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Ethnopolitical Regimes and State-Minority Relations: A Comparative Case Study of Abkhazia, Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli in Georgia

MA thesis

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Tartu 2021

Abstract

After the collapse of the Soviet Union (SU), recently independent governments with heterogenous populations had to find ways to establish a new political power balance between the ethnic groups. But while some nation-building processes resulted in peaceful ethnopolitical confrontations, other state-minority relations developed into ethnic war and secessionism. This master thesis seeks to explain different outcomes of relationships between a government and its ethnic minorities in the context of ethnopolitics and ethnic conflict. Two variables accounting for ethnic conflict are: exclusion of non-core groups and a high political mobilization of ethnic minorities. Starting from there, this study analyzes when a host-state decides to exclude non-core groups from state power, as well as what factors account for a high political mobilization of an ethnic minority. The mechanisms are deduced from two main theories – the politics of nation-building by Mylonas (2013) and ethnopolitical situations by Pettai (n.d.) – and applied in a few-n comparative study to three Georgian minorities: from the most violent form in Abkhazia to a milder form of unrest of Armenians in Javakheti and finally a case with a very low mobilization potential of Azeris in Kvemo Kartli. The comparative study shows that the decision of a host-state to exclude a minority is influenced by the international alliance-system. The political mobilization and consequently the reaction of a minority group to an exclusionary ethnopolitical regime depends on the resources it has gathered throughout historical processes, including the support of an external ally, grievances or strong social cohesion. The thesis is one of the few studies accounting for the relationship between all three players involved in ethnopolitical relations – the state, the minority and external powers – and for the broader geopolitical context of ethnic power struggles. Hence, this study crucially adds to the ability of understanding the mechanisms of ethnopolitics and conflict. Finally, this thesis is the first study that compares Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli in their differences, contributing to our understanding of nation-building processes and minority behavior in an under-researched part of the post-soviet space.

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Introduction

With the collapse of the Soviet Union (SU), nations that had previously belonged to this multi-national council republic, became independent states. Additionally, most of these former communist states now faced a transition towards democracy. While some of them could draw from a history of democratic statehood prior to the incorporation into the SU, others had none or limited historical experience in this regard, and thus, after 1991 faced greater challenges when (re)defining their nationhood.

Since the democratic principle is based on the idea of legitimization of power from 'The People', one of the most crucial questions for emerging democracies is about citizenship and state borders: Who belongs to 'The People' of a nation, and who, on the other hand, belongs to 'The Others' (Nodia, 1994)? These questions were even more pressing considering that the emerging post-soviet states had to deal with minority-communities that ethnically diverged from the core group of the new states, a legacy that resulted from the Soviet border drawing intended to weaken the political units (Hunter, 2006, p. 113). Those ethnic minorities suddenly found themselves behind newly emerged borders, that changed the ethnic configuration and power balance that had before existed in the society of a multi-ethnical SU. Hence, apart from the establishment of a new political regime, the emergent states additionally had to find a way to deal with the various ethnic groups, and a new ethnic power-balance had to be installed. Since the process of defining 'The People' and creating cohesion necessary for democratic transition disposes of no rational a-priori criteria, this situation brought with it a potential for conflict:

> "Many nations have to convince some marginal ethnic groups that "you are our kind", while the latter claim that "we are different and should be independent", or "I belong to others". Almost every emerging nation has to deal with ethnic minorities, which are viewed with suspicion as potential traitors and which in their turn consider the majority as would-be oppressors" (Nodia, 1994, p. 45).

In many cases, ethnic nationalism (the idea that "ethnic likes should rule over ethnic likes", Cederman, Wimmer and Min, 2010, p. 92) became a driving force in the democratic transition during the early years of independence of many post-communist countries. Vis-à-vis this wave of ethnic nationalism, some minorities worried about forced assimilation or the undermining of their own cultural values and reacted with counter-nationalism. They started to claim territorial independence for themselves in response, a phenomenon termed by scholars *matryoshka-nationalism* (Hughes and Sasse, 2001).

Interestingly though, this process did not unfold everywhere in the same manner. The nation-building policies towards non-core groups and consequently the state-minority relations took various forms among the former Soviet Republics: it ranged from autonomous concessions to assimilationist policies or exclusion. Some minorities cultivated diplomatic relations with their central governments and have maintained a non-violent negotiation approach throughout the

years, despite tensions remained. Their demands for self-rule remained within the cultural range or were limited to some autonomous concessions, without striving for full independence. Other minorities, on the other hand, developed a militant separatism and strong requests for autonomy or independence, resulting in ethnic war and in some cases secession. The forms of ethnic relations vary among different minority groups even within one state (see e.g. Siroky, 2016; Brubaker, 1996).

From those different transition outcomes ensues a set of fascinating questions about how latent ethnic tensions between a majority and a minority group can evolve into large scale ethnic conflicts, how some non-core groups manage to peacefully coexist with their nation-state, while others militarily challenge the status quo, and why some nations politically and economically marginalize ethnic non-core groups, while others choose to integrate them and delegate political power across ethnic lines. Hence, the research question of this thesis is: which factors influence the relationship between a government and a non-core group in the context of ethnopolitics?

One case of a multi-ethnic country in which state-minority relations took very diverse forms after the Soviet dissolution is Georgia. While some minority communities maintained non-violent relations with the government and did not demand self-governing rights, others got involved into an ethnic war and seceded from Georgian territory (Cornell, 2002). Hence, the Master thesis will analyze three cases of Georgian minority communities that reflect different inter-ethnic situations and levels of political mobilization ranging from the most violent form in Abkhazia to a milder form of unrest of Armenians in Javakheti and finally a case with a very low mobilization potential of Azeris in Kvemo Kartli (e.g. Cornell, 2002; Siroky, 2016).

The study will try to explain the variation in the outcome of ethnic power struggles by looking at the ethnopolitical regime a state implements. A prominent study that examines how certain ethnic power configurations foster violent conflict was conducted by Cederman, Wimmer and Min (2010). They come to the conclusion that the more an ethnic group is excluded from state power, the higher its willingness to take violent rebellious action. Other factors they define as favoring conflict is a high mobilization capacity of a group, as well as past experience with conflict. Starting from these presumptions, the overall research puzzle will be divided into two sub-questions: First, when does a host-state decide to exclude non-core groups from state power? Second, which factors account for a higher political mobilization of an ethnic minority? In order to explain the nation-building policy of Georgia with regard to ethnic non-core groups, the theory by Mylonas (2013) will be adduced. He assumes that the host-state's choice for a certain ethnopolitical regime is influenced by its interstate relations with external powers, that support the ethnic minority. To analyze the various reactions of the three Georgian minorities to the nation-building policies of their host-state, resources the ethnic minorities possess and that account for their mobilization capacity will be examined, following Pettai (n.d.). In short, the study is an attempt to explain Georgia's ethnopolitics and its implications for the ethnic relations with its ethnic minorities.

The puzzle of this study is not only one of the most interesting aspects of the post-soviet transition, but also, one of the most relevant. Since the early 1990s ethnic and nationalist wars have risen from around 40 to about 80% of worldwide wars (Wimmer, 2013. p. 3), indicating that 4/5 wars today result from ethnopolitical power-struggles. Its relevance is also reflected in a growing number of studies analyzing the connection between ethnic power-competition and violent conflict (See e.g. Woodwell, 2004; Cederman, Wimmer and Min, 2010; Taras and Ganguly, 2002;). Hence, analyzing ethnopolitics crucially adds to our ability of understanding the mechanisms of conflict, and consequently, preventing them by incentivizing governments to assume nation-building policies that favor a peaceful coexistence of ethnic groups. This is most relevant in multi-ethnic states that have not yet completed the process of establishing democracy and are still struggling to stabilize inter-ethnic relations within their society. Such is the case in many former SU-countries, whose dissolution caused a reorganization of national boundaries and ethnic power-balance. Thus, analyzing Georgian ethnopolitics crucially adds to our understanding of nation-building processes in the post-soviet space and how they affect ethnic relations and conflict.

The structure of my thesis will be the following: In chapter 1, the conceptual framework for analyzing various ethnopolitical regimes as well as resource constellations influencing minorities' mobilization will be outlined. In chapter 2, a short presentation of the research design and methodology will follow. In chapter 3, the historical formation of Georgia's ethnic constellation will be described. Chapter 4 will treat the analysis of Georgia's ethnopolitics, comparing the ethnopolitical regimes of the three Georgian governments between 1991 and 20013, as well as the resource configurations of our three cases and how they influenced the variations in their political mobilization. Finally, a conclusion will wrap up the findings of the study and give a short outlook of the future development of the region.

1. Analyzing Ethnopolitical Regimes and Ethnic Mobilization in the Post-Soviet Space

A much-acclaimed analytical model for examining ethnopolitical power-struggles in Central and Eastern Europe is Rogers Brubaker's (1996) triadic nexus, in which he defines a conflictual triangular relationship between the ethnic minority, their host-states and their ethnic kin states as responsible for many disputes (Brubaker, 1996, pp. 55-57). According to the author, new nation-states promote a certain political homogeneity, which conflicts with the demand of their minority-communities requesting certain degrees of self-rule and feeling alienated from the center. As third player of the conflictual triadic nexus, Brubaker adduces a neighboring state that shares ethnic kin with the minority and steps in as self-declared 'external national homeland' (ibid, pp.57-58). This external homeland then monitors the situation of its kin and emphasizes the group's minority rights, which can lead to tensions with the host-state, which sees its sovereignty infringed.

While Brubaker's model offers a useful direction when it comes to the levels of analysis, his definition of the third involved player, the external national homeland, is too narrow to be applied to all cases of the post-soviet area. There are cases in which ethnic kin states did not assume an active role, and hence, did not become external national homelands, while in other cases, external powers supported a minority without sharing ethnic kin with the group (Mylonas, 2013). For instance, Ukraine's engagement for diaspora-communities in Russia or Poland has been limited, and declarations of cultural ties have not translated into active foreign policy steps (King and Melvin, 1999, pp. 124-127). On the other hand, India militarily intervened on behalf of the Muslim community of former East Pakistan, decisively contributing to the emergence of independent Bangladesh. The intervention had mainly political motives, since the two community do share ethnic kinship (Heraclides, 1990, p. 349; 365). Finally, while Brubaker's model indicates the actors and the relations that should be examined when analyzing ethnopolitics and ethnic conflict, it does not explain why or under what conditions the triadic nexus becomes conflictual.

Another approach that deals with a triadic constellation of actors involved in ethnic power-struggles is Harris Mylonas' (2013) theory on the politics of nation-building. The strength of his theory lies in the fact that he does not restrict external intervention to ethnic kin states but includes the intervention of third players that may have no ethnic ties to the concerned minority: "In my framework, however, the external actor does not have to be a national homeland, ethnic kinship does not have to be the motivation or even the excuse for external involvement […]" (Mylonas, 2013, p. 37). This way, the broader geopolitical picture and international dynamics are considered, when examining ethnopolitics, without strictly focusing on ethnic kinship.

Additionally, Mylonas' theory offers a useful explanation for Georgia's nation-building approach with regard to ethnic minorities, by exploring "conditions under which a state is likely to assimilate, accommodate, or exclude a non-core group" (ibid., p. 2). Examining why a host-state adopts certain policies and attitudes towards a minority is crucial for understanding ethnic minorities' political mobilization and, ultimately, ethnic conflict. It brings us closer to answering *when* the relationship between a government and a minority becomes conflictual, an aspect, Brubaker misses to address. Cederman, Wimmer and Min (2010) come to the conclusion that the likelihood of ethnic conflict is closely related to ethnopolitical struggle for state power. More precisely the scholars find that: "Large ethnic groups that are excluded from state power or underrepresented in government are much more likely to challenge the regime's insiders through violent means" (Cedermann, Wimmer and Min, p. 114).

Hence, in order to extrapolate factors accounting for the variation in majority-minority relations as it is the case in Georgia, what influences a state's decision to exclude an ethnic minority needs to be examined first. This explains the usefulness of Mylonas' (2013) theory for the research problem.

However, looking at factors influencing state's behavior vis-à-vis a non-core group is not enough to explain variations in majority-minority relations; a closer examination of the non-core group needs to be done as well, in order to give a wholistic picture of ethnopolitics. Here

again, our analytical focus starts from the results of Cederman, Wimmer and Min's (2010) work, in which they conclude that the reaction of a non-core group to its host-state's nation-building policies depend on their mobilization capacity (Cederman, Wimmer and Min, p. 88). Therefore, in the second part of the theoretical chapter, I will address factors accounting for the degree of mobilization a minority can achieve.

Many scholars analyzing ethnopolitics have argued that certain traits and experiences a group disposes of, can influence their tendency to mobilize and to rebel. For instance, territorially concentrated groups are expected to pursue a harder fight for self-determination than dispersed and small groups (e.g. Weidmann, 2009) Similarly, when non-core groups have experienced accommodation, for instance through a past autonomy, and now lost it, a higher mobilization capacity is ascribed to them (e.g. Siroky and Cuffe, 2015). Also, past grievances and conflictual historical myths nurture minorities' propensity to fight ethnic conflicts (e.g. Kaufman, 2001). Finally, the extent of cohesion and leadership of a group is adduced as influencing a minority's behavior (e.g. Treisman, 1997).

Basically, what accounts for these factors is – apart from the actual ethnopolitical regime and host-state's nation-building choices – the specific historical configuration, the mode in which the ethnic constellation of a state was formed. This historical configuration and its implications for a minorities' mobilization will be conceptualized in the second part of this chapter under the term ethnopolitical situation, following Pettai (n.d).

1.1 Ethnopolitical Regimes and their Geopolitical Context

Ethnopolitical regimes – that is state policies that structure political relations between ethnic groups vis-à-vis the state power (Pettai, n.d) – are established during the nation-building processes. Different kinds of ethnopolitical regimes have been classified by various scholars, even though they did not use the term 'regimes'. Coakley (1992) for instance, provides a typology of strategies that nation states dispose of when dealing with ethnic diversity. He defines eight "ethnic management strategies" that he classifies according to three dimensions: the physical survival of the group, the territorial survival of borders and the cultural survival of the group. His types range from the most inclusive to the most exclusive form of ethnic power distribution, including various types of power-sharing, federalist options like territorial autonomies, and ethnic cleansing. McGarry and O'Leary (1993) offer a similar typology with overlapping types but use different characteristics to their categories (are the state's ethnic policies designed to eliminate or manage differences?) and additionally order them normatively. They refer to their concept as a classification for different types of 'ethnic conflict regulation' (McGarry and O'Leary, 1993, p. 1).

Mylonas (2013) categorizes his theory to explain three categorical types of ethnopolitical regimes (that he calls 'nation-building policies': (1) exclusion, (2) assimilation and (3) accommodation. The first refers to "[…] policies that aim at the physical removal of a non-

core group from the host-state (or specific areas of it)" (ibid, p. 22). Exclusionary policies also include forms of segregation that do not involve a physical removal of the population. However, Mylonas classifies exclusionist measures as the most violent form of discriminatory ethnic regime, since often from such policies ensue refugees and victims of state violence. McGarry and O'Leary (1993) stress that population transfers often result from the perception of 'ethnic swamping' (ibid. p. 10) and that it is especially justified for territories, which the state interprets as homeland stolen by settlers. With the second type of policy, according to Mylonas (2013), a host-state aims at national homogenization by coercing a specific ethnic minority to adopt the majority's culture and language. Assimilationist policies can include educational, demographic, cultural or political measures but also more violent actions such as colonization of the minorities' territories, internal displacements or exclusion of the elites of the minority group. Assimilation is often found in those types of nation-states that promote nationalist discourses underlining the supremacy of the dominant nation and aiming at the creation of a homogenous culture and language. Such policies follow the goal of national integration (Mylonas 2013, pp. 21-22). Typical practices include the refusal to give minorities more self-administrative rights in the cultural or political sphere or limiting educational institutions in the minorities' native language. (Coakley, 1992, p. 349). Moreover, assimilationists usually try to eliminate ethnic political parties with the argument that this would lead to segregation (McGarry and O'Leary, 1993, p. 17). Finally, according to Mylonas (2013) a host-state can opt for accommodation, the least violent form of ethnic regime, although it can include discrimination. In case of accommodation, the majority group aims at preserving, instead of eroding, the cultural differences between the ethnic groups. Accommodation also comprises some form of institutions that regulate and monitor the respect for such cultural peculiarities of the non-core group as well as separate institutions like schools, cultural associations etc. for the ethnic minority (ibid., p. 22) According to Coakley (1992, pp. 347-349), the degree of cultural and political rights within this type varies. They range from power sharing at the central level, to power sharing in a decentralized manner such as territorial autonomies, or simply some minority rights based on a legal framework such as those developed under the League of Nations Minorities Treaties. Another important element of this type is that the federative sub-unit should reflect the territory of the minority community in order to produce an effective outcome of a peaceful co-existence (McGarry and O'Leary, 1993, p.33).

What influences a host-state's decision to adopt a certain ethnopolitical regime? Here, the relationship between host-state, its minority and external power that Mylonas (2013) describes comes into play. First of all, he starts from the presumption that in a nation-building process, the elites of the majority group seek to preserve their power position. They ultimately aim at eliminating non-core groups that are perceived as a threat to their nation-building objectives. If a minority is allied with or supported by an external power[1] that the host-state views as an

[1] Mylonas discusses states as main external actors. However, he does not exclude non-state actors as external supporters such as religious groups, diasporas or non-governmental organization (NGOs). Still, he acknowledges the methodological difficulty of definind a non-state actor as 'enemy' or 'friendly' power. Similarly, this master thesis will focus on external support from state-actors.

enemy, the minority group is automatically considered a higher security threat, than a minority close to an ally state.

External powers that support the minority group's interests (neighboring states, kin states, great powers or diaspora groups) can be either an enemy or an ally to the host-state. An intervention from an external enemy in most cases aims at destabilizing the host-state or provoking secession, whereas an intervention of an external ally does not. Although both types of interventions have in mind supporting the non-core group's cultural peculiarities and maintaