by Bakur Gulua,[291] author's interview)

It was largely believed that Soviet authorities defended the rights of these minorities at the expense of the rights of ethnic Georgians and more liberal groups within the national movement were often accused of "not doing enough" for local Georgians. As Bakur Gulua points out, these moderate Georgian elites from Tbilisi were often meeting with ethnic Abkhaz and seemed more interested in their problems rather than the problems of ethnic Georgians. "No one was listening to Georgians there [in Abkhazia]" (author's interview).

Another important factor here which is often overlooked by scholars is the issue of historical memories. The tragic events of 9 April 1989 and the death of unarmed civilians resonated with the events of March 1956. In both cases the main culprit was the Soviet Army and the Georgian side overwhelmingly blamed the Kremlin for orchestrating the violence. In this way, how Moscow reacted shaped identity in Georgia, further radicalising it. The fact that neither the Abkhaz nor the Ossetian authorities sent any letters of condolence to Tbilisi in the aftermath of 9 April reaffirmed Georgian perceptions that these minority groups were, in fact, representing

[291] Originally from Samegrelo region, Gulua spent five years in Sokhumi (Sukhum) as a student. He worked at the Enguri Hydroelectric Station in Abkhazia before becoming Party First Secretary of the Gali region in Abkhazia in 1975. He also served as Georgia's Minister of Food and Agriculture, and Vice-Premier in Eduard Shevardnadze's government (author's interview).

Russian interests. These were some of the key contributing factors to why inter-ethnic relations in Georgia were (and still are) often viewed (at least from the Georgian perspective) through the prism of Georgian–Russian relations.

Among the members of the national movement, the idea of Georgia's independence has always been imperative. Indeed it could be argued that it was the main motivational factor behind the elites' efforts to mobilise the masses. Speeches made at private, informal gatherings at the homes of the dissidents during the early days of the national movement are a good demonstration of the importance of the idea of Georgia's independence. At one of these meetings of the "Georgian patriots", as they were often referred to, Irakli Tsereteli ([1988] 2010, p.240) points out,

> for us the idea of Georgia's freedom and independence should be the issue of primary importance, it should be the main goal of our movement, our fight, even our life. Dear friends, to liberate Georgia from the modernised Russian empire, to restore Georgia's state independence are the main strategic aim and historical goal of contemporary Georgian politicians. This is the mission of Georgian national-liberation movement.[292]

This and other examples show that the content of these speeches hardly changed, whether they were made at informal gatherings of only select members of the national movement or at large demonstrations involving tens of thousands of people. This casts doubt on the arguments advanced by Christoph Zürcher (2007) and others that the motivations of the elites who were involved in mobilising the masses and organising violence differed significantly "from those of the hundreds of thousands who rallied on the main squares of the capitals, demanding national independence". According to these scholars, despite rising tensions "interethnic relations withstood the national fever that gripped the capitals and the public discourse for an astonishingly

[292] For more on this, see also author's interview with Tsereteli.

long period", and it only took a small number of radical elites with the necessary skills and resources to turn "ethnic conflicts" into "ethnic violence" (Zürcher, 2007, p.39).

Undoubtedly, these scholars are right in arguing that national mobilisation "did not 'automatically' translate into civil war" (Zürcher, 2007, p.3; see also Lake and Rothchild, 1996b, p.54). It is also true that in order for violence to occur groups require access to resources and opportunities. However, while these issues certainly need to be taken into account when analysing how exactly conflicts turn violent, assigning responsibility to a small number of elites with "military experience" and willingness to take risks, as Zürcher (2007, p.39) seems to be doing, appears rather premature. More importantly, these accounts still leave two of the major questions in ethnic conflict studies open – why do the public follow these leaders, what motivates them to support the outbreak of war and engage in large-scale violence when in fact the ones who lose out the most in violent conflicts are ordinary citizens themselves?

3. Who Was Involved in Violence?: The View from the Ground

There is much disagreement about the role of the masses in ethnic conflicts. Social anthropologists studying elite cultures have long cautioned against overgeneralisations from the micro (i.e. elite) to the macro (i.e. mass) levels of a society. According to Shore (2002), for instance, very often, "[e]ven within a shared social system or political culture, elites and masses occupy a very different habitus" and that there can be a significant "cultural gulf" between them. Thus, when it comes to ethnic conflicts, the question that needs to be probed is whether these two segments of a society share "the same moral universe" (Shore, 2002, pp.5–6). In other words, just how deep is the "cultural gulf", if any, between the elites and the masses?

The three prominent Georgian, Abkhaz and Ossetian leaders at the time – Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Vladislav Ardzinba and Alan Chochiev respectively – often insisted that they represented the will of their people, that the processes taking place in Georgia were out of their control, and that they were only "following the flow" (Birch, 1995, p.94). Emzar Goguadze, former member of the Supreme Council of Georgia, for instance, maintains that the main reason why Gamsakhurdia's government refused to join the CIS was that "Zviad [Gamsakhurdia] was afraid of the [Georgian] nation's rebellion" if he had agreed to sign the treaty (1 Arkhi TV, 17 Feb. 2011). Some scholars share the same views on this issue too. Contrary to Henze's ([1997] 1998) above-mentioned statements on Abkhaz separatism being an entirely "intellectual phenomenon", Toft (2005) has argued that "there is simply no evidence that he [Ardzinba] was representing anything other than the wishes of the Abkhaz people – wishes that had remained constant for decades". In her view, having a charismatic leader does not automatically equal a successful mass mobilisation and, in the case of Abkhazia, there was "no real evidence that the issues of contention were in any sense reframed or intensified by that leader" (Toft, 2005, p.118). In this way Toft not only significantly plays down but altogether ignores the role of Ardzinba in exacerbating ethnic tensions in Abkhazia; however, she is by no means alone in this. Her analysis echoes views voiced by other scholars, many of whom remain sceptical regarding the extent to which demagogic politicians or militants influence the masses and argue that national mobilisation is often a result of a mass hostility that rules out compromise rather than particular decisions made by the elites (Kaufman, 1996; 2001; Petersen, 2002).

Many of my respondents also acknowledge that Georgia's conflicts did not start as a result of the rhetoric and policies of the nationalist leaders (author's interview with Ivliane Khaindrava[293]).[294] Davit Darchiashvili,[295] for instance, argues that even though Zviad Gamsakhurdia's personality had much to do with the development and outcome of the political processes in Georgia, if he had not been around there would have been someone else in his place, and that his coming to power was the result of the overall political situation in the early 1990s (author's interview).[296] Gia Karkarashvili further points to the danger of the masses. As he states, "on the one hand leaders manage to make people become hostage to ideas but on the other people themselves take these leaders hostage" (author's interview, November 2011). As Guram Odisharia, a Georgian writer from Abkhazia, points out, society as a whole had as much to do with the conflicts in Georgia as the leaders – they were both equally engaged in these conflicts. At the time there was "a harmony between the society and the elites. Society was also very worked up and degenerate", says Odisharia (author's interview). In other words, Georgian society and its leaders "spoke the same language" on this issue and there was not that much difference between them (author's interview with Aleksandre Rondeli).

In the literature on ethnic conflicts, in general, however, masses are often portrayed as "mindless robots", merely pawns in the hands of manipulative leaders (Petersen, 2002, p.36). This (over)emphasis on the role of the elites in many of the rational choice theories leaves the impression that the construction of ethnic boundaries serves *only* elite interests (de Figueiredo

[293] Khaindrava is a member of the Republican Party of Georgia. He is the brother of the film director, Giorgi Khaindrava, mentioned earlier.
[294] Georgian political analyst Ghia Nodia (1996, p.10) makes a similar argument.
[295] Darchiashvili holds a Ph.D degree in political science. At the time of the interview he served as the Director of the Open Society–Georgia Foundation and has been a member of the Parliament since 2008.
[296] For a similar argument, see also Wheatley (2005, p.62).

and Weingast, 1999). In these accounts, the masses are often "voiceless" and "invisible", their interests being treated as "nothing important" (Brass, 1997, p.71). However, turning a blind eye to the role of the masses in ethnic conflicts represents a rather simplistic, even mistaken view. On the contrary, one could argue that what sustains ethnic group constructs is the fact that they often serve not only elite but also *popular* interests;[297] the role of the "ordinary folk" on the ground therefore needs to be adequately acknowledged and analysed.

Some instrumentalist scholars have tried to address this issue more explicitly. In his seminal work on communal violence in northern India, Brass (1997), for instance, makes a compelling argument that actually people "on the ground" may *not* be following their leaders, at least not in a conventional way, even though individual action can often be *framed* as such. Instead, by supporting and participating in violence people "are in fact pursuing their own diverse agendas that may have little to do with [ethnic] … antipathies per se" (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, pp.855, 868). Brass (1997, p.96) argues that the Hindu–Muslim conflict in India, for instance, is socially constructed as "religious communalism" and operates "as a cover for the political ambitions of elites and as a smokescreen to draw attention away from the consequences … of the policies of the modern Indian state".

The validity of "ethnic" nature of the conflict is contested in the case of Bougainville as well. It is argued that inter-ethnic violence that raged on this island in 1988–97 had little to do with ethnicity per se and that "ethnic conflict" served as a cover for what was essentially a conflict over resources and distribution of wealth (Regan, 2002, p.114). According to Colin Filer (1990,

[297] I thank Steve De Klerk for drawing my attention to this issue.

pp.78–9), for instance, the Bougainvillean nationalism is a myth and the only thing that distinguishes Bougainville "from the other eighteen provinces of Papua New Guinea (PNG), in historical, political, cultural, social and economic terms, is nothing other than the massive hole in the middle of it" , that is the Panguna mine. In other words, any violent incident that involves people of different ethno-linguistic groups, castes or religions is often automatically relegated to the realm of ethnic conflict or caste or religious communalism, and is treated as a continuation of pre-existing inter-ethnic rivalries. Initially, however, many of these conflicts often start out as "local, often trivial events" involving ordinary villagers who are often more "motivated by a desire for profit", whether looting, acquisition of land and property, or personal revenge, than "by faith, sentiment, or feeling" (Brass, 1997, pp.67, 92, 96, 260–2).[298]

In the cases in Georgia too, there were instances when local residents and authorities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia might have been indeed "motivated by a desire for profit". Undoubtedly, some local residents were involved in violence (as well as looting) and according to some accounts, often it was the locals themselves who robbed properties, blaming paramilitary groups for these actions (Ioseliani [1996]2007, pp.120, 150, 222). Nevertheless, there is little evidence to suggest that "ordinary villagers" played any significant role in the outbreak or escalation of violence. In fact, Georgian IDPs have often been accused of "not doing enough" and "not fighting hard enough for their homelands" (i.e., for Abkhazia and South Ossetia) (Studio Re, 2010).[299] In both of these regions major outbursts of violence were largely prompted by external (i.e., non-local) forces – the National Guard and other paramilitary organisations. In other words, despite some

[298] For a similar argument, see also Kalyvas (1999, p.243); Fearon and Laitin (2000, p.874).
[299] See also author's interview with Mariam Lortkipanidze.

involvement of the locals, on the ground, these wars were mostly fought by paramilitary groups and volunteers from other parts of Georgia.

Within the ethnic conflict studies field, a significant body of literature exists that explores the role of these paramilitary organisations in inter-ethnic conflicts. According to these accounts, violence is often evoked and fought by these groups, which are largely comprised by ordinary thugs and marauders whose motivations go far beyond ethnic hatred (Mueller, 2000). In other words, what is frequently described as "ethnic" violence is often nothing more than a "gang violence" with little, if any, ethnic dimension (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, p.869). Elites, who are the masterminds of nationalist mobilisation, make good use of the services of these groups (Woodward, 1995; Mueller, 2000). In this way, "[b]y initiating violent tit-for-tat sequences, thugs bring about the construction of more antagonistic group identities, making it rational to fear the other group and see its members as dangerous threats" (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, p.871). It is these processes that make the public "act", the argument goes.

But how accurate are these claims? If violence is mainly orchestrated by paramilitary organisations, often comprised by the so-called "weekend soldiers" – largely untrained and undisciplined fighters who went to the conflict zones on a temporary, short-term basis, as is often claimed (Zürcher, 2007, pp.137–8), can we generalise from the motivations of these "organisers of violence" to the motivations of an entire ethnic group then? In other words, are large-scale wars possible with a little help from gangs and without much support from larger segments of a given society? As I argue, such arguments are often inconclusive (and at times even misguided), and that ethnic sagas are usually much more complex than they might first appear. In the coming

sections, I explore these questions in more detail by examining in some depth various paramilitary groups' involvement in Georgia's conflicts and the motivations behind their participation in violence.

3.1. From Gang Violence to Ethnic Violence?

3.1.1. The Emergence of Paramilitary Groups in Georgia

In the period between the late 1980s and the early 1990s many paramilitary organisations surfaced in Georgia. Often formed on the basis of fraternities (*sadzmoebi*), they were composed mainly of young men, united around informal networks in their neighbourhoods (Williams, 2003, p.82; 1 Arkhi TV, 8 May 2010). Research shows that generally youths engaged in ethnic violence also tend to be ill-educated and come mostly from rural backgrounds (Laitin, 1993; Fearon and Laitin, 2000, p.869). While conceding that ethnic activists may not always be motivated by personal benefit and self-interest, Kuran (1998, p.41), for instance, argues that "[a]n *uneducated* and *inarticulate* person might become an ethnic activist simply because he is burning with anger toward people he considers outsiders" (emphasis added).

In Georgia, however, while many members of paramilitary organisations were unemployed (or underemployed), they were also rather well educated, often coming from families in the intelligentsia, and were largely urban-based (Henze, [1997] 1998, p.112; Zürcher, 2007, p.137). *Mkhedrioni*, for instance, one of the most notorious paramilitary groups in Georgia, was founded by residents of prestigious central districts of Tbilisi and was headed by Jaba Ioseliani – the so-

called thief-in-law – "a criminal observing a code of honour and commanding respect from other criminals", with a Ph.D in philology[300] (Zürcher, 2007, p.138; see also 1 Arkhi TV, 8 May 2010). Among Georgia's many paramilitary organisations *Mkhedrioni* and the National Guard were by far the most powerful groups. *Mkhedrioni* was formed in 1989 in the midst of the upheaval of the national movement in Georgia. Its name is derived from a Georgian word *mkhedari* ("horseman"), used to describe troops on horseback (*The New York Times*, 1993). Many of its members considered themselves "knights" fighting for Georgia's independence and many of them reportedly displayed on their chests "a large amulet with a portrait of Saint George" – patron saint of Georgia (Zürcher, 2007, p.138).[301] Unlike other paramilitary organisations, by 1990 *Mkhedrioni* was legally registered as the so-called "Rescue Corps" (1 Arkhi TV, 8 May 2010; see also Ioseliani, [1996]2007, p.155).

The National Guard of Georgia was also created as a result of legislation passed by the newly elected Supreme Council of Georgia in January 1991, although its foundations had already existed informally since at least April 1990. Tengiz Kitovani, with a background in arts and hardly any military experience before the early 1990s, was appointed its Commander. The authorities in Tbilisi envisaged the National Guard as "a proto-army" that would be staffed based

[300] Ioseliani (1926–2003) was a theatre critic and writer. A professor and a deputy head of a museum in the 1970s, he came from an intelligentsia family. His elder sister Elena (Lili) was a well-known theatre director and a pedagogue. However, Jaba Ioseliani was more known for his criminal past than his academic and other activities. During Soviet times he spent more than 20 years behind bars on various charges, including robbery, assault and manslaughter (*The New York Times*, 1993; *Los Angeles Times*, 2003; Ioseliani, [1996]2007, pp.11, 40, 156).

[301] The first 50 members of the organisation were initially known as "Jaba's boys" (*Jaba's bichebi*), although in later years its membership reached 1,500 well-equipped men, with a further 4,500 fighters without weapons. Some sources even put the number of its associate members close to 10,000 (Ioseliani, [1996]2007, p.9; see also RFE/RL, 18 June 1993; Slider, 1997; Zürcher, 2007, p.139).

on universal conscription and would lay the foundations for the national army of Georgia.[302] However, Georgia's new government was unable to commit sufficient resources to its build-up and instead of conscription the National Guard had to rely mainly on volunteers ready to serve with their own weapons.[303] In its campaigns in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, around 5,000–6,000 people reportedly fought under the banner of the National Guard. Most of them, however, were "weekend soldiers", largely fighting on temporary basis (Zürcher, 2007, pp.137–8).[304]

This largely contributed to what scholars have called "a privatisation of the war" where looting and extortion provided the main (if not the only) means of income for various armed groups (Mueller, 2000).[305] In the absence of official salaries and any real material support from the government, members of these organisations were actively engaged in what Zürcher (2007) calls the "market of violence", where they sustained their paramilitary structures through "protection-racket business". The spheres of influence were carefully divided between different groups. *Mkhedrioni*, for instance, was engaged in the "targeted taxation" of the fuel business while the National Guard's revenue mainly came from the arms trade (Zürcher, 2007, pp. 138–39, 140). As a result, this period is often referred to as "the epoch of racketeering" in Georgia (1 Arkhi TV, 8 May 2010).

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[302] At the time the Georgian government had already banned the conscription of Georgians into the Soviet Army and the idea was that these young men would now join the National Guard instead. Conscription into the National Guard was nationwide and not restricted to ethnic Georgians.

[303] The National Guard's target of 12,000 members was never reached – by the summer 1991 its official strength was only around 1,000, although, as some have noted, its "pool of sympathizers, which could be mobilized when necessary, was far larger" (Zürcher, 2007, p.138).

[304] For more on the National Guard, see also RFE/RL (18 June 1993, pp.80–1); Wheatley (2005, pp.54–5, 65); Morchiladze (2007, p.84).

[305] See, for instance, accounts provided by Ioseliani ([1996]2007, pp.157; 228); Henze ([1997] 1998, pp.105–6).

Despite several attempts to bring these various paramilitary organisations under direct control of the state they remained largely independent and their members refused to pledge loyalty to anyone but their own leadership. Members of *Mkhedrioni*, for instance, refused to join the National Guard[306] or wear an official uniform, allegedly threatening to start a guerrilla war if anyone tried to disband them (1 Arkhi TV, 29 May 2010; 10 February 2011). *The New York Times* (1993) reported at the time that every member of *Mkhedrioni* had to "swear an oath of allegiance to the country, to God, to his [*sic*] gun and to the leaders of *Mkhedrioni*" and when asked which was more important to them, their obligation "to the leader of Georgia or to the leader of *Mkhedrioni*", many of them chose the latter without hesitation. The same was true of the National Guard, whose members seemed more loyal to their leader Tengiz Kitovani than to the head of state (Zürcher, 2007, p.139). Indeed, the conflict that eventually turned into a *coup d'état* against President Zviad Gamsakhurdia in December 1991 was largely orchestrated by Kitovani's National Guard and its roots dated back to August 1991 when Kitovani disobeyed Gamsakhurdia's orders to disband the National Guard and have it transformed into the special forces of the state police. The fighting in Tbilisi that lasted little over two weeks resulted in the deaths of more than 100 people and hundreds more injured and left central parts of the capital city largely destroyed (1 Arkhi TV, 15 December 2010; 17 February 2011).

Indeed, the influence of these organisations and their leaders over the course of the events of the early 1990s cannot be overstated. Alongside Tengiz Sigua, who served as a Prime Minister in Gamsakhurdia's cabinet, in 1992 Kitovani and Ioseliani effectively ruled the country as part of

[306] Initially it was intended that the National Guard should unite under its umbrella structure all the paramilitary organisations in Georgia. It was subordinated to the Ministry of Internal Affairs before being transferred to the Ministry of Defence in 1992.

the interim government – the State Council. They continued to have significant influence over Georgian politics in the following years, following Eduard Shevardnadze's return from Moscow in March 1992. In fact, Kitovani is largely held responsible for igniting a war in Abkhazia after he marched his National Guard troops into Sokhumi (Sukhum) in August 1992, allegedly disobeying Shevardnadze's orders (RFE/RL, 4 September 1992, pp.1, 4; 1 January 1993, p.23; 27 August 1993).[307] The result was a large-scale violence that left up to 10,000 people dead (of which battle-related deaths were only around 2,500) and resulted in the mass-scale ethnic cleansing when almost the entire ethnic Georgian population of Abkhazia (an estimated 220,000–240,000 people) was forced to flee the region.[308] The war in Abkhazia was accompanied by the struggle for power between the followers of ousted President Gamsakhurdia and the supporters of the newly established Military Council. The violent confrontations that cost an estimated 2,000 deaths were mainly taking place in western Georgia and were closely interwoven with the war in Abkhazia since Gamsakhurdia had a large support base among ethnic Georgians in that region (Zürcher, 2007, pp.143, 239).

The above-outlined seems to confirm Zürcher's (2007, p.39) argument that it only takes "a few capable" elites with organisational skills, access to resources and willingness to seize the opportunity to turn inter-ethnic tensions into violent conflict. I agree with these observations – the

[307] For more on the build-up to the 1992 Abkhaz war, see *Sakartvelos Respublika* (1992a; 1992b).

[308] It is estimated that between 40,000–60,000 ethnic Georgian IDPs had returned to Abkhazia since then, mainly to the traditionally Georgian-populated Gali region, which is about half of Gali's pre-war population (UNHCR, 2001, p.215; IIFFMCG, 2009, p.83; ICG, 2010, pp.8–9; Blakkisrud and Kolstø, 2011, p.12). However, officially, only 26,000 ethnic Georgians had Abkhaz passports which gave them the right to vote in elections in Abkhazia (Maestro TV, 1 June 2014). This issue of passportisation of ethnic Georgians was one of the main issues of contention in Abkhazia in spring 2014 as well when then *de-facto* President Alexander Ankvab (in office 2011-14) was forced to step down from his office as a result of mass protests. Reportedly one of the main issues of dissatisfaction among his opposition was his relatively more liberal stance on the integration of ethnic Georgians in Abkhazia (BBC News, 2014c).

existence of “a few capable elites” (whether one dubs them “ethnic activists”, “chauvinist leaders”, “political entrepreneurs” or “organisers of violence”) is a necessary, often crucial, factor in triggering violence. However, an equally important question is how do these “symbol-manipulating extremist leaders” (Kaufman, 2006, p.54) emerge on the political arena in the first place and come to play such an important, decisive role in ethnic conflicts?

Rational choice theorists have argued that in periods of uncertainty that generally accompany institutional/state collapse, people are more likely to align with leaders from their respective ethnic groups, even if they are not entirely sure which side to blame for the deteriorating situation (de Figueiredo and Weingast, 1999). The lack of accurate information about the opposing side’s intentions and capabilities (“information failures”) and the fact that groups can never be completely sure about the other side’s willingness to credibly commit and honour the agreements made (“commitment problem”) further raise the stakes in conflicts (Lake and Rothchild, 1996b, p.52). When the stakes are high – i.e. when the chances of being wrong are good – and there is a threat (real or perceived) to the very existence of the group, people are likely to support their co-ethnic elites, no matter how radical they might be, rather than the leaders of the opposite side (de Figueiredo and Weingast, 1999, pp.265–6).

In this way, the argument goes that the structural conditions that came into play amidst the disintegration of the Soviet Union further intensified the security dilemma and led to the escalation of inter-ethnic tensions (Lake and Rothchild, 1996b, p.52). This created the necessary conditions for the emergence of the “market of violence” in which radical elites operated. In other words, as almost all scholars would agree, state weakness and/or failure was a necessary

condition for violence to occur in Georgia. However, while I share these views, I disagree with the argument that the security dilemma was a result of state weakness and failure in the late 1980s only. Instead, as I have argued in Chapter 4, understood in a broad sense, a security dilemma was, in fact, unfolding over the course of several decades in post-Stalinist Georgia. The institutional structure of the Soviet Union – the hierarchical alignment of ethno-linguistic groups – as well as the existence of discourses (myths, symbols, and metaphors) that justified hostility towards the other groups had already prepared the ground for the release of inter-ethnic tensions by the late 1980s. They had laid the foundations for the emergence of the "market of violence" and provided ample supply for the radical elites who exploited the political space offered by Gorbachev's new leadership and the institutional weakness of the state to rally the masses around the idea of Georgia's independence.

It is important to emphasise that these preconditions had to exist for violence to occur. Without them, nationalist elites would have had nothing to manipulate, or their manipulation would not have been successful. In this way, my findings further confirm some of the points raised in Kaufman's (2006, pp.50–1) "symbolist argument", according to which "politicians' ability to use ethnicity instrumentally is … limited by the cultural context in which they operate". In this way, ethnic and political "entrepreneurs" are not inventing anything new. Kaufman's focus here is solely on the cultural and symbolic context while I consider institutional context to be of equal importance.

Lake and Rothchild (1996b, pp.54–5) further point, albeit implicitly, to another important aspect that is seldom acknowledged in literature on ethnic conflicts. They recognise that elites "are as

much a product as a producer of ethnic fears"; they "both reflect and stimulate" the symbolic, cultural, and institutional resources of their respective groups. In this way, while elites may "use" these symbolic and cultural resources "rationally", they are not only constrained by these resources but are also constituted by them. While many concede that "successful" elite manipulation of these resources very much depends on the institutional and cultural context of the societies they intend to lead (Kaufman, 2006, p.51), few recognise that the very interests, beliefs and preferences of these elites may also be constituted by these resources.

3.1.2. Why Do People Follow?: Motivations to Fight

Some further maintain that organisation of violence is much more important than the underlying causes of why this organisation might occur in the first place (author's interview with Bakur Gulua). As Zürcher (2007, p.137) argues, for instance, it is the availability of young men, weapons and financial resources that provide the missing link between ethnic tensions and the outbreak of violence. It is of course no news that the availability of weapons and people who are willing to use them plays an important role in the outbreak, duration and sustainability of ethnic conflicts (Beissinger, 1998, p.413). But the question remaining is what motivates these "young men" to join paramilitary groups and fight?

In his memoirs, the leader of *Mkhedrioni*, Jaba Ioseliani, argues that unemployed young men would do anything if given a gun.[309] According to him, for these young people weapons provide an illusion that they are in control of their lives. This was the main reason why they took up arms

[309] Ioseliani wrote *Three Dimensions* (*Sami Ganzomileba*) while in prison in 1996. While it is classified as a novel, it is, in fact, autobiographical, documenting Ioseliani's life in the early 1990s.

and fought – “otherwise what do these youth know about who is [Zviad] Gamsakhurdia or Jaba [Ioseliani], who is on the right side between them?”, asks Ioseliani ([1996]2007, p.142). Nemo Burchuladze, Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Council of Georgia in 1990–1, points to the same problem, that many of these young men participated in violence because “guys from their neighbourhoods did”, and that the real culprits were those who supported the idea of giving them the weapons in the first place (1 Arkhi TV, 17 February 2011).

Indeed, at first glance there seems to be abundant evidence to support claims that symbolic (emotional) factors had little to do with the outbreak of violence in the case of Georgia. As many have argued, violence was largely organised, and sustained, by gangs of thugs (operating under the banner of “paramilitary groups” and often encouraged by politicians) who were driven more by material interests than any national sentiments (*The New York Times*, 1993; Ioseliani [1996]2007, p.243). In 1991, for instance, when Ioseliani and several members of the national movement imprisoned by the Gamsakhurdia regime were freed, 140 members of *Mkhedrioni* and up to 4,000 other inmates with various criminal convictions were also released from prison alongside them. On Ioseliani’s initiative, these people were given military uniforms and weapons and were offered amnesty for fighting against Gamsakhurdia’s supporters (1 Arkhi TV, 17 February 2011).

This situation is not unique to Georgia, of course – similar scenarios were playing out in many other conflicts across the world, such as Rwanda and the Balkans in the 1990s, for instance. As John Mueller (2000, p.49) rightly points out in the case of Serbia,

> the politicians urged underworld and hooligan groups to get into the action, and it appears that thousands of prison inmates, promised shortened sentences and enticed by the prospect that they could "take whatever booty you can", were released for the war effort.[310]

The same was the case in Sri Lanka, where "[o]n the ground, the ethnic war at its early stages was fought on the Sinhalese side by gang members and criminals, probably more interested in booty and violence for its own sake than in achieving group goals" (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, p.871). In other words, in many conflict-ridden societies, some criminals often became "nationalist warriors" and some nationalists "turned to criminal violence" (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, p.871; see also Kapferer, 1988, p.101).[311] The same was also true in the cases in Georgia, where one analyst described *Mkhedrioni* as a "weapons-bearing arm of successful patriot-businessmen" (Zürcher, 2007, p.138). In other words, the line between nationalist sentiments and criminal activities was often blurred. In the 2007 documentary film *America in One Room* (*Amerika Ert Otakhshi*), for instance, Nikoloz (Koka) Gegechkori, an architect by training, tells of his experience of being a member of *Mkhedrioni*.[312] He discusses openly the drug problems among many of its members, including himself, and recalls how they were continuously provided by the *Mkhedrioni* leadership with long lists of people from whom they would extort money:

> These lists were so long that we could not keep up with them. When we were given a second one, the question was whether we were done with the first. If not, we were told we needed more people and people were coming. Can you imagine, whatever we could not take in money we would take in furniture, foreign TV sets and cars, do you understand what I am saying? … This is what it turned into and when it turned into this, queues of people appeared asking us to admit them [into *Mkhedrioni*]. (*America in One Room*, 2007)

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[310] For a similar argument, see also Woodward (1995, pp.238, 249, 265).
[311] For a similar argument in the case of Northern Ireland, see also McGarry and O'Leary (1995).
[312] After falling out with *Mkhedrioni,* Gegechkori fled to the United States. Since 1994 he has been serving a life sentence in Sing Sing prison in New York for a murder he claims he did not commit. The film is based on his telephone conversations with the film's director, David Kandelaki (*America in One Room*, 2007).

Jaba Ioseliani ([1996]2007) himself concedes that the numerous allegations and the bad reputation that his paramilitary organisation had among the wider public in Georgia were not completely unfounded. He also implicates some of his most trusted and high-level members in the systematic use of drugs and illegal substances, and admits that he was aware of the atrocities committed by men under his command (Ioseliani, ([1996]2007, p.135; see also Morchiladze, 2007, pp.12, 111). There were instances of extortion and racketeering not only from ordinary citizens but even from the police. According to Ioseliani, individual members often acted on their own and it was impossible to control everyone in such a large force. Even though he tried to take measures in order to eradicate such practices, the need for human resources often forced him to turn a blind eye to certain misbehaviour by his fighters (Ioseliani, [1996]2007, pp.95, 171, 191, 228).

At the time it was not unusual to expect material reward in the form of stolen goods in exchange for fighting. “War has its own laws” (“*oms tavisi kanonebi akvs*”) was an often-heard expression in Georgia and it was widely believed that during the war different sets of laws or rules applied. However, paramilitary organisations were not the only ones who were profiting from the ongoing violence. Many of the former communist *nomenklatura*, for instance, were reportedly also engaged in various illegal activities, including exchange dealings for the export of citrus during the war in Abkhazia (Ioseliani [1996]2007, pp.120, 150, 222). As General Karkarashvili states in the case of Abkhazia, it was due to terrorising the local population through looting, robbery and chaos that “in just one month we [Georgians] turned these populations into enemies, especially

Armenians [living in Abkhazia]" (*Absence of Will*, 2009).[313] The looting, however, was not restricted to Abkhazia and South Ossetia or to ethnic minorities.

On a number of occasions, amateur documentary film footage features young Georgians dressed in military uniforms looting and pointlessly shooting at abandoned properties. The rampage is, in fact, taking place in the Samegrelo region – a village of ethnic Georgians is looted and destroyed by none other but ethnic Georgians themselves (1 Arkhi TV, 8 May 2010). These iconic images are a good demonstration of the point raised above – that many who joined paramilitary organisations "to fight and die for their country" were, in fact, more interested in "looting and raping" (*The New York Times*, 1993; see also Ioseliani, [1996]2007, p.243). Indeed, most of the crimes committed were often purely criminal acts and had little to do with ethnic belonging per se (Tsotniashvili, 1998, p.31). "A criminal has no nationality", argues Nugzar Zhghenti, one of the leaders of *Mkhedrioni*, "[but] at the time it was easy to frame any robbery or looting as an ethnic antagonism" (1 Arkhi TV, 2 December 2010).[314]

In reality, however, there was as much conflict between ethnic Georgians and the different paramilitary groups they represented over the distribution of power and resources as between Georgians and Abkhaz or between Georgians and Ossetians. In South Ossetia, for instance, conflict arose between *Mkhedrioni* and the Merab Kostava Society, headed by Vazha Adamia, after the two groups stayed behind following the 23 November 1989 demonstration in Tskhinvali organised by the national movement of Georgia. As Nugzar Zhghenti states, "certain conflicting

[313] For more on this, see also Kolstø and Blakkisrud (2012); author's interviews with Karkarashvili (November 2011) and Levan Kiknadze.
[314] For a similar argument in the case of inter-ethnic violence in the Balkans, see Mueller (2000, p.57).

situations arose with Georgians and not with Ossetians. We had more trouble with Georgians, for instance about where to station troops and which villages to defend" (1 Arkhi TV, 2 December 2010; see also *America in One Room*, 2007). The presence of these various paramilitary groups in South Ossetia and the tensions between them eventually served as a catalyst for turning the Georgian–Ossetian conflict into open warfare. Reports of isolated armed clashes in the region first emerged in late September 1989 although sporadic clashes had already been reported during summer and continued throughout much of 1990. A major escalation of violence, however, came in January 1991 (RFE/RL, 8 Dec. 1989, p.19; 21 Dec. 1990, p.8). Intermittent violence lasted until June 1992 when the OSCE-brokered agreement was signed between Georgian, Ossetian (South and North Ossetian), and Russian sides in Dagomys (near Sochi, Russian Federation).[315] This marked the official "end" to violence in this region in the early 1990s that resulted into the deaths of about 500–600 people.[316] During this time, reportedly around 12,000 ethnic Georgians were displaced from South Ossetia and 30,000 ethnic Ossetians living in various parts of Georgia were forced to leave the country, mainly for North Ossetia (Zürcher, 2007, p.142).

At first glance, the above account demonstrates at times non-ethnic nature of the conflicts in Georgia. It seems to highlight the point raised earlier by rational choice (instrumentalist) scholars in regards to elites and their motivations to rally the masses. Similarly, when it comes to participation in violence, many have argued that the reason people follow their elites and take part in fighting often has little to do with ethnic belonging as such. According to these accounts,

[315] As a result of this agreement, on 14 July 1992 the joint Georgian–Ossetian and Russian-led CIS peacekeeping forces entered South Ossetia (Cordell and Wolff, 2010, p.47).
[316] It is hard to obtain exact statistics on the number of casualties in South Ossetia, mainly because unlike in Abkhazia, violence there was more intermittent.

in many so-called “ethnic wars”, the mechanism of violence is in fact “remarkably banal”. Rather than being driven by ancient hatreds towards other ethnic groups, violence is often the result of atrocities committed by “common, opportunistic … and often distinctly nonideological marauders” (Mueller, 2000, pp.43, 55, 69; see also Zürcher, 2007). In other words, as Brass (1997, p.96) has argued, those engaged in violence may not be following their leaders as such but pursuing their own diverse interests instead, which are shaped and re-defined by ongoing violence as new opportunities arise.[317]

But is the story of Georgia’s ethnic conflicts really “banal”? It is true that on the ground, violent conflicts have many participants, often with diverse motives but while some people indeed seek, and achieve, material benefits by participating in violence, most do not. It is also true that isolated incidents may indeed often be construed as ethnic violence and interested elites may indeed frame the actions of individuals with their own agendas as “following the leaders”, but can we generalise from individual to group (or mass) action? In other words, while at times it may be difficult to separate gang violence from ethnic violence, the question remains whether we can equate the interests and actions of self-interested individuals (or gangs of thugs) with those of the entire group (or broader masses). The major problem with many of the rational choice (instrumentalist) accounts of ethnic violence is that their focus remains rather narrow. Whether they emphasise the role of the elites (political or military leaders, or members of intelligentsia) or those who “follow” them (whether the rank-and-file fighters of paramilitary groups or members of wider society), such accounts provide a rather *incomplete* picture. They hardly ever concede

[317] See also, Bowen (1996, p.3); Fearon and Laitin (2000, p.869); Mueller (2000, pp.47, 58, 69).

the idea that the reasons why people might be "following" their leaders might have more to do with the "symbolic and cultural systems" than rational calculations.[318]

As is well documented in numerous accounts, the number of demonstrators at the protest rallies in Georgia, for instance, increased significantly when the national movement voiced the idea of Georgia's independence (Tsereteli, 2010). In fact, demonstrations that preceded the tragic events of 9 April 1989 started in protest at renewed Abkhaz calls for secession from Georgia, but quickly turned into mass rallies and hunger strikes after the question of Georgia's independence was raised and made a central theme of the protests (author's interview with Jumber Patiashvili). Moreover, the creation of the paramilitary organisations in the first place was also largely decided after 9 April. As Soso Jajanidze, leader of one such organisation – the Kakutsa Cholokashvili Society – argues, the death of civilians at the hand of Soviet troops that night "convinced us that no one would grant us independence; that we had to fight for it ourselves". In other words, the main themes were the idea of Georgia's independence and restoration of its statehood, and the fight against "Kremlin's neo-imperial goals" (1 Arkhi TV, 8 May 2010). Nikoloz Gegechkori also concedes that he and several other members of *Mkhedrioni* had a falling-out with Jaba Ioseliani because of allegations that the latter might be associated with the Communist Party *nomenklatura*, especially after his instrumental role in the return of Eduard Shevardnadze to Georgia.[319] In other words, despite Gegechkori's account that many indeed joined *Mkhedrioni* rather "accidentally" and were often engaged in racketeering and various lucrative dealings, there was also a strong ideology behind people's participation in the conflicts in Abkhazia and South

[318] There are some exceptions, of course. Most notably, in the case of Georgia, see Kaufman (2001).
[319] In fact, some have even openly accused Ioseliani of being a KGB spy (author's interview with Vazha Adamia; see also 1 Arkhi TV, 8 May 2010).

Ossetia. This is why many considered Ioseliani's possible links with the Communists a betrayal. Gegechkori maintains that many members of *Mkhedrioni* died and were imprisoned due to internal quarrelling, but in reality "there was nothing even to quarrel about, if we had managed to sit down and talk, we all had the same aim" (*America in One Room*, 2007). This "aim" was to achieve Georgia's independence and maintain its territorial integrity.

Pikria Chikhradze, a student activist and a member of the national movement at the time,[320] argues along the same lines that

> at the time *Mkhedrioni* was created as a result of a very noble idea and there were some wonderful people in it. Even those who later would be remembered by Georgian society as monsters entered the organisation with purely patriotic intentions. (1 Arkhi TV, 8 May 2010)

In his diaries of the war in Abkhazia, writer and journalist Mikho Morchiladze, who enlisted as a volunteer and headed one of the Georgian battalions, recalls that on the morning of 1 October 1992, when the news reached Tbilisi that the city of Gagra in Abkhazia had fallen into enemy hands, "an enormous number of people rushed to the buildings of the Parliament, Ministry of Defence, Military Commissariats with the only request – to enlist as volunteers in order to [fight and] recapture Gagra" (Morchiladze, 2007, p.12). This is in sharp contrast to the August 2008 war in South Ossetia. Speaking about this war, journalist Ia Antadze states: "I don't think the country was ready to conduct a large-scale war [in 2008]. There was definitely no approval for this from society. I only know of one person who volunteered to fight and managed to go to this war" (*Absence of Will*, 2009). While it could be argued that unlike in the early 1990s, in 2008

[320] Chikhradze currently serves as a Chairwoman of the New Rights Party.

Georgia did have a regular army and no longer depended on volunteers, nevertheless, Antadze does have a point – in the early 1990s, for the most part, the elites did have the approval of the Georgian society to engage militarily in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In other words, Antadze raises an important question here – the question of the role of the wider masses and their involvement (whether direct or indirect) in violence.

The main problem with the above-outlined gang violence, however, is that while it offers interesting and important insight into the outbreak, duration and sustainability of violence in Georgia, it fails to demonstrate how this gang violence relates to wider mass action. After all, most people (i.e. the larger segment of society) are not even part of the violence, whether "gang" or "ethnic", and are not directly involved in the various acts of violence. So one might ask – are the masses acting at all? It is widely accepted that elites derive their legitimacy from the masses (Shore, 2002, p.6). Therefore, it could be argued that while masses at large might not be involved in violence directly, they are still "acting" by granting support to their leadership and in this way, legitimising their actions. In other words, without their "approval" it would be hard for the elites to sustain large-scale wars.

Many have claimed that certain decisions made by various political and military leaders "were a central reason why the violence occurred" in Georgia (Kaufman, 2001, p.112). Without a doubt, as mentioned above, a number of political decisions made by Gamsakhurdia and his government, including abolition of the autonomous status of South Ossetia, for instance, were indeed largely responsible for the major escalation of violence in the region in January 1991. The situation further deteriorated after Vazha Adamia's decision to station his troops in South Ossetia and

blockade Tskhinvali in winter 1991, causing international outcry.[321] In the case of Abkhazia as well, even Kaufman (2001), who recognises the important role of the masses in Georgia's conflicts, affirms that "if mass passions were driving political conflict and personal confrontation, individual leaders' decisions turned those elements into war and made possible the Russian intervention that determined the war's outcome". Alongside many others, he maintains that "[Tengiz] Kitovani clearly wanted war" and that it was his arbitrary decision to march the National Guard troops into Sokhumi (Sukhum) that sparked a full blown war in Abkhazia (Kaufman, 2001, p.126).

While I agree that certain decisions by political and military leaders played an insurmountable role, to blame the outbreak of wars largely on Georgian leaders' "penchant for warlordism" (Kaufman, 2001, p.126–7), as many have done before, is a significant oversimplification of a complex issue. In the 2002 interview, Kitovani, for instance, argues that while in retrospect many blame him personally for orchestrating a *coup d'état* against President Gamsakhurdia or for starting the war in Abkhazia, back then, as he claims, these decisions, in fact, had many supporters both in Tbilisi and in the latter case, among ethnic Georgians in Abkhazia (Rustavi2 TV, 29 Nov. 2002). This claim is confirmed by some of my respondents too.[322]

In the case of South Ossetia, Vazha Adamia admits that he was, in fact, disobeying orders from Tbilisi when staying in the region but maintains that his main motivation was to defend Georgian villages there:

[321] For more on the situation in South Ossetia at the time, see National Security Archives of the United States (Doc. 7, 11 Jan. 1991; Doc. 8, 21 Feb. 1991; Doc. 9, 26 Feb. 1991; Doc. 10, 1 March 1991).
[322] See author's interview with Zurab Papaskiri; see also Studio Re (2010).

> I was torn into two pieces – on the one hand, Gamsakhurdia, Tsereteli and others were telling me that I was disgracing the name of national movement but on the other hand, local residents [ethnic Georgians in South Ossetia] were telling me that they would curse me for generations [*sashvilishvilod dagckevlit*] if I were to leave them unprotected. (Author's interview)

What these statements demonstrate is that these leaders did have at least some "approval" from some segments of wider society. In this way, based on the foregoing, it could be argued that in the case of Georgia masses – ordinary individuals on the ground – were not simply "blind" followers of the wishes of the elites but rather, shared the same "moral universe" (Shore, 2002) with them. In other words, both leaders and their "followers" were "constrained by their ethno-national identities" (O'Leary, 2001, p.150) – identities that had been shaped by institutional structures and discourses.

4. Concluding Remarks

While there is plenty of evidence to suggest that ethnic belonging might not have been always "a crucial motivating force" in Georgia's conflicts, it seems premature to argue that it simply served "as an ordering device or principle" around which people lined themselves up, as some have argued (Mueller, 2000, p.62). Once again, the main issue here seems to be a somewhat narrow, elite-centric focus in the scholarly analyses. This is largely due to what Jonathan Spencer (2002, p.92, 107) calls the "instrumental reading of nationalism", which provides a very "top-down picture of nationalism, an ideology simply imposed from above on local people". The same applies to the study of ethnicity and ethnic conflicts, where such "instrumental" ("rational"), "top-down" explanations remain the dominant views. Even though some scholars have pointed out that people on the ground might not be "blind" followers and might, in fact, be acting on their

own, these approaches remain centred on "instrumentally rational" individuals with their own various agendas and goals and motivated largely by their own self-interest (Brass, 1997).

But is it even relevant to ask whether violence is mainly driven by emotional or rational factors? After all, as one rational choice theorist points out, both factors play equally important roles – "[w]ithout the … emotional fanatics the spiral [of violence] could not get going, but without the rational nationalists it could not get to the point where the conformists are brought into the game" (Melberg, 1998, p.9). I agree that these different players all contributed to bringing societies towards a path of violence. As the discussion in this chapter demonstrates, the reasons why leaders led the masses to violence and that those who followed and supported this violence – whether as active participants in fighting or as "innocent" bystanders, vary tremendously. However, the cases in Georgia suggest that it was more symbolic issues – language, territorial integrity, restoration of independent statehood – that aroused the strongest emotions among both the elites and the wider public. On the other hand, material issues concerning the state of the country's economy – inflation, prices, employment – or property rights often seemed of secondary importance rather than the main driving force of violence (Kaufman, 2001, p.47).[323] Indeed, as Walker Connor ([1993] 1994, p.206) rightly points out, "people do not voluntarily die for things that [concern these material issues]" but rather, for more emotional and symbolic issues that concern their national identity. The overemphasis on material interests and rational calculations, however, whether at the elite or mass levels, "reduce[s] identities to interests" (O'Leary, 2001, p.151), and gives insufficient weight to the role of institutional structures and discourses in shaping these identities.

[323] See also author's interviews with Roman Gotsiridze, Aleksandre Rondeli, and Irakli Tsereteli.

In this way, scholars continue to focus on the construct rather than the identity per se.[324] It is often argued that since the latter is socially constructed it cannot be the real reason behind people's motivations to fight. Identity-based issues are viewed as cover stories for something more sinister (or "banal") – greed (whether for power or other material resources) (RFE/RL, 26 June 1978; Brass, 1997; Mueller, 2000). However, as I have argued throughout this thesis, the constructed nature of ethnic identities does not make ethnicity any less real or relevant. Most people involved in Georgia's conflicts, for instance, whether at the elite or mass levels, viewed ethnic categories of "Georgians", "Abkhaz" and "Ossetians" as part of their "social reality" rather than as "social constructs" (Luczewski, 2005; see also Calhoun, 2003).[325] Much of the current scholarly analysis on ethnic conflicts, however, does not take these "local epistemologies" (Gil-White, 2001) into account and often excludes identity as a viable explanatory variable, delegating it mostly a secondary role, if at all. The result is that, even though some of this research provides interesting insights about different aspects of ethnic conflicts, it gives a largely incomplete account of the motivations behind people's actions, which often leads to misleading policy recommendations on how to end ethnic wars or maintain peace in post-conflict situations. In Georgia's case, it is often argued that the key to reconciliation is to build "the kind of state where Abkhaz, South Ossetians and Russians want to live", as argued by one Georgian journalist in a recent policy brief (Saferworld and Conciliation Resources, 2012, p.4). In other words, it is to build a democratic, just state with strong political institutions and economy. As Irakli Alasania, the leader of the Our Georgia–Free Democrats party[326] pointed out, "significant and rapid

[324] I thank Steve De Klerk for further pointing this out.
[325] Calhoun (2003) and Luczewski (2005) do not discuss Georgia but make a similar general argument.
[326] In 2006–8 Alasania was Georgia's Ambassador to the United Nations. Before this post he was the chairman of the Tbilisi-based government in exile of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia. Most recently Alasania served as

economic reforms would make Georgia more attractive to both Abkhazia and South Ossetia and potentially accelerate the resumption of the dialogue" (as paraphrased in Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010). Undoubtedly, a just society and a truly democratic, prosperous state with strong economy and political institutions that ensure the protection of minority groups and their participation in political processes would be much more appealing to anyone than a non-democratic, corrupt, failing state (as Georgia arguably was in the 1990s). Nevertheless, such views fail to acknowledge that these conflicts are first and foremost identity-based and making Georgia economically more attractive is unlikely to address some of the root causes of inter-ethnic violence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Georgia's Minister of Defence in 2012–4. He is also the son of General Mamia Alasania who was killed alongside other high-ranking Georgian officials amidst the fall of Sokhumi (Sukhum) in September 1993.

Chapter 7 – Conclusions

The aim of this Ph.D thesis was to provide an in-depth inquiry into the nexus between identity construction and inter-ethnic violence by looking at how particular constructions of conflicting group identities contributed to the outbreak of violence in Georgia in the early 1990s. In order to examine the relationship between identity and violence, I focused on the overarching empirical question of how violence "came about" in the cases in Georgia – how it "came to happen". Answering this general question entailed a more historical approach to studying inter-ethnic relations in Georgia and how these relations turned from tensions to violence.

I consider conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia "ethnic conflicts", i.e. conflicts between the groups that perceived themselves as distinct "ethnic communities" and that were largely organised around their "ethnic identities" (Cordell and Wolff, 2010, p.14). In other words, warring sides in these conflicts held "irreconcilable visions of the identity, borders, and citizenship of the state" and the main aim of the Abkhaz and Ossetians was the division of that state (i.e. secession from Georgia) rather than control of the state (Kaufmann, 1996, p.138).[327] In this way, as I argue, (ethnic) identity did play an important role in these conflicts and provided a powerful mobilisation base for the conflicting sides. However, this is not the same as to claim that ethnicity in itself necessarily leads to violence. As Cordell and Wolff (2010, p.16) point out, for ethnicity to play a causal role in conflicts "certain patterns of interaction are required, which themselves occur only under specific circumstances". Thus, identifying these "patterns" of inter-

[327] Kaufmann (1996) does not talk about Georgia per se but outlines a general definition of what he refers to as "ethnic civil conflicts".

ethnic relations in Georgia and the "circumstances" under which they occurred was the main task of this study.

In this chapter I summarise the key findings of this thesis, and suggest ways in which they can be used to further enhance our understanding of ethnic conflicts and, in particular, the motivation to mobilise and support violence not only in Georgia but also more generally in other instances of ethnic violence.

1. Main Findings

1.1. Construction of Conflicting Group Identities as a Long Term Project

My research findings validate arguments concerning the role of ethnic fears in the outbreak of violence, which are particularly prominent in the security studies approaches to ethnic conflicts (Lake and Rothchild, 1996a, 1996b; Kaufman, 2001). Indeed, perceptions of threat (whether physical or cultural) and the fear of victimisation often make violence a viable option (de Figueiredo and Weingast, 1999). However, as the discussion in this thesis demonstrates, ethnic fears and hostility between Georgians and Abkhaz, and Georgians and Ossetians, were neither deep-rooted and long-standing, nor continuous and inevitable. Rather, the causes of the conflicts between these groups can be located mainly in the socio-political developments of the last century and, to use constructivist language, in the construction of antagonistic group identities based on ethnicity (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, p.845). Still, as I argue, conflicting group identities in Georgia were not the outcome of "sudden transformations in identity" in the late 1980s, as argued by some scholars (de Figueiredo and Weingast, 1999, p.293). The ideas of threat and hostility do not emerge only as the result of the state collapse and are not solely the creations of

self-interested manipulative elites. Rather, they are the outcome of relatively long-term *processes* taking place over the course of several decades as opposed to several years.

One of my main criticisms of the existing scholarship on the conflicts in Georgia (as well as on ethnic conflicts more generally) is its rather ahistorical approach to the study of ethnic violence. While most scholars acknowledge the existence of inter-ethnic tensions in the pre-Gorbachev years, hardly anyone explores the underlying reasons behind these tensions in any greater detail. The vast majority of this literature generally starts its analysis from the late 1980s, paying only lip service to ethnic protests in the previous decades. The basic assumption seems to be that whatever happened before the mid- to late 1980s had very little relevance (if any at all) to the outbreak of violence in the early 1990s. The "critical juncture" in this analysis is usually the events of 9 April 1989, when the crackdown on a peaceful demonstration in Tbilisi by Soviet troops resulted in the death of 20 civilians. Without a doubt, the importance of these tragic events cannot be understated. The mass trauma they caused acted as a catalyst; it further radicalised the masses and made it very difficult to defuse already existing ethnic tensions. However, the argument I advance in this thesis is that, by the late 1980s, the grounds for large-scale mass mobilisation in Georgia had already been laid and that the mass mobilisation (or rather, radicalisation) that followed the April 1989 events and the subsequent outbreak of violence cannot be understood without putting them in an historical perspective.

Using previously unpublished archival sources as well as wide-ranging ethnographic interviews with mid- to high-level government and military officials, members of the intelligentsia, and the IDPs, I shed some light on previously overlooked aspect of Georgia's conflicts and focus my

analysis on ethnic mobilisation in Georgia during the Soviet era. In this way, the empirical analysis in this thesis provides a clear contribution here. By tracing the process of the development of inter-ethnic relations in Georgia in the post-Stalinist period, I show that inter-ethnic tensions that arose in the late 1980s did not, in fact, *start* in the 1980s; rather, they were only *exacerbated* during this time. In other words, what happened *before* this period was just as important in the formation of conflicting group identities as what happened during or after it. Thus, the history of inter-ethnic relations in Georgia is not simply part of the background information in this thesis but, rather, an integral part of the *explanation* of Georgia's violent conflicts.

The events in Tbilisi in March 1956 serve as the "critical juncture" in my analysis. These large-scale mass protests swept across Georgia, lasting for almost an entire week. Triggered by Nikita Khrushchev's denunciation of Georgia-born Joseph Stalin in his "Secret Speech" in February 1956, these demonstrations – the first major expression of public discontent in the Soviet Union for decades (Blauvelt, 2009, p.651) – marked an important point in Georgia's twentieth-century history. Khrushchev's speech, which reportedly included slurs against the Georgian people, and his attempts at de-Stalinisation, were therefore understood in Georgia not so much as the Kremlin's move against Stalin's "personality cult" but as "a humiliation and insult of Georgians" (Kldiashvili, 2012, p.13; see also Smith, 2008, p.5). The demonstrations that essentially started out as pro-Stalin gatherings to mark the third anniversary of the "Great Leader's" (*didi beladi*) death on 5 March acquired nationalist characteristics over the course of the following days and by 9 March protesters were also raising questions regarding "Georgian self-determination and civil

liberties", and were even voicing calls "for Georgian independence" (Nahaylo and Swoboda, 1990, p.120).

The subsequent violent crackdown on these demonstrations and Soviet troops' use of force against unarmed civilians on 9–10 March in Tbilisi, which led to the death of at least 21 people, played a significant role in the discrediting of Soviet rule in the Georgian SSR and sowed the seeds of the underground dissident movement that evolved into the fully-fledged "national liberation" movement in the 1980s. In other words, this violent incident triggered "a sense of crisis" in Georgia and, to use Hutchinson's (2005, p.135) terminology, set in motion an "episode" of nationalist upheaval.

Indeed, in the months following the March 1956 events, anti-Soviet proclamations and leaflets started to appear in the streets of Tbilisi calling for Georgia's liberation from the Soviet Union. In fact, Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Merab Kostava – two of the most well-known Georgian dissidents – were first arrested as 11th-graders in December 1956 in connection with the distribution of such leaflets. Their testimonies suggest that anti-Soviet and nationalist sentiments were increasingly on the rise among Georgia's youth and were largely due to the tragic events of March 1956 (Kldiashvili, 2012, pp.15–16).

These events were significant for other reasons as well. As Jeremy Smith (2008) correctly points out, it was at this time that "anti-Russian attitudes became, for the first time, an integral part of Georgian nationalism". In Georgia, "Soviet Union" and its power structures were now increasingly associated and equated with "Russia" and "Russians" (Smith, 2008, pp.3, 11).

Recently discovered archival material also demonstrates that expressions of anti-Russian attitudes increased significantly across Georgia in the aftermath of March 1956. Protest letters by Georgia's ethnic Russians speak of hostility and threats from ethnic Georgians (Kldiashvili, 2012, pp.13–14). In other words, the March 1956 events also marked a new era in the development of ethno-politics in Georgia. In the years that followed, protests from some of Georgia's other ethnic minorities also became bolder and more vocal. As demonstrated by the Abkhaz protest rallies and manifestations in particular, the rise of national feelings and self-consciousness in the post-Stalinist period was not confined to ethnic Georgians. The timing of some of the Abkhaz protests (especially in 1957 and 1978), which followed closely, or coincided with, disturbances in Tbilisi (in 1956 and 1978), as well as the reversal of some of the Georgianisation policies in the spheres of language and culture in Abkhazia and South Ossetia from the 1950s onwards, were interpreted by the Georgian side as deliberate acts by the Kremlin to weaken central authority in Tbilisi and its influence in these regions (Smith, 2008, p.10). Thus, both Abkhaz and Ossetians were increasingly seen in Georgia as "pawns" in Moscow's hands that could be used every time authorities in the Kremlin wanted to "punish" Georgians – a view further strengthened by the shifts in Soviet nationality policies over the subsequent few decades.

Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the mid- and late 1980s undoubtedly played a further crucial role in the development of inter-ethnic relations across the Soviet Union. They opened up political space necessary for inter-ethnic tensions to play out in the open and, in this way, provided political opportunity for large-scale mass mobilisation to occur. Arguably these policies also set in motion the processes that accelerated the weakening and eventual collapse of the Soviet Union, which proved essential for the organisation of violence (Glinkina

and Rosenberg, 2003). This explains why state failure (institutional weakness and eventual collapse) remains central in most theories and approaches in ethnic conflict studies. Most notably, security-oriented approaches are rooted in the understanding that "domestic anarchy" – i.e. the lack of central authority at a sub-state level – is what ultimately creates *necessary* conditions for the emergence of what Zürcher (2007) calls the "market of violence" in which conflicting sides operate. However, while I acknowledge the utmost importance of state weakness (and failure) in the outbreak of violence, I argue that focusing solely (or even mainly) on the conditions that immediately preceded the outbreak of violence – i.e. emerged during the time frame of the mid- to late 1980s and early 1990s – gives us an incomplete picture of Georgia's road to war and omits other vital aspects of conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In other words, scholarly focus on this period highlights the importance of the means (resources) and opportunity structures in waging and sustaining large-scale violence but, in so doing, it gives us an insufficient (and at times even mistaken) view of the wider motivations behind people's actions.

1.2. Construction of Conflicting Group Identities as an Outcome of a "Relational Nexus" Between Different Factors

The ideal-typical versions of primordialism and constructivism diverge significantly on the issue of motivation and provide different explanations of what motivates people to opt for violence. Primordialists tend to view ethnic groups as generally conflict–prone, given the nature of ethnic identities (and inherent cultural differences) that remain largely fixed once formed. According to this view, membership in a group "necessarily involves differentiating one's self or one's group from an Other", and this, in turn, "necessarily entails the potential for a violent, antagonistic relationship with the Other" (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, p.851). Thus, according to this logic, under

the right circumstances, such as the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the accompanying "domestic anarchy", fear of the "Other" becomes a "natural" reaction.

Most scholars would largely agree that ethnic fears (whether they stem from inequalities suffered by the group within a given society or insecurities about group's cultural or physical survival within a state) are an important factor in people's motivations to mobilise and support violence. However, constructivists do not share the view that these fears and hostilities stem from inherent cultural differences and are a "natural" accompaniment to "on-the-ground" ethnic interactions. Rather, they argue that identities can be (re)shaped, (re)invented and even (re)constructed in both antagonistic and non-antagonistic ways (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, p.852) and that individuals are not bound to a single form of identity (de Figueiredo and Weingast, 1999, p.293).[328] Many of these views would be shared by sympathisers of the primordialist school of thought as well. Among others, Donald Horowitz (2004, p.76), for instance, has argued that having a particular ethnic identity, no matter how strongly held, does not equate to "antipathy … toward particular outgroups". In this way, the main question posed by constructivists then is – how is the motivation for violence *constructed*?

In this thesis I use the cases of violence in Georgia to examine the mechanisms outlined by Fearon and Laitin (2000) that link identity construction and ethnic violence. Based on the review of several high-profile cases of ethnic conflict across the world, these scholars suggest two ways

[328] It needs to be pointed out here that Fearon and Laitin (2000), as well as de Figueiredo and Weingast (1999), who operate within International Relations field, largely identify themselves as rationalist scholars. In this field rationalism stands in stark opposition to constructivism but, as these scholars show, these two schools of thought do share similar views on many aspects of identity formation.

in which constructivist claims can explain violence: 1) "the construction of ethnic antagonisms is the result of individual strategic action", whether at the elite or mass level, or 2) it is "supra-individual discourses of ethnicity … that construct actors and motivate or define their possibilities for action". Fearon and Laitin argue that their case studies yield more support for the actor-centred constructivist propositions, although they concede that the discourse route of social construction of ethnicity should not be lightly discarded either (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, pp.846, 874).

As the cases of Abkhazia and South Ossetia demonstrate, the social construction of ethnicity (ethnic identities) is indeed an important "ingredient" in the outbreak of ethnic violence. However, by itself none of the "routes" of ethnic identity construction outlined by Fearon and Laitin is able to explain occurrences of violence. Instead, as I argue, the formation of conflicting group identities in Georgia was taking place at three different levels – structural (institutional), discourse and actor. It was the "*relational nexus*" between these different factors – institutional structures, discourses and elites – that played the key role in the mobilisation of the masses and the subsequent outbreak of violence. Thus, the existence of ethnic fears among Georgia's various ethnic groups by the late 1980s – one of the important contributing factors to the outbreak of violence – cannot be explained without first considering the relationship between these factors over the course of several decades before the actual outbreak of violence.

In the field of ethnic conflict studies, while most scholars would acknowledge the importance of all three factors – institutions, discourses and actors – not all of them incorporate them in their analysis (at least not explicitly), and the ones who do generally tend to attribute much greater

importance to the actors, largely understood as elites. In the cases in Georgia, most notably (and more explicitly) Zürcher (2007), for instance, attributes no explanatory "weight" to the discourses but does acknowledge the importance of Soviet institutional structures in the outbreak of violence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. However, he maintains that, ultimately, what brought violence about was "a few capable" elites or "organisers of violence" who made rational decisions to go to war. Stuart Kaufman (2001), by contrast, incorporates discourses as one of the main elements in his symbolic politics theory but makes hardly any mention of the role of Soviet nationality policies in relation to these discourses or in shaping identities in general. In this way, he never really questions hard enough why Georgian mythology singled out the Abkhaz and Ossetians as the main "villains", while in fact there was as much about tolerance and inter-ethnic cooperation among Georgia's symbolic and cultural resources as there was about "dominance" over other ethnic groups, as claimed by Kaufman. In this way, his analysis of Georgia's mythology seems to imply that there is something intrinsically chauvinistic about Georgian culture. Moreover, he, too, ultimately concludes that it was decisions of certain self-interested individuals that made the wars possible.

These scholars are not wrong in drawing these conclusions. Indeed, in the end violence is the outcome of the "choices made by individual human beings" (Cordell and Wolff, 2010, p.44). I do not dispute that decisions made, and actions taken, by certain elites – whether it was President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, or the leaders of various paramilitary groups in Georgia such as Tengiz Kitovani, Jaba Ioseliani, Vazha Adamia or others – contributed significantly to, or directly resulted in, the outbreak of violence. What this thesis is interested in, however, is what motivated these actors. In other words, is their use of ethnicity as primordial (in the socio-biological sense)

and their resort to symbolic and cultural reservoirs of their ethnic groups merely a tool used strategically to mobilise the masses? Or is this itself a framework through which these actors view their social life and which "*frames* that life, constraining the actor's instrumental choices" (Gil-White, 1999, p.813, emphasis original)? But, even if we concede that these actors conceive myths, symbols and metaphors that they use simply as instruments of mobilisation, another important question arising is how these individuals come to be in their positions in the first place when their decision-making has the capacity to bring about wars. One could argue that, in the case of Georgia, the biggest problem was not, in principle, particular individuals such as Gamsakhurdia, but rather the circumstances that brought him to power. In other words, what needs further explanation in this case is the phenomenon often referred to as "the Gamsakhurdia effect" (Kozlov, 1999, pp.132–3; Smith, 2008, p.3). While Gamsakhurdia's personality certainly played a key role in the decisions and choices he made throughout his political career, as Jonathan Wheatley (2005) argues, "he was as much constrained by the circumstances in which he found himself as by the flaws in his own character". In fact, Wheatley goes as far as to argue that even the personality of Gamsakhurdia "was a product of the situation in society to the extent that it was this situation that dictated that a Gamsakhurdia type of figure would come to the fore" (Wheatley, 2005, p.60).[329] In this way, one of the main concerns of this thesis, as mentioned above, is to analyse the factors that constrained and shaped Gamsakhurdia's leadership as well as the underlying causes of the situation in which he and other leaders operated.

[329] Although he does not focus on ethnic conflicts per se, Wheatley (2005) pays particular attention to the structural constraints on the political elite in Georgia. However, like others, the main starting point of his analysis is 9 April 1989.

The main argument I put forward in this thesis is that, in the cases in Georgia, the Soviet institutional structure and the discourses embedded in and nurtured by this institutional context not only had a *constraining* but also a *constitutive* effect on the actors (both elites and the masses). In this way, in the framework that I propose, the role of the elites in the construction of conflicting group identities becomes secondary, albeit still very important. Without doubt, elites played an enormous role in shaping how ethnic Georgians, Abkhaz and Ossetians viewed one another but it is important to move beyond instrumentalist beliefs when analysing elite motivations. In other words, there is a need to move beyond the dominant rational choice explanations in ethnic conflict studies that tend to portray elites as self-centred "utility maximizers" who are ready to sacrifice the collective good for their own personal benefit (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991, p.7; Nee, 2001, p.9). Rather, it is more appropriate to talk about elite rationality as "context-bound" (Nee, 2001, pp.10–12; see also Boudon, 1987; Scharpf, 1997). Consequently, as I argue, elite choices are firmly rooted in institutional and symbolic, cultural and historical contexts of their societies, which not only constrain their actions but also constitute their preferences (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991, p.7).

Hence, the three empirical chapters of this thesis provide an in-depth inquiry into each of the constituting elements of the framework outlined above – institutional structures, discourses and actors (elites/masses) – and highlight their roles in the formation of conflicting group identities.

1.2.1. Soviet Nationality Policies Revisited

I started out with a discussion of the institutional structure of the Soviet Union in Chapter 4. The focus of this chapter was Soviet nationality policies and their various manifestations in the

Georgian SSR. While a lot has been written already on this issue, the importance of Soviet nationality policies in fostering inter-ethnic conflict cannot be understated.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, scholars working on this region have been puzzled by the nature of these policies, and their intended consequences or unintended side-effects have been the subject of heated debate. One of the best analogies that highlights the many paradoxes of these policies, however, was drawn as long ago as in 1924, at the very start of these policies, when two scholars compared the Soviet Union to "a communal apartment" in which Union republics and their various autonomous territories represented separate rooms. Authorities in the Kremlin and their handling of the "nationality question" were likened to "the communist landlords" who never really stopped encouraging and celebrating "separateness" of their tenants, while at the same time promoting "communalism" (Vareikis and Zelenskii, 1924, p.59, cited in Slezkine, 1994, pp.415, 434). Indeed, some of the key themes of Soviet nationality policy in subsequent decades remained centred on the concepts of "national uniqueness" (*svoeobrazie*) and "national diversity" (*raznoobrazie*) – the two opposing concepts that were supposed to act "as paradoxical prerequisites for ultimate unity" of the Soviet Union's multitude of nationalities (Slezkine, 1994, p.433). In other words, the paradox of these policies lay in the Bolsheviks' attempts to achieve constructivist ends by primordialist means.

The result of this paradox was the mushrooming of ethno-territorial units across the Soviet Union, with local bureaucracies and educational institutions in native languages (at least on paper) and indigenous ethnic cadres. The effects of these state-sponsored processes were two-fold. In the case of the Georgian SSR, they significantly strengthened national self-awareness

among the Abkhaz and Ossetians, as well as providing them with the institutional means to wage large-scale mass mobilisations in the late 1980s (Cornell, 2002). The ethno-federal structure of the Soviet Union, however, was only one of many features of the nationality policies. Another related and equally important aspect was the hierarchical alignment of ethno-linguistic groups. An individual's opportunities to succeed, including education and employment prospects, largely depended on the status of the ethnic category to which he or she belonged (Slezkine, 1994; Brubaker, 1996).

While the creation of three autonomous entities in Georgia within its state boundaries had always been considered as the age-old "divide and rule" policy of the imperial centre, in recent years scholars have increasingly questioned this view. Instead, some have proposed that, rather than part of the Bolsheviks' grand divide-and-conquer plan, setting up autonomous territories and legitimising ethnicity were meant as concessions towards ethnic minorities in order to stabilise a rather uneasy situation in the region in the early 1920s (Smith 1997a; 1997b; Saparov, 2010; de Waal, 2012). Indeed, as many point out, Georgia's troubled relations with its ethnic minorities pre-date Soviet rule. After all, the first violent confrontations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia took place under the auspices of Georgia's Menshevik government in 1918–21. Thus, one could argue that the conflicting group identities had already been formed by the time the Bolsheviks came to power.

In this case, the question arising is whether we can hold Soviet institutional structures accountable for the deterioration and the eventual breakdown of the relationship between Georgians and Abkhaz and Ossetians. If ethnic hatreds pre-date Soviet rule, then we could

reinterpret Georgia's ethnic troubles as a failure of the Soviet authorities (and their nationality policies) to end conflict, rather than their ability to further construct conflicting group identities during the Soviet era. In fact, as many have argued, the previous history of violence along ethnic lines plays an important role in the later outbreaks of inter-ethnic violence (Aspinall, 2007). Undoubtedly, the memory of the repression that the Abkhaz and Ossetians suffered under Georgia's Menshevik government has had a significant effect on how these minority groups perceived ethnic Georgians in later years. However, as I argue, these memories of past experiences were awakened, and further intensified, within the context of the Soviet institutional structure.

"Georgianisation" policies in the 1930s and 1940s further affected Abkhaz and Ossetian populations, providing these groups with a sufficiently long list of grievances and serving as a powerful motive for them to seek secession from Georgia. The Abkhaz ASSR was a particularly interesting case in this regard. Unlike South Ossetian elites, Abkhaz elites had direct access to high-ranking decision-makers in the Kremlin, who often vacationed in Abkhazia. This provided them with an opportunity to bypass the Georgian authorities in Tbilisi and stay in direct contact with Moscow. This also explains their more active role in terms of staging protests and organising rallies. As a result of such protests following Stalin's death, concessions granted to the Abkhaz from Tbilisi and Moscow meant that the Stalinist-era "Georgianisation" policies turned into "Abkhazianisation" policies in the 1970s and 1980s in Abkhazia. This further heightened a sense of insecurity among its ethnic Georgian population, who comprised the plurality in the Abkhaz ASSR.

Ethnic fears and insecurities among Georgians were also due to intensified Russification policies that stemmed from Khrushchev's renewed efforts to promote the teaching of the Russian language across the Soviet Union. Since Abkhaz and Ossetians both demanded the transfer of their autonomous territories from the Georgian SSR to the RSFSR, from the Georgian perspective these ethnic groups were increasingly viewed through the prism of Georgian–Russian relations, which became particularly tense in the aftermath of the 1956 events. These minority groups were perceived as the Kremlin's allies against Georgia and their grievances, however legitimate, were regarded as provocations and manipulations orchestrated from Moscow. Thus, ethnic mobilisation and subsequent ethnic conflict in Georgia was closely intertwined with anti-Soviet (anti-Kremlin) mobilisation; it was shaped as much by inter-ethnic relations between Georgians and Abkhaz and Ossetians as by attitudes to Moscow (Smith, 2008, p.12). From the Georgian perspective these two issues (concerning Georgia's minorities and relations with Moscow) were inseparable – a view that continues to dominate the current Georgian discourse on these conflicts.

Consequently, as I argue, Soviet nationality policies contributed significantly to the development of the security dilemma. Broadly defined, the security dilemma emerges when ethnic fears and insecurities among members of a particular group create fears and insecurities among members of the opposing group (Kaufman, 2006, p.55). When understood in this general sense, the security dilemma was not solely the result of the collapse of the central state authority and the subsequent "domestic anarchy" of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Rather, it was one of the long-term side-effects of Soviet nationality policies, evolving over the course of several decades. This also highlights the "relational nature" of ethnic identities – how members of a particular ethnic group

perceive themselves and construct their group boundaries depends largely on how they perceive members of the "other" group (Fenton, 1999, p.6; Zürcher, 2007, p.55).

However, probably the most important "contribution" of the Soviet nationality policies towards the construction of conflicting group identities was "nurturing" a particular view of ethnicity strongly linked to territorial and linguistic identities that manifested itself in historical myths and metaphors of ethnic groups concerned. In this way, closely linked to the Soviet institutional context were the discourses discussed in Chapter 5.

1.2.2. Significance of Myths: Myth or Reality?

As used in this thesis, "discourses" are understood broadly as "supra-individual things" encompassing historical and cultural narratives – "stories that people tell about themselves", whether embedded in myths, symbols or metaphors (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, p.874). Ethno-symbolists call this phenomenon the "myth–symbol complex" of ethnic groups, which remains at the centre of their scholarly analysis.

In my proposed framework I identify discourses as one of the mechanisms through which construction of conflicting group identities occurred in Georgia. As I argue, discourses were at the heart of the Georgian–Abkhaz and Georgian–Ossetian conflicts. Rival indigenous myths of origin and competing "guest–host" metaphors played a particularly divisive role. While ethnic mythology is a common trait of any ethnic group, cultural and symbolic resources to which ethnic myths and metaphors belong tend to be (re)activated when a group is perceived to be under imminent threat (Edelman, 1971; Hutchinson, 2005). In the case of Georgia, I consider the

events of March 1956 as a turning point in this regard that triggered the resurgence of Georgian nationalism and the activation of "metaphorical and mythical modes of thinking".[330]

These myths and metaphors highlight one of the main characteristics of the conflicts in Georgia – the highly symbolic nature of a "territory" (or "soil"). Both Georgians and Abkhaz (in Abkhazia) and Georgians and Ossetians (in South Ossetia) viewed these territories as inseparable parts of their respective national identities. In this way, more than anything else, these were conflicts about the "indivisibility" of the territories concerned. In other words, they were (and continue to be) ethno-territorial conflicts.

That ethnicity and territory often feature as important factors in the onset of violence is no news to the literature on ethnic conflicts. According to recent findings, during the period between 1940 and 2000, 98% of intra-state wars were mainly driven by ethnic concerns and involved people of different ethnic groups, while 73% of these ethnic wars were centred on territorial issues and were largely motivated by concerns over the control of a particular territory (Toft, 2006, p.44; see also Denny and Walter, 2014, pp.199–200). Much of this literature, however, is based on statistical models which use "materially based" indicators in order to statistically "measure" "the perceived meaning and value of territory" (Toft, 2014, p.189). Consequently, there is little room in these statistical analyses for exploring other, non-material, more symbolic aspects of a territory. As the cases in Georgia demonstrate, however, it is these latter aspects that played one of the most decisive roles in the construction of conflicting group identities in Georgia, and their importance must not be understated.

[330] I borrow this terms from Edelman (1971, p.65).

The emphasis on the symbolic value of the territory (and language) in ethnic myths and metaphors in Georgia cannot be understood without considering the role of Soviet nationality policies in fostering a rather primordial understanding of ethnicity. As some have argued, the dominance of (socio-biological) primordialist views of ethnicity in the Soviet Union, which also manifested itself in ethnic myths and metaphors, was "a natural outgrowth" of the process of *korenizatsiya* of the 1920s and "a logical outcome" of the wider shifts in Soviet nationality policies in subsequent decades. By the end of the 1930s Soviet authorities neared the end of mass collectivisation and it was believed that class differences had been eliminated, which left nationality as the main category of identification among Soviet citizens (Smith, 2013, pp.118–9).

This is not to say, of course, that historical myths and cultural narratives in Georgia were creations of Soviet nationality policies per se. After all, writer Ilia Chavchavadze's linkage of territory, language and Orthodox Christianity ("homeland, language, religion") to the very essence of Georgian identity dates back to at least 1860. Novelist Mikheil Javakhishvili's *Jaqo's Dispossessed*, which portrays one of its main characters, an ethnic Ossetian, in a negative way, was also originally written and published as early as 1925, before any real impact of the nationality policies.[331] In other words, negative stereotypes and prejudices had existed within Georgian society long before the arrival of the Bolsheviks and the establishment of Soviet rule. Nevertheless, Soviet nationality policies created fertile ground for these stereotypes and prejudices to flourish further. In a political environment where longevity meant advancement, the level of privilege accorded to various groups largely depended on how well they could

[331] The Georgian language itself also reflects some of the stereotypes and prejudices about ethnic minorities. The word *daosebuli* (da-oseb-uli), for instance, has at its roots another word – *osi* (plural *oseb-i*) (the Georgian word for "Ossetian(s)") and has largely negative connotations, meaning "weak" (author's interview with Lela Jikashvili).

demonstrate their "belonging" to a particular territory and prove their ancient historical roots in this territory. Thus, the longest-established inhabitants were viewed (and treated) as more privileged "hosts", while the rest of the population was designated with the informal status of "guests". In this way, discourses and Soviet nationality policies were intrinsically linked.

This brings us to the third factor identified in the framework I outline above – the role of the actors in the outbreak of violence discussed in Chapter 6. In this chapter I explored the question of how much freedom elites had in the construction of conflicting group identities in Georgia and how their choices, decisions and actions were influenced by the Soviet institutional context and the discourses outlined in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively. This question also leads to broader theoretical implications of this study concerning the links between identity and violence.

2. Theoretical Implications: Limits of "Instrumental Rationality"

In the literature on ethnicity the main debate between "primordialists" and "constructivists" has been centred on the questions concerning the nature of ethnic identities. Are ethnic ties "primordial" – so deeply rooted in the history and culture of a given group that they act as powerful "determinants of human behaviour" and can, in fact, "be treated as a given in human relations"? Or are they relatively recent "constructs" that individuals and groups can use "opportunistically to promote their more fundamental security or economic interests" (Esman, 1994, pp.10–11)? In this context, "construction" of ethnic group identities is understood as "an individual cognitive … process" (Young and Collin, 2004, p.378) in which "meanings are constructed by human beings" (O□zkirimli, 2005, p.162). Thus, it is individuals who are viewed

as the main agents in the processes of social construction of ethnic group identities. Moreover, their involvement in these processes is often understood in “instrumental” and “rational” terms.

Scholars nowadays are more likely to consider the possibility that the construction of (conflicting) group identities can also occur “on the ground” – when ordinary citizens from the mass public are engaged in the processes of identity construction (Deng, 1995; Fearon and Laitin, 2000; Hempel, 2004). Nevertheless, much of the literature remains overwhelmingly elite-centred and identity construction is viewed as a largely “top-down” process in which it is the elites (whether political, military or members of the intelligentsia) who intentionally construct (conflicting) identities and impose them “on a relatively passive population” (Özkirimli, 2005, p.191). It is this latter variant of constructivism that Fearon and Laitin refer to as “elite constructivism”. In fact, as they point out, in this case, when “individuals are viewed as the agents who construct ethnic identities, then constructivist explanations for ethnic violence tend to merge with rationalist, strategic analyses, particularly those that emphasize elite manipulation of mass publics” (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, p.846; see de Figueiredo and Weingast, 1999; Gil-White, 1999).

Within the field of International Relations, where harsh epistemological and methodological differences exist between constructivists and rationalists, identifying the two along the same lines would be a contradiction in terms. In fact, the rationalist–constructivist debate has often been referred to as a “war of paradigms” in this field (Fearon and Wendt, 2002, p.53). However, within the realm of the literature on ethnicity and ethnic conflicts, Fearon and Laitin (2000, p.874) point to “a shared consciousness” (Gergen 1985, p.266) between these two approaches. Consequently,

rationalists can be considered "constructivist" the same way as Geertzian (cultural) primordialism, discussed in Chapter 2, is sometimes also referred to as "constructivist" by some scholars (Tilley, 1997).

This explains why, within the context of the primordialist–constructivist debate, the actor-centred variant of "constructivism" is often used almost interchangeably with "instrumentalism" or "rational choice". Thus, much of the criticism directed towards "constructivist" conceptualisation of ethnicity and ethnic identities in this context is, in fact, criticism towards instrumentalist understandings of ethnicity as a "free-floating" social category[332] that can be (re)constructed, (re)produced, and manipulated at an individual's will and in a relatively short time.

While most scholars in Western academia do recognise the constructed nature of ethnic identities and the malleability of ethnic group boundaries, they diverge significantly on the issue of the role of individuals in this process. In other words, how much freedom do elites (or ordinary citizens "on the ground") have in the construction of (conflicting) group identities? How freely can they manoeuvre and define these (conflicting) group boundaries?

Primordialists argue that the role of actors in identity formation is limited. They tend to downplay the role of instrumental calculations behind their motivations, or deny it altogether, and emphasise individuals' "altruism" (i.e. "group loyalty") over "self-interest" (Horowitz, 2004, pp.74, 78; see Connor, [1993] 1994; Shils, 1995). But, as Horowitz (2004, p.80) asks, are the two

[332] I borrow this term from Luczewski (2005, p.5).

necessarily incompatible? In other words, can “primordialists” also be rationalist? And just how rationalist are “rationalists” themselves?

Within the field of ethnic conflict studies, most rationalist (instrumentalist) explanations of ethnic violence are well aware of the mobilisational power of ethnicity and concede that “non-rational factors” such as ethnic myths and symbols can evoke powerful emotions and often play a significant role in the outbreak of violence (Lake and Rothchild, 1996b, p.55). Thus, they recognise that in order for the elites to rally the masses around ethnicity, they need to take notice of the cultural and symbolic resources that make up the “core” of their respective ethnic groups (Esman, 1994, p.14). These accounts also acknowledge the constraining effect that a group’s culture and historical memories and experiences can have on the elites. For instance, Paul Brass (1979, p.67), who has been credited as a classic example of the instrumentalist position in the literature on ethnicity and ethnic conflicts, admitted decades ago that “elites are indeed limited and constrained by the cultures of the groups they hope to represent”. Lake and Rothchild (1996b) – prominent rational-choice theorists in the International Relations field – go even further by pointing (at least implicitly) to not only the constraining but also the constitutive power of “political memories, myths, and emotions”. As they state, “political entrepreneurs are as much a product as a producer of ethnic fears”, and they “both reflect and stimulate” these fears (Lake and Rothchild, 1996b, pp.53, 55).

However, despite conceding that “symbolic and cultural systems” (Fearon and Laitin, 2000) of a given group matter in the construction of conflicting group identities and the outbreak of violence, rationalist accounts of ethnic conflicts seldom inquire any further into how exactly they

matter. In other words, these factors (myths, symbols, emotions, memories) are considered secondary and continue to be treated as epiphenomenal to the politics of power and resource competition (Hutchinson, 2008, p.22). Consequently, these approaches remain at the end of the "spectrum" identified by Esman (1994) that favours "material" (rational) over "non-material" (symbolic) factors in their explanations of political action and continues to attribute *primary* agency to "*instrumentally rational*" actors (mainly understood as elites). In these accounts, it is often assumed that actors – such as Gamsakhurdia, Kitovani, Ioseliani, Adamia and others in the case of Georgia – are largely self-motivated individuals who use ethnicity to manipulate the masses into violence in order to maintain or obtain power and other material resources. In this way, this literature overwhelmingly treats actors' interests and preferences as given and seldom questions how these interests (preferences) might have been formed in the first place (Checkel, 2011, p.6).[333]

On the contrary, as I show in Chapter 6, while many of these actors in Georgia were indeed often acting in "rational" and "strategic" ways, this is a different kind of rationality – in this case, actors were "*boundedly rational*". In other words, their interests and identities were not only constrained but also constituted by the institutional and discursive structures within which they operated. By the late 1980s, the interaction between Soviet institutional structures (shaped by Soviet nationality policies) and historical and cultural discourses (embedded in myths, symbols and metaphors) had produced a particular "social reality" in Georgia in which an individual's identity was largely defined by a (socio-biological) primordialist view of ethnicity. Thus, actors'

[333] While Checkel (2011) does not discuss the case of Georgia, he raises similar general questions in his discussion of the rationalist approaches in the field of International Relations. See also Fearon and Wendt (2002, pp.58–60).

(whether elites or the masses) choices and their political behaviour was fundamentally shaped by this "primordial cognitive frame" – to use Horowitz's (2004, p.80) term.

In this way, the main arguments advanced in this thesis are oriented towards the opposite end of the "spectrum", which attributes substantial agency to institutional and discursive structures that not only limit actors' choices but also shape their very beliefs.[334] However, this is not to deny the existence or role of "instrumentally rational" actors altogether. After all, violence has many participants, with motivations ranging from symbolic (emotional) and non-symbolic (material) issues and, as Hans Melberg (1998, p.9) points out, "emotional fanatics", "rational nationalists" and "the conformists" all play an important role in bringing about violence. Nevertheless, as I argue in Chapter 6, while many profited (financially or otherwise) from the outbreak of violence in Georgia, its presence or absence cannot be explained by interest-based approaches alone, advocated by rational-choice theories. In order to mobilise the masses successfully, elites – whatever their motivations – must speak to their followers "in languages the latter understand" (Hutchinson, 2008, pp.24–5). This point is also highlighted by the non-violent case of Adjara, further emphasising the importance of "ethnicity" and its constituent elements in the mobilisation of the masses in Georgia and casting doubts on the actor-centred rational-choice explanations of ethnic conflict.

Bringing Ethnicity Back into the Debate

Many of the preconditions that existed in Abkhazia and South Ossetia before the outbreak of war, for instance, were also present in Adjara. As an autonomous republic it had all the institutional

[334] DiMaggio and Powell (1991, p.13) make a similar argument within the neo-institutionalist school in sociology.

means necessary to counteract the centre – Tbilisi, which considered its autonomous status as illegitimate as that of South Ossetia and threatened its abolition. Similar to Abkhazia, Adjara also hosted one of the Soviet (later Russian) military bases located on the territory of Georgia, which could have potentially become a source of weapons for the rebellion, as was claimed in the case of Abkhazia.[335] One could also argue that the collapse of state institutions and the economy, and the subsequent lawlessness that emerged in the country, affected Adjara as much as other regions in Georgia. Consequently, there seems to have been all the prerequisites for the emergence of the strategic dilemmas that the security studies approaches claim as some of the main reasons for the outbreak of violence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (such as the security dilemma, commitment problems and information failures). Moreover, there was also a history of resistance against Tbilisi among the Adjars. While relations between Tbilisi and Batumi remained peaceful throughout the Soviet period, between 1917 and 1921 many of the Adjars aligned with Turkey rather than Georgia, and Adjar partisans fought against the Menshevik government of Georgia as well as the Bolsheviks (Zürcher, 2007, p.202). Nevertheless, violence was avoided and, as I argue, one of the key reasons for this was the absence of a sense of a separate Adjar ethnic identity and culture, and the existence of any rival ethnic myths.[336] In other words, political elites and would-be nationalists there "simply did not have enough material to work with" in order to construct any antagonistic Adjar identities (Fowkes, 2002, p.4).[337] As Aslan Abashidze, head of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara from 1991 to 2004, points out:

[335] The military base in Batumi, Adjara was officially handed over to the Georgian government in November 2007 – at the time marking the end of the Russian military presence in Georgia (RIA Novosti, 2007). In Abkhazia, a Soviet (later Russian) military base was located on Bombora airfield near Gudauta and is thought to have played a key role during the 1992–93 conflict by providing military assistance to the Abkhaz side.
[336] For a similar view in line with the general ethno-symbolist argument, see Hutchinson (2008, p.23).
[337] In this case Fowkes (2002, p.4) makes a general argument along the same lines rather than talking about the case of Adjara in particular.

> The situation in South Ossetia and Abkhazia cannot be compared with the state of affairs in Adjara. … We have never had, and never can have, any territorial claims against Georgia. … Adjara is historically a part of Georgia, and there has never been any instance in history in which Adjara has created problems for its motherland. (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 6 October 1993, p.3, cited in Toft, 2005, p.113)

While the Georgian side considers both Abkhazia and South Ossetia as historical (and therefore inseparable) parts of Georgia, the Abkhaz and Ossetian sides claim the opposite. By contrast, the Adjars consider Georgia to be their only motherland. This point is also highlighted in many interviews I have conducted.[338] Much of the English-language scholarship on Georgia, however, has generally downplayed the importance of (perceived) "ethnic kinship" between Georgians and Adjars and has argued that maintaining peace in the region was largely due to the leadership and personality of Aslan Abashidze himself (Zürcher, 2007, p.207). On the contrary, however, as one of my respondents noted, "Abashidze could never have been Ardzinba since [unlike in Abkhazia] there was no social basis for separatism in Adjara due to the non-existence of such sentiments among the Adjars" (author's interview with Davit Darchiashvili).

The general assumption within Western academia, however, that ethnicity is not, *a priori*, given but socially constructed, has had its impact on how scholars view inter-ethnic relations and how they analyse inter-ethnic conflicts. It is largely assumed that, since ethnicity is "imagined", "invented" or "constructed", it cannot be the "real" cause of inter-ethnic tensions. This is why actors' beliefs – in itself a qualitative category – have largely been reduced to "interests" and "power", assumed to be more "uniform" categories and, therefore, more "valid" reasons for engaging in violence (Grosby, 1994, p.167; see also Connor [1993] 1994). While the tendency in

[338] See, for instance, author's interview with Levan Berdzenishvili (November 2011, Tbilisi).

the field of ethnic conflict studies to move beyond ethnicity and explore other motivational factors for political behaviour is welcome, this should not be taken to the extreme of neglecting the study of "ethnicity" in "ethnic conflict" studies altogether. As this thesis has demonstrated, ethnic identity and its main contents – territory and language – remain at the heart of the Georgian–Abkhaz and Georgian–Ossetian conflicts and are crucial in understanding the politics of "belonging and exclusion" (Jenkins, 2012) in Georgia. Thus, any future reconciliation between these communities is unlikely to occur without addressing these "non-rational", "symbolic" issues first.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Map 1: Administrative Map of Georgia

Source: Nations Online Project (based on a UN map, UN Cartographic Section, Department of Field Support).

Map 2: Ethno-Linguistic Groups in the Caucasus

Source: Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, the University of Texas at Austin Libraries, Russia and the Former Soviet Republics Maps.

Map 3: Administrative Divisions of the Soviet Union in 1989

Source: Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, the University of Texas at Austin Libraries, Russia and the Former Soviet Republics Maps.

Appendix 2

List of Interviewees

Adamia, Vazha – January 2012, Tbilisi. Adamia was one of the founders and the head of the paramilitary organisation Merab Kostava Society in 1990.

Anchabadze, Giorgi (Gia) – November 2011, Tbilisi. Anchabadze is a historian. He is the son of a well-known Abkhaz historian Zurab Anchabadze.

Areshidze, Mamuka – October 2010, Tbilisi. At the time of the interview Areshidze served as the Director of the Caucasus Strategic Studies Centre. He was a Member of the Parliament of Georgia in 1995–9.

Batiashvili, Irakli – May 2006, Edinburgh. Batiashvili served as Georgia's Minister of Information and Intelligence in 1992–3.

Berdzenishvili, Levan – July 2006, Edinburgh and November 2011, Tbilisi. Berdzenishvili was one of the founders of the Republican Party of Georgia in 1978. He served as a Member of Parliament in 2004-2008 and again since 2012.

Chkheidze, Tamar (Tamriko) – September 2011, Tbilisi. Chkheidze was one of the founders and a chairwoman of one of the first informal organisations in Georgia in the late 1980s – Ilia Chavchavadze Society.

Dadiani, Zizi – November 2011, Tbilisi. Dadiani is an IDP from Gulripsha, Abkhazia.

Darchiashvili, Davit – July 2006, Edinburgh. At the time of the interview Darchiashvili served as the Director of the Open Society–Georgia Foundation. He has been a Member of Parliament since 2008.

Dzidziguri, Zviad – November 2011, Tbilisi. At the time of the interview Dzidziguri was a chariman of the Conservative Party of Georgia. He was elected to the Parliament in 2012.

Gelantia, Rapiel – December 2011, Tbilisi. Gelantia is an IDP from Gali, Abkhazia.

Gorgodze, Shota – October 2011, Tbilisi. Gorgodze served as the Minister of Internal Affairs (MVD) of the Georgian SSR in 1985–90. He was the Director of the Academy of the Ministry of Interior of Georgia (Police Academy) in 1994–2001.

Gotsiridze, Roman – November 2011, Tbilisi. Gotsiridze is a professor of economics. At the time of the interview, he was an adviser on economic issues to President Mikheil Saakashvili. He served as Georgia's Deputy Prime Minister in 1992–3, as a Member of Parliament in 1998–2004, and as the President of the National Bank in 2005–7.

Gugeshashvili, Avto – November 2011, Tbilisi. Gugeshashvili is an IDP from Gagra, Abkhazia.

Gulua, Bakur – November 2011, Tbilisi. Gulua served as the Communist Party First Secretary in the Gali region, Abkhazia. He was also Georgia's Minister of Food and Agriculture, and Vice-Premier in Eduard Shevardnadze's government.

Gurgenidze, Gela – December 2010, Tbilisi. At the time of the interview Gurgenidze worked for the Georgian media holding agency *Palitra Media.*

Jikashvili, Lela – October 2011, Tbilisi. At the time of the interview Jikashvili worked as a journalist at the Georgian newspaper *Kviris Palitra*.

Karkarashvili, Giorgi (Gia) – June 2006, Edinburgh and November 2011, Tbilisi. At the time of the interview Karkarashvili was a member of the political party Our Georgia–Free Democrats. He served as Georgia's Minister of Defence in 1993–4 and as a Member of Parliament in 1999–2004.

Kavlelashvili, Elene – December 2011, Tbilisi. Curator of the Treasury [Okros Pondi] of the Shalva Amiranashvili Museum of Fine Arts at the Georgian National Museum.

Khaindrava, Giorgi (Goga) – October 2010, Tbilisi. Khaindrava is a Georgian filmmaker who served as the State Minister of Abkhazia in 1992–3 and Georgia's State Minister of Conflict Resolution in 2004–6.

Khaindrava, Ivliane – October 2010, Tbilisi. At the time of the interview Khaindrava was a member of the Republican Party of Georgia.

Kiknadze, Levan – December 2011, Tbilisi. Kiknadze is a former Deputy Head of the Counterintelligence Service of the Abkhaz ASSR. He also served as a Minister of National Security in the Tbilisi-based government in exile of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia.

Khutsishvili, Lali – November 2011, Tbilisi. Khutsishvili is an IDP from Gagra, Abkhazia.

Lobzhanidze, Tsitso – October 2010, Tbilisi. Lobzhanidze is a paediatrician. She is an ethnic Georgian from Abkhazia.

Lomaia-Dadiani, Tsitso – November 2011, Tbilisi. Lomaia-Dadiani is an IDP from Gulripsha, Abkhazia.

Lortkipanidze, Mariam (Marika) – September 2011, Tbilisi. Lortkipanidze is a professor of history at Tbilisi State University.

Lortkipanidze, Vazha – November 2011, Tbilisi. At the time of the interview Lotkipanidze was a Professor at Grigol Robakidze University, School of Humanities and Social Sciences.

He served as Georgia's Ambassador to Russia in 1995–8. In 1998–2000 he was Georgia's Minister of State (Head of the Government). He served as a Member of Parliament in 1995–8 and 2001–4.

Maisuradze, Giorgi (Gogi) – December 2011, Tbilisi. Maisuradze worked at the Counterintelligence Service of the Abkhaz ASSR.

Maisuradze, Aleksandre – December 2011, Tbilisi. Maisuradze is an IDP from Sokhumi (Sukhum), Abkhazia.

Menagharishvili, Irakli – December 2011, Tbilisi. At the time of the interview Menagharishvili served as the Director of the Strategic Research Centre. He was Georgia's Minister of Public Health in 1986–91 and in 1992–3, Deputy Prime Minister in 1993–5 and Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1995–2003.

Natadze, Nodar – August 2006, Edinburgh and October 2010, Tbilisi. Natadze is a professor of philology. He was one of the founders and the chariman of the Popular Front of Georgia in 1989.

Ninidze, Nino – October 2010, Tbilisi. Ninidze is a Teacher of English language. Her parents are ethnic Georgians from Abkhazia.

Nodia, Ghia – October 2010, Tbilisi. Nodia is a professor of politics. At the time of the interview he was a Director of the International School of Caucasus Studies at Ilia State University. He served as Georgia's Minister of Education and Science in 2008.

Odisharia, Guram – October 2010, Tbilisi. Odisharia is a Georgian writer and an IDP from Sokhumi (Sukhum), Abkhazia. He served as Georgia's Minister of Culture and Monument Protection in 2012–4.

Papaskiri, Zurab – September 2011, Tbilisi. Papaskiri is a professor of history at Sokhumi State University where he has worked since 1976 (the University has been based in Tbilisi since 1993).

Papava, Vladimer (Lado) – November 2011, Tbilisi. Papava is a professor of economics. At the time of the interview he was a Senior Fellow and the Director of the Centre for Applied Economic Studies at the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (GFSIS). He served as Georgia's Minister of Economic Development in 1994–2000 and was appointed as the Rector of Tbilisi State University in 2013.

Patiashvili, Jumber – September 2011, Tbilisi. Patiashvili was the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Georgian SSR in 1985–9.

Poladishvili, Elga – September 2011, Tbilisi. At the time of the interview Poladishvili worked as a journalist at the Georgian newspaper *Asaval-Dasavali*.

Ratashvili, Nino – December 2011, Tbilisi. Ratashvili was a member of the national movement of Georgia in the late 1980s and early 1990s. At the time of the interview she worked as a journalist for the Georgian media organisation *Obiektivi.*

Rondeli, Aleksandre (Alika) – December 2011, Tbilisi. At the time of the interview Rondeli served as the President of the GFSIS.

Shengelia, Eldar – December 2011, Tbilisi. At the time of the interview, Shengelia chaired the Filmmakers' Union of Georgia. He was one of the founding members of the Popular Front of Georgia and served as a Member of the Supreme Council and the Parliament of Georgia in 1990–2004.

Sigua, Tengiz – September 2011, Tbilisi. Sigua served as the Prime Minister of Georgia in 1990–1 in Zviad Gamsakhurdia's cabinet and in 1992–3 in Eduard Shevardnadze's cabinet. He was one of the key members of the interim government of Georgia in 1992 – the State Council (preceded by the Military Council) that effectively ruled the country during that period.

Tarkhan-Mouravi, Giorgi (Gia) – October 2010, Tbilisi. At the time of the interview Tarkhan-Mouravi was a co-chair of the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD).

Tevzadze, Davit – December 2011, Tbilisi. At the time of the interview Tevzadze was the Vice-Rector of the IB Euro-Caucasian University. He served as Georgia's Minister of Defence in 1998–2004.

Tsereteli, Irakli – December 2011, Tbilisi. Tsereteli was one of the founders and the chariman of the National Independence Party of Georgia. He served as a Member of Parliament in 1992–5.

Uchadze, Zauri – January 2012, Tbilisi. Uchadze is a retired General of the Georgian armed forces. He headed the 2nd Army Division of Georgia's Ministry of Defence in 1993 and was in charge of its Arms Office in 1994–8.

Zakareishvili, Paata – October 2010, Tbilisi. At the time of the interview Zakareishvili served as the chariman of the Institute for the Study of Nationalism and Conflict (ISNC). In 1992–7 he was the head of the Commission of the Prisoners of War, Missing Persons and the Protection of Civilians in Conflict Zones in the Georgian–Abkhaz Conflict. In 2012 he was appointed as Georgia's State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality.

Appendix 3

Factbox 1 – Ethnic Composition of the Georgian SSR:[339]

Ethnic Groups	1989	(%)
Abkhaz	95,853	1.8
Armenian	437,211	8.1
Asirian	6,206	0.1
Azerbaijani	307,556	5.7
Belarusian	8,595	0.2
Chechen	609	0
Georgian	3,787,393	70.1
German	1,546	0
Greek	100,324	1.9
Jewish	24,720	0.5
Kurdish	33,331	0.6
Moldovian	2,842	0.1
Ossetian	164,055	3
Polish	2,014	0
Roma	1,744	0
Russian	341,172	6.3
Tatar	4,099	0.1
Turkish	1,375	0
Ukrainian	52,443	1
Other	27,753	0.5
Total: 5,400,841		

Sources: *Zarya Vostoka* (23 March 1990, p.2); *Results of the 2002 First National Census of Georgia* (2003, p.110).

[339] For more on the accuracy of the 1989 Soviet census see RFE/RL (7 April 1989b).

Factbox 2 – Ethnic Composition of the Abkhaz ASSR:

Ethnic Groups	**1989**	**(%)**	**1979**	**(%)**	**1970**	**(%)**	**1959**	**(%)**	**1939**	**(%)**	**1926**	**(%)**
Abkhaz	93,267	17.8	83,097	17.1	77,276	15.9	61,193	15.1	56,197	18	55,918	27.8
Armenian	76,541	14.6	73,350	15.1	74,850	15.4	64,425	15.9	49,705	15.9	25,677	12.8
Belorussian	2,084	0.4	1,311	0.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Estonian	1,466	0.3	1,445	0.3	1,834	0.4	1,882	0.5	2,282	0.7	-	-
Georgian	239,872	45.7	213,322	43.9	199,595	41	158,221	39.1	91,967	29.5	67,494	33.6
Greek	14,664	2.8	13,642	2.8	13,114	2.7	9,101	2.2	34,621	11.1	14,045	7
Jewish	1,426	0.3	1,976	0.4	4,265	0.9	3,332	0.8	1,982	0.6	-	-
Ossetian	1,165	0.2	952	0.2	1,214	0.2	-	-	-	-	-	-
Russian	74,913	14.4	79,730	16.4	92,889	19.1	86,715	21.4	60,201	19.3	12,553	6.2
Tatar	1,099	0.2	1,485	0.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ukrainian	11,655	2.2	10,257	2.1	11,955	2.5	11,474	2.8	8,593	2.7	4,647	2.3
Other	6,908	1.3	5,515	1.1	9,252	1.9	8,395	2.2	6,861	2.2	20,682	10.3
Total	525,061		486,082		486,959		404,738		311,885		201,016	

Compiled by the author using the following sources: *Zarya Vostoka* (23 March 1990, p.2) - for the years 1989 and 1979; see also RFE/RL (1 June 1978, p.2; 26 June 1978, p.6; 4 Sept. 1992, p.3); *Population of Abkhazia* (n.d.).

Factbox 3 – Ethnic Composition of the Sukhum *Okrug* of Kutaisi *Guberniya*:[340]

Ethnic Groups	**1897**	**(%)**	**1886**	**(%)**
Abkhaz	58,697	55.3	28,323	41.2
Armenian	6,552	6.2	1,090	1.6
Georgian	25,873	24.4	4,166	6.1
German	-	-	245	0.4
Greek	5,393	5.1	2,149	3.1
Russian	5,135	4.8	1,090	1.6
Samurzakanian	-	-	30,640	44.6
Turks	1,347	1.3	-	-
Other	3,079	2.9	962	1.4
Total	106,179		68,773	

Source: *Population of Abkhazia* (n.d.) (compiled by the author).

Factbox 4 – Ethnic Composition of the South Ossetian Autonomous *Oblast*:

Ethnic Groups	**1989**	**(%)**	**1979**	**(%)**
Armenian	984	1	953	1
Georgian	28,544	29	28,187	28.8
Ossetian	65,232	66.2	65,077	66.4
Russian	2,128	2.1	2,046	2.1
Other	1,639	1.7	1,725	1.7
Total	98,527		97,988	

Source: *Zarya Vostoka* (23 March 1990, p.2).

[340] What would later become the Abkhaz ASSR.

Appendix 4

Zviad Gamsakhurdia's Speech at the Founding Meeting of the Popular Front of Georgia in 1989:

> In most regions of Georgia there are newspapers published in two languages already; not only in Abkhazia, not only in South Ossetia, but in other places too. [In certain regions we have] newspapers in two and three languages, even in four languages. I am telling you soon we will have four official languages in Georgia. Georgia is a country of Georgians – this axiom should be presented and manifested in this programme [of the Popular Front], and the constitution [of Georgia] should reflect the interests of the Georgian nation. And at the same time [it should reflect] the interests of every *individual* despite their nationality [applause from the audience], and not the interests of *nations.* We are not here to defend Azerbaijan's interests, my friends. And if there is anyone who does, then they will no doubt be defeated [applause]. Once again here we have the Kremlin's policy of privileging Ossetians and Abkhaz in Georgia. For some reason Abkhazia and [South] Ossetia are emphasised and the Popular Front is fighting for the rights of the Abkhaz and for the rights of Ossetians. Abkhaz and Ossetian interests have a very good defender in the shape of the Kremlin [applause] … You [Popular Front] defend Georgia's interests. (1 Arkhi TV, 27 Feb. 2010; 1 Arkhi TV, 23 April, 2010)

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