When Sugar Cane Grows in the Snow[1]:
Ethno-Nationalist Politics and the Collapse of the Georgian State

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ABSTRACT – *This paper examines Georgia's transition from Soviet rule to independent statehood in 1991, focusing primarily on the relationship between the political ideology within the independence movement and the failure of the development and construction of the Georgia Republic writ large. It is shown that, while there is no single overarching explanation for the collapse of the Georgian state, one critical line of causation is drawn from the effects of a radical ethno-nationalist discourse within the dominant Georgian political culture. This analysis draws from theories of state collapse, as well as the empirics of the Georgian case. This allows for the assertion that the socio- and ethnopolitical fractures which emerged after independence were diametrically opposed with the political discourse of ethno-nationalism. The conclusion drawn from this is that the ethno-nationalist response aggravated the principle challenges to the Georgian state-building process sufficiently to cause outcomes which were detrimental to the viability of the Georgian state.*

RÉSUMÉ – *Ce travail traite de la transition de la Géorgie depuis la gouverne soviétique à un État indépendant en 1991, en se concentrant principalement sur les relations entre l'idéologie politique au sein du mouvement indépendantiste et l'échec du développement et de la construction d'une République au sens propre. Il est démontré que, bien qu'il n'y ait pas une seule théorie qui contiendrait une explication globale de l'effondrement de l'État géorgien, une ligne critique de causalité est présente comme effet d'un discours ethno-nationaliste radical à l'intérieur de la culture politique dominante en Géorgie. Cette analyse s'inspire de théories de l'effondrement de l'État ainsi que de l'étude empirique du cas géorgien. Ceci nous permet d'affirmer que les fracture sociales et ethno-politiques qui ont émergées après l'indépendance était diamétralement opposées au discours de l'ethno-nationalisme. La conclusion qui en est tirée veut que l'ethno-nationalisme ait assez aggravé les principaux défis à la construction de l'État géorgien pour causer des conséquences négatives à la viabilité de l'État géorgien.*

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[1] Georgian proverb: "When shall blood cease to flow in the mountains? When sugar cane grows in the snow" (Goldenberg, 1994, p.2).

"Nobody Else Has Ruined Their Own Country, As Much As We Ruined Ours"

The story of Georgia's transition from a Soviet republic to independent statehood is one of the most perplexing narratives of the dissolution of the U.S.S.R. Within the region, Georgia has always been uniquely significant. Situated on the southeastern fringe of the European security system, Georgia lies at the crossroads between Europe and Asia, and also serves as a buffer between the Middle East and Russia. Georgia marks the obscure geographical border between Christianity and Islam, and is also the home to the competing interests of a multiplicity of ethnic groups.   In contemporary geopolitics, it is a key actor in the regional security system of Transcaucasia and Central Asia, and it is a vital stakeholder in the Caspian and Black Sea oil network. Given the historical complexity and strategic importance bestowed upon Georgia, the challenges typical to most post-communist states manifested themselves with an unusual intensity (Herzig, 1999, p. 147). Nevertheless, there was tremendous optimism from both within Georgia, as well as the international community, as to the viability of an independent Georgian state. In 1990, the Georgian population voted 85% in favour of an independence-government (Uppsala, 2003), and sovereignty followed in the spring of 1991. However, within nine months, the first independent government had been ousted in a violent coup, ensuing in a two-year civil war. At the same time, tensions with ethnic minorities climaxed in two distinct and bloody intrastate conflicts. By 1993, the Georgian state had collapsed in ruins.

Political scientists have pondered the causality behind the failure of Georgia's transition, which is all the more confounding given the initial outpouring of popular support toward independence. A variety of different explanations for this state failure have been suggested, including the role of political actors at the individual level (Nodia, 1995 and 1996), the challenges of democratization in a context of nationalism (Snyder, 2000), and the political economy of ethnic war (King, 2001). For Georgia, the cause of collapse is over-determined: that is to say that there were a number of different casual mechanisms at work, all of which were necessary and sufficient. As such, it would be incorrect to establish one set of determinants as the sole cause of the failure of the Georgian state-building project. By looking at the relationship between ideology within the independence movement (which later formed the first independent government) and the failure of the (re)construction of the Georgia Republic writ large it becomes apparent that there is no single overarching explanation for the collapse of the Georgian state, but one critical line of causation can be drawn from the effects of a radical ethno-nationalist discourse within the dominant Georgian political culture. This should not, however, be mistaken as an assumption that ethno-nationalism was unto itself sufficient for the collapse of the Georgian state. Rather, in the context of the problems emblematic of Soviet successor states, ethno-nationalism acted as a key component in shaping political behaviour. In turn, this ultimately led to the irreconcilability of the reconstruction process within the realities of the post-independence political environment. This analysis is broken into four sections. In the first, a theory of state collapse is contextualized within the Georgian case, which leads to the assertion that the socio- and ethnopolitical fractures which emerged after independence were diametrically opposed with the political discourse of ethno-nationalism. The second section outlines the defining features and overarching significance of ethno-nationalism within the Georgian independence movement and the subsequent national government. The third and fourth sections analyse the relationship between ethno-nationalism and the principle challenges to the Georgian state-building process: unresolved ethno-territorial disputes, power struggles within the national government, and the influence of the Soviet Union / Russian Federation. The conclusion drawn is that the ethno-nationalist response aggravated all three factors sufficiently to cause outcomes which were detrimental to the viability of the Georgian state.

Understanding State Collapse in a Georgian Context

To understand the significance of a dominant radical ethno-nationalist political discourse, it is important to first establish a conceptualization of the theory and mechanics of state collapse.

According to the research on failed states by Martin Doornbos, collapse occurs when the "basic functions of the state are no longer performed" (2002, p. 799). Building on this, collapse is the antithesis of successful state-building, and is the failure to "[establish] viable government institutions capable of controlling and administering key resources and of sustaining themselves beyond the political lives of individual office holders" (Herzig, 1999, p. 6). Collapse in Georgia was defined by a combination of compromises of territorial integrity (through the loss of South Ossetia and Abkhazia), fragmentation of political authority (highlighted by the coup of January, 1992), and political subjugation to the former metropolitan power (made apparent by Georgia's forced membership to the C.I.S. in 1993). The process by which such collapse occurs is multi-causal, with a number of different – and often parallel – trajectories leading to disintegration. According to Doornbos, it is "hardly realistic to assume a single path or set of determinants" (2002, p. 803). That said, it is possible to identify specific conditioning and facilitating factors which influence the path toward collapse. The failure of the Georgian state mirrors Doornbos' paradigm of a "basic mismatch between the nature and orientation of state institutions and the socio-political processes and divisions within the society concerned" (2002, p. 804). Examined in detail below, the ethno-nationalist ideology driving the national government after independence was irreconcilable with the internal and external socio-political cleavages challenging Georgian state-building.

THE GEORGIAN ETHNO-NATIONALIST MOVEMENT: QUALITIES AND SIGNIFICANCE

The impact of Gorbachev's policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* were manifested in the empowerment of national independence movements throughout the Soviet Union. While most breakaway post-Soviet states were united in their usage of anti-Soviet political activism as the vehicle to independence, nationalist movements in the Caucasus were differentiated by the co-existence of three important features (Herzig, 1999, pp. 8–9). First, the uniting factor for nationalist movements in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan was the perceived distinct language and culture of the dominant ethnic groups within each state: in the case of Georgia, there was a desire to see a 'Georgia for the Georgians'. Second, the challenge faced mutually by the Caucasus states was the issue of "unfinished [domestic] territorial business" (Herzig, 1999, p. 9). Explaining these first two characteristics is the legacy of Soviet rule (Coppieters, 2001; Cornell, 2001; Goldenberg, 1994). Throughout the U.S.S.R., the Soviet government frequently maintained its political hegemony through *korenizatsiia* ('divide-and-rule' politics), which created and/or manipulated social or ethnic divisions to confine the political aspirations of its subjects (Demetriou, 2002, p. 864). These policies had the contradictory effects of creating a sense of popular nationalism, through "[popularizing] concepts of historically-validated exclusive national territories," while at the same time "[suppressing] nationalist expression" (Herzig, 1999, p. 7) through the use of overarching, dominant Soviet institutions. The final important characteristic of nationalism in the Caucasus was framing of the independence movement as an objection to perceived Russian domination, expressed in terms of nations (political and social) being the victims of 'forced incorporation'. In Georgia, this was related to the 1921 annexation of the Georgian state by the Bolsheviks. Accruing from this, the nationalist independence movement defined itself foremost as the antithesis of Soviet rule.

While many other post-Soviet states shared these traits to one degree or another, Georgia was a prime example of how ideologies could lead an otherwise promising transition astray. The hegemony of an ethno-nationalist ideology, combined with a popular sentiment premised on rejecting Soviet domination, had tremendous impacts on the post-independence political culture of Georgia. It at once instilled a disdain for compromise, a disregard for political reality and an attachment to historical revivalism. The rhetoric and behaviours espoused by ethno-nationalism squared the new Georgian state against both the Soviet / Russian regime and various domestic minority nationalities, and as well it crystallized tensions within the Georgian political elite. Popular ethnic rivalry and military insecurity were not preordained to lead to state collapse; it was the way in which the ethno-nationalist independence government in Tbilisi responded to these challenges, through an "increasingly forceful

articulation and pursuit of national aspirations," that led to the conflict which undermined the state-building processes (Herzig, 1999, p. 10; Snyder. 2000, p. 191).

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to consider the long-standing roots of this ethno-nationalist movement, it is important to consider the proximate causes for its emergence as the dominant discourse. While there existed a tension between the radicals and moderates within the independence movement over the appropriate path to self-government, the policies of the Georgian Communist Party (GCP) silenced any hope of popular support for the moderates (Nodia, 1995, pp. 108–9). Specifically, the April 9th 1989 massacre of twenty protestors in central Tbilisi not only delegitimized the GCP, but it also strengthened the hand of the radicals, who promoted the belief that independence was impossible if collaboration within the existing political structures was pursued (Goldenberg, 1994, pp. 96-7). Following the 1990 parliamentary elections, which saw Zviad Gamsakhurdia's left-wing Round Table-Free Georgia coalition capture 85% of the vote (McFaul, 2002, p. 240; Uppsala, 2003), it became obvious that Georgian politics, free to choose its own path for the first time in nearly seventy years, would be dominated by radical ethno-nationalist ideologies. The effects of this on the reconstruction of an independent Georgian state were disastrous.

CONFLICTS FROM WITHIN – ETHNO-TERRITORIALISM AND INTRA-GOVERNMENT FRACTURE

The challenges to the state-building process which surfaced after independence were neither unique to Georgia nor beyond plausible reconciliation. However, the responding behaviours were a product of the ethno-nationalist ideology permeating Georgian political culture; accordingly, rather than acting in a manner that sought mutually acceptable end-states, the hegemonic political actors pursued zero-sum courses of action. After analysing the ethno-territorial and intra-government issues which surfaced between 1990-92, it becomes apparent that ethno-nationalism was crucial in accounting for the antagonistic political behaviours, which were ultimately detrimental to the state-building process.

Many authors devalue the ethno-territorial conflicts between both the Abkhaz and the Ossetian minority groups and the government in Tbilisi as the culmination of a long-standing historical rivalry. This is true to an extent, insofar as the seeds of mutual animosity and distrust date to Soviet policies in the 1920s. However, Soviet manipulation of ethnicity for political purposes was not unique to Georgia, and, accordingly, such 'historical legacy' arguments do not provide a sufficient causal explanation for conflict; they merely serve to contextualize it. The critical mechanism preventing the reconciliation of these competing interests was the dominance of an ethno-nationalist discourse within the Georgian independence movement. Tensions began to manifest themselves in the latter stages of the pre-independence period, when it became obvious that the radicals (the 'irreconcilables') were to be the dominant figures within the independence movement. As was mentioned previously, theirs was a struggle based in anti-Soviet terms; however, there was more to the language of independence than simply a negative Soviet regard. The dissident ethos, uniquely enshrined within the ethno-nationalist ideology, emphasized the primacy of the Georgian nation (in both political and cultural terms). According to the radicals, the solution to the Soviet occupation was seen in terms of statehood based on the hegemony of the Georgian 'titular nation', which was to be inherently politically and culturally exclusionary toward all non-Georgian communities (Coppieters, 2001, p. 22; Demetriou, 2002, p. 868).

The election of the ethno-nationalists to parliament in October 1990, followed by the May 1991 election of their leader, Gamsakhurdia, to the Presidency, solidified the role of ethno-nationalism within Georgian political discourse. Gamsakhurdia, despite his dictatorial trappings, appealed to mass opinion, particularly within Tbilisi's political circles. While popular nationalism failed to reach a consensus on the specific design of the new Georgian regime, it was agreed that there would be a unification of all Georgian territory within their 'historic homeland' (corresponding to the borders of the Georgian Republic), under a single administration in Tbilisi (Demetriou, 2002, p. 869). The prospects for the maintenance of the autonomous territories within Georgia were bleak. Furthermore,

fearing the territorial ambitions of the ethnic minorities, Gamsakhurdia encouraged Georgian immigration to the autonomous republics, particularly Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Herzig, 1999, p. 77). The primacy of Georgian language and culture, and the political authority of Tbilisi, were quickly asserted over the regions through the appointment of Georgian nationalists to key posts within the central and local governments (Demetriou, 2002, p. 870, Herzig, 1999, p. 74).

The ethnic minorities viewed the ethno-nationalist rhetoric as a "latent threat" (Demetriou, 2002, p. 873) to their survival. These threats took on a more pressing nature following early indications of how the central government planned to deal with minority groups. Accordingly, alternative discourses on Georgian statehood were formed by minority groups, which were spatially defined within autonomous republics inside a federalist framework; a legacy from the Soviet-era, which had been designed to protect their cultural and political autonomy. While it is speculative to ponder to what extent ethno-nationalism influenced these alternate dialogues on statehood, it is clear that it was the most powerful factor motivating which the Abkhazian and Ossetian groups to consider alternative solutions for their autonomous republics. By the elections of 1990, "mutually exclusive visions on the future of the political system in Georgia" had developed between the ethno-nationalists and the ethnic minorities. Contrary to the consolidation of political power within a central government in Tbilisi, the Ossetians and Abkhazians insisted on greater political and institutional autonomy, allowing them to manage their own affairs as equals to the Georgians (Demetriou, 2002, p. 869). By 1991, following Gamsakhurdia's antagonistic policies, popular demands within the minority communities called for the political and social re-orientation of their autonomous units toward the Soviet Union / Russian Federation (Demetriou, 2002, p. 869). The Abkhazian Supreme Soviet declared its sovereignty from the Georgian Republic in August of 1990, and in the spring of 1991 a majority of Abkhazians voted in favoured joining the proposed reconstituted Soviet Union (Herzig, 1999, p. 77). The South Ossetian Supreme Soviet followed a similar path, having declared sovereignty as an independent subject of the U.S.S.R. by the end of 1990 (Herzig, 1999, p. 74).

The overt physical conflicts between the ethnic minorities and Tbilisi were caused, in both instances, by the Georgian national government. They reflected a desire in Tbilisi to protect the ethnic Georgians living with Abkhazia and South Ossetia who were ostensibly being harassed and abused by Abkhaz and Ossetian separatist militias. Whether this was in fact a motivating factor for the Gamsakhurdia and Shevardnadze governments remains contested. However, the mere use of it as justification clearly indicates the preferencing of the ethnically Georgian peoples, rather than a pluralistic desire to amicably resolve the social and political tensions at the root of the conflict. Ethno-nationalist political behaviour also explains the refusal on the part of Tbilisi to pursue a negotiated end to the conflict. The Georgian leadership, pointing to historical claims of pre-eminence over all of Georgia's territory, adopted a zero-sum approach to dealing with the minorities. However, these antagonistic policies did not take into consideration the exogenous factors, such as Russian geopolitical meddling (discussed below), that would ultimately lead to a *de facto* sovereignty in South Ossetian (1992) and Abkhazian (1993). The loss of these territories represented the failure of a key component of the Georgian state-building project - the consolidation of its territorial political authority (Herzig, 1999).

Ethno-nationalism, which had brought the country to the point of forming its first independent government, was, ironically, also a key factor in catalysing the fragmentation of that very same regime. The most obvious point is that the ethnically-biased political culture served to blind the Georgian elite to the methods of modern political behaviour; in particular, this applied to the lack of creation of democratic institutions, framed within a liberal political culture, which were necessary for the Georgian state to overcome its divisions (Nodia, 1995, p. 108). That is not to say that dialogue over the issue of democracy was absent from Georgian politics. In fact, the principal rift in the Tbilisi government between 1990-91 concerned the most appropriate path toward an eventual democratic regime. However, given the overwhelming minority of liberal thought in Georgian politics – a legacy of the Soviet Union – Gamsakhurdia's election on a popular ethno-nationalist platform quickly ended this debate. Between the elections in 1991 and the coup in 1992, Georgian (ethno-)nationalism was

the principal means by which power was institutionalized within the new regime (Demetriou, 2002, p. 864). Moreover, this autocratic despotism had been, from its very inception, institutionalized along ethno-nationalist lines. For example, in the parliamentary elections of 1990, the ethno-nationalist independence movement excluded any regional or ethnically-based political parties from participating (Herzig, 2002, p. 74).

Gamsakhurdia's downfall was not due to his failure to pursue democracy or his preference for autocratic means of leadership; it was, in fact, owing to a more apparent source. In the summer of 1991, Gamsakhurdia's government began to crack down on paramilitaries, controlled by Tengiz Kitovani and Dzhaba Ioseliani, who had been using nationalist rhetoric to harass various poorly-defined ethnic groups, while in reality carving Georgia into neo-feudal fiefdoms for personal plunder. Realizing that their political and economic monopolies were threatened, Kitovani and Ioseliani responded with the New Year's (1992) coup. Obviously, their toppling of a *democratically*-elected regime could not be justified in terms of democratization; instead, they invoked popular ethno-nationalism, claiming that Gamsakhurdia's refusal to persecute the increasingly vocal separatist groups was harmful to the integrity of the Georgian nation-state. The result of their ascension to power was the entrenchment of a political vocabulary of violence within the state apparatus, alongside the already dominant discourse of ethno-nationalism, which thus guaranteed the "impossibility of articulating a peaceful and inclusive vision of political order" (Demetriou, 2002, p. 871). Within a few short months of independence the incompatibility of ethno-nationalism with the dominant patterns of political patronage had become apparent. The resulting fragmentation of political authority severely constrained the future viability of state-building in Georgia.

CONFLICTS FROM WITHOUT – THE 'SOVIET FACTOR'

The impact of the Soviet legacy in shaping an ethno-nationalist discourse within the post-independence Georgian government was tremendously important. However, as Georgians are quick to point out, the role of the Russians in influencing their independence was not limited to a historical narrative. To the contrary, one of the most active and influential factors in the outcome of the Georgian state was the 'Soviet factor' (Nodia, 1996). The Russian military doctrine of 1991, which "[asserted] a sphere of influence that coincides with the one maintained by the U.S.S.R." (Cornell, 200, p. 340), was a clear indication of Moscow's desires for hegemony in the Caucasus. The motivations for Russian meddling in the region were numerous, the foremost of which was an obvious interest in preserving the security structures of the U.S.S.R. to protect Russia's southern borders (Nodia, 1995, p. 104). As Cornell identifies, beyond security concerns Russia's actions in Georgia were influenced by a set of desires revolving around geopolitics, economic interests, and political animosity with the post-Soviet states (Cornell, 2001, pp. 340-1). The independence of Georgia challenged this ability to assert Russian hegemony in the Caucasus. Accordingly, the strategy pursued by Moscow between 1990 – 1993 was to destabilise the Georgian state in order to thwart the success of the independence movement and force Tbilisi to acquiesce to Russian needs. Conveniently for Moscow, the destabilising effect of ethno-nationalism in Georgia presented precisely the right opportunities for Russia to achieve this objective.

The autocratic tendencies of Gamsakhurdia created a tremendous image problem for Georgia, insofar as the Western powers quickly wrote the fledgling nation off as an example of a failed transition. Europe and America's disinterest in Georgia gave Russia the freedom to intrude in the Georgian state-building project without concern (Goldenberg, 1994, p. 93). The civil and ethnic conflicts that unfolded between 1991–1992 provided the pretext needed by Moscow to achieve its doctrine of "aggressive reintegration" (Cornell, 2001, p. 341). The civil war arising from the ousting of Gamsakhurdia provided the first opportunity for Russia to meddle. Specifically, the weapons supplied to both the National Guard and Mkhedrioni militia units, who were involved in fighting the Zviadists (supporters of Gamsakhurdia), were directly linked to Soviet / Russian military bases in Georgia (Cornell, 2001, p. 346). At the same time, Russia was assisting Gamsakhurdia's supporters

by broadcasting Zviadist propaganda throughout Georgia and by providing intelligence to the rebel forces (Goldenberg, 1994, p. 86). Ultimately, it was only with the assistance of Russian forces that Shevardnadze was able to defeat the rebels in 1993.

The civil war was itself not sufficient to completely undermine the Georgian state. Recognising this, Moscow played a decisive role in supporting both the South Ossetian and Abkhazian separatist movements. In the case of the former Russia's support was primarily political, focusing on encouraging the Ossetian separatists with vague references to repatriation with their ethnic brethren in North Ossetia, which was an autonomous republic within the Russian Federation. As well, Moscow did little to disguise its willingness to annex South Ossetia and go to war against Georgia if peace was not achieved immediately (Cornell, 2001, p. 346). This brinkmanship worked and Georgia sued for peace within weeks. Russia's aim, however, was not a humanitarian one. After the cessation of hostilities Russia did little to make good on its promises to the Ossetians; rather, Russian intervention in the conflict had the different purpose of "weakening of Georgia and the interposition of Russian troops in South Ossetia" (Cornell, 2001, p. 346). Russian support for the Abkhazian separatists was more overt, reflecting a growing impatience within Moscow at Georgia's continued refusal to join the C.I.S. (Demetriou, 2002, p. 872). Military support, including weapons, equipment and, on a number of occasions, troops, were channelled to the Abkhaz government through the Russian military bases at Gudauta and Bombora, both within Abkhazia (Herzig, 1999, pp. 77-8). Again, Russia's motivations were anything but altruistic, as is obvious by the willing interposition of peacekeeping forces, following the cessation of hostilities, which frequently engaged in skirmishes with the very separatists that Moscow had been supporting months before (Cornell, 2001, p. 344).

The political landscape provided by the dominance of an ethno-nationalist discourse – that is, an environment of fragmented political authority and distinct socio-political cleavages – provided the necessary context for Russia to realize its aim of further destabilising the Georgian state. The success of the ethnic minority groups in defeating the Georgian nationalists could only have been achieved with Russian assistance (Economist, 2004). In turn, the expulsion of Georgian political authority from these two territories meant that they had moved beyond the control of the Georgian state, and had achieved *de facto* independence (Nodia, 1995, p. 114). Moreover, the protraction of the civil conflict between the national government and the Zviadists was to a large extent a result of a prolonged equilibrium of power between the two parties, ensured by calculated Russian support to both sides. The only resolution to the conflict was through 'official' Russian 'assistance' to the national government. The demands placed on Shevardnadze's government for this assistance, however, achieved Moscow's overall objective: the subordination of Georgia into a Russian-dominated sphere of influence (Herzig, 1999, p. 49). It was by this point, at the end of 1993, that the building of an independent Georgian state had reached an impasse. The Georgian state had, for all intents and purposes, collapsed.

CONCLUSION

Georgia's first experience at contemporary statehood was disastrous. By 1994, ethnic antagonisms had led to several regions gaining *de facto* independence; national politics and the economy were personalized and used for criminal activities under the governance of warlords-*cum*-mafia bosses; and a firm Russian military presence in the country, tantamount to colonialism, was established (Demetriou, 2002, p. 860). To many scholars, "Georgia [had] played out most, if not all, of the nightmare scenarios that a pessimistic political scientist might devise for postcommunist states" (Nodia, 1995, p. 104). For Georgia's state-building project to have been successful a multiplicity of factors would have been necessary; the institutionalization of democratic structures to allow for both conflict resolution and state consolidation would be the foremost consideration. However, it is not surprising that this did not take place in Georgia. The historical legacies of Soviet rule planted the seeds for the creation of an *intelligentsia* that was highly nationalistic but with little exposure to moderating liberal discourses. The policies of the Soviet Union in the 1980s empowered this ultra-

nationalist sentiment, while at the same time offering no permanent structures for ameliorating the numerous conflicts waiting patiently below the surface. As such, a radical and uncompromising ethno-nationalist political discourse dominated Georgian politics at the threshold of independence and immediately thereafter.

The continued impact of ethno-nationalist political discourse was made strikingly apparent in recent years, owing to a number of events which have served to highlight the on-going failure of Georgia's state-building process. Using Doornbos' framework of state collapse as a point of reference, one notes the continued compromise of territorial integrity (through the *de facto* independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, as well as renewed conflict in South Ossetia in 2004); fragmentation of political authority (highlighted by the Rose Revolution of 2003); and continued political subjugation to the former metropolitan power (apparent by continued presence of Russian 'peacekeepers' on Georgia soil, despite adamant protest by Tbilisi). The significance of the seemingly stalled nature of Georgia's state (re)construction and socioeconomic development process lies in a wider recognition of the extent to which the ideology of post-Soviet independence movements continues to affect the political behaviour of semi-democratic and autocratic regimes in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe.

While this paper has focused solely on Georgia, ethnonationalism and its effects on state building are certainly not isolated to this case. The intrastate conflicts that transpired throughout the South Caucasus in the 1990s, as well as the revolutions of late in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, were all informed in large part by the entrenched political discourses. The vocabulary of these discourses at once provided the incumbent regimes and their challengers with a menu of options for political behaviour, as well as serving to blind these groups to alternate recourses. Beyond short-run considerations of transformation and change within the political sphere, these discourses have also significantly influenced the socioeconomic development trajectories of the states of the region. In 2004, the World Bank released a report which pointed to the lack of change in levels of poverty and inequality in the region, in states such as Georgia and Tajikistan, despite the successes of their more liberal neighbours in Eastern Europe (World Bank, 2004). This is in large part a result of the regimes' failure to ensure that the benefits of economic growth since the early 1990s were shared among all groups of the population (World Bank, 2004). Given the growing instability in the Caucasus and Central Asia, simultaneous to their increased geopolitical significance of late, it is important that academics and policy makers alike recognise the extent to which underlying discourses of political behaviour underpin all political and economic realities in these states.

It is worth returning to the case of Georgia in order to answer the final question of why ethnonationalism undermined the state to the extent that it did. In light of the findings presented in this paper the answer is a surprisingly simplistic one. Given the impossible likelihood that such a political ideology would ever be able to resolve the ethnic, territorial and geopolitical challenges that were presented to it, many authors have concluded that collapse was inevitable (Demetriou, 2002; Nodia, 1996), if not also *de rigueur* for the long-term reconstruction of the Georgian state (see Garreton-Merlno, 1999; Tishkov, 1999). Returning to Doornbos' theory of state collapse, in situations paralleling that of Georgia, "it may well be more prudent to allow fresh departures to emerge out of [the] situation than insisting on re-instatement of the previous failing state structures" (Doornbos, 2002, p. 805). The attempt to impose a distinct ethno-nationalist political agency upon increasingly dysfunctional Soviet governance structures prevented any hope of reconciling the inevitable post-independence conflicts in a manner which would guarantee the viability of the state. As such, in many respects the only viable solution was a complete breakdown. Thus, purging the state of its historical and political 'baggage.'

One must be reminded to exercise caution in attempting to apply typologies and paradigms to such multilayered conflicts in the Caucasus, as these issues defy minimalist explanations (Tishkov, 1999). In the case of Georgia, the period of 1990-1993 must be considered within the broader context of the state-building project, which remains uncertain to this day. Even Georgia's exemplar statesman and president, Eduard Shevardnadze, was far from the panacea to Tbilisi's state-building woes. In

many ways, Shevardnadze typifies the experience of Georgian independence. Elected with popular support following the ousting of Gamsakhurdia, Georgians quickly realized that they had brought to power an autocratic kleptomaniac, who to a certain degree was tied to the puppet strings of Moscow. The 2003 'Rose Revolution' was a clear signal to the world that Georgians remained dissatisfied with their bitter taste of independence. It has also reminded the world that processes of state-building in the region are as uncertain as the weather.

APPENDIX A: CHRONOLOGY OF STATE COLLAPSE

1801		Georgia annexed by Czarist Russia. Until then, it had been divided between the Ottoman Empire and local principalities.
1918-1921		"First Georgian Republic: Followed the break-up of Russian empire. It was a period of independence, and formal recognition by several Western powers, which lasted until 1921.
1921		Georgia and principalities were re-conquered by the Red Army of Bolshevik Russia. Later, Abkhazia and South Ossetia were granted a degree of cultural and political autonomy.
1931		Stalin makes Abkhazia & S. Ossetia autonomous republics and oblasts, respectively, within Soviet Georgia. Ethnic quotas established for certain bureaucratic posts, giving Abkhaz disproportionate political power within the republic, part of Soviet 'nativization', essentially divide-and-rule, policies. Georgians counter this through attempts to exert strong central rule from Tbilisi and policies of "Georginization."
1987	Jan	*Perestroika* – USSR embarked on policy of democratisation and economic modernisation. For the first time, national organisations were allowed to operate openly
1988		Push for Georgian independence begins in earnest. At the same time, the emergence of 'popular front' organizations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.
1989	Apr 9	Soviet troops kill 20 peaceful pro-independence demonstrators in Tbilisi. Signals the end of the Georgian Communist Party's legitimacy as the ruling government body (Demetriou, 2002, p. 868).
	Jul 16	16 Georgians killed, 137 injured, by Abkhazian nationalists following pro-Georgian protests in the Abkhazian capital, Sukhumi.
	Aug 25	Creation of an Assembly of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus (primarily Abkhazians, Ingush, Kabardians and Chechens). Essentially a popular front for ethno-territorial independence movements. It played a vital role as a semi-organised paramilitary force in supporting Abkhazian and Ossetian separatist militias (Chervonnaya, 1994, p. 152)
	Nov	Clashes between Georgian nationalists and Ossetians in Tskhinvali, capital of South Ossetia (Goldenberg, 1994, p. xii)
1990	Mar 11	Independence of Lithuania and the beginning the collapse of the U.S.S.R.
	Aug 25	Abkhaz Supreme Soviet declares Abkhazia to be a sovereign republic in the U.S.S.R. (O'Ballance, 1997, p. xxv)
	Oct	First multi-party elections in Georgia, pro-independence parties defeat the Georgian Communist Party with 54% of votes (Chervonnaya, 1994, p. 154; Uppsala)
	Dec 11	Georgian parliament removes autonomous status of South Ossetia.
1991	Mar 17	Gorbachev's All-Union Referendum; majority of Abkhazian population vote in favour of a Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the basis of a renewed treaty, that would see Abkhazian autonomy subordinated directly to Moscow. Similar

		results in South Ossetia.
	Apr 9	Georgian parliament votes to secede from Soviet Union.
	May 27	Former Soviet dissident Zviad Gamsakhurdia elected president of the "Second Georgian Republic", with 85% of the votes (McFaul, 2002, p. 240; Uppsala Conflict Data Program)
	Sep 11	30 opposition groups unite and demand the resignation of Gamsakhurdia (Uppsala, 2003)
	Sep 22	Tbilisi is divided into 'armed camps' of pro- and anti-Gamsakhurdia militias; first (civil) conflict-related death (Uppsala, 2003)
	Dec 8	U.S.S.R. ceases to exist; foundation laid for the Commonwealth of Independent States, which Georgia refuses to join
	Dec 21	South Ossetian Supreme Soviet withdraws from Georgia, declaring sovereignty and subordinating South Ossetia to the U.S.S.R.
	Dec 22 - Jan 06	Anti-government militias stage a coup against Gamsakhurdia, who is forced to flee the country after a tense standoff in Tbilisi
	Dec 23	General mobilisation of Georgian government forces against South Ossetian separatist militias; first (South Ossetia-Georgia) ethnic conflict-related death (Uppsala, 2003)
1992	Jan 02	Anti-government opposition forms a Military Council, headed by paramilitary commanders Tengiz Kitovani and Dzhaba Ioseliani.
	Jan - Mar	Mkhedrioni (militia loyal to Ioseliani) units retake major towns in western Georgia, previously occupied by Zviadists; despite a truce (18 March), low level fighting and skirmishes continue until June, 1992, when hostilities flare up again.
	Jan 19	South Ossetian referendum on unification with North Ossetia which returns favourable vote.
	Feb 21	Georgia's ruling Military Council announces abolishing of the Soviet-era constitution and restores the 1921 Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. Many minority groups interpret this as an abolition of their cultural and political privileging.
	Feb 28	Eduard Shevardnadze (former Soviet Foreign Minister, instrumental in the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, and former leader of Georgian Communist Party) returns to Georgia to head the Military Council-*cum*-Georgian State Council (Goldenberg. 1994, p. xiii).
	Jun 24	Cease-fire between Georgia-South Ossetia is supervised by combined Russian, Georgian, South Ossetian peacekeeping force, which is authorised by the United Nation. Ossetian ethnic composition of South Ossetia declines to 15%.
	Jul 23	Abkhazian Supreme Soviet declares 'intent' to secede from Georgia, and desire to preserve Soviet Socialist system in Abkhazia.
	Jul 25	Georgian State Council deploys Georgian National Guard to Sukhumi, in response to Abkhazian militias taking Georgian hostages; commencement of Abkhazian-Georgian conflict.
	Aug 14	First (Abkhazia-Georgia) ethnic conflict-related death (Uppsala, 2003)
	Oct 11	Georgian parliamentary elections, in which Shevardnadze elected by popular majority to chairman of parliament. Elections considered 'free and fair' by Western observers.
1993	Jul	Abkhazian conflict, stalemated until this point, escalates. Abkhazian militia launches summer offensive against Georgian-held Sukhumi. The city falls on 27 September.
	Aug	Zviadists step up rebellion in western Georgia. Gamsakhurdia returns from exile.

	Fall	Major offensive by Zviadists against government forces.
	Oct 8	Shevardnadze brings Georgia into the C.I.S. Obtains Russian military assistance against Zviadist rebels, in return for numerous military and political concessions to Moscow
	Dec 31	Civil conflict between Zviadists and government forces ends with the death of Gamsakhurdia.
1994	Apr 4 - May 14	Moscow agreements: cease-fire and political principles on settlement to Abkhazian-Georgian dispute; creation of Russian peacekeeping force and UN Observer Mission. By this point the Abkhazian ethnic composition in Abkhazia has increased from 17% (1989) to 45% (1993), following the mass exodus of over 250,000 ethnic Georgians. The causalities for the conflict are estimated at over 10,000.
	Sept	Beginning of IMF "economic shock therapy" policies; liberalizing prices for bread and energy; increased poverty and unemployment results
1995	Nov	Elections in Georgia, in which Shevardnadze is re-elected to the reinstated post of President (O'Balance, 1997, p. xxvi)
2003		"Rose Revolution"; Eduward Shevardnadze deposed and replaced by Mikhail Saakashvili.
2006	Jan	Gas pipelines into Georgia blown up in alleged 'terrorist' attack. Most Georgian's believe it was orchestrated by Russia in effort to send signal to anti-Russian government in Tbilisi.
	Feb	Georgian parliament votes in favour of expelling Russian peacekeepers from South Ossetia. Russia issues thinly veiled warning of intent to support South Ossetian separatist rebels if Georgian troops attempt to enforce Russian expulsion.

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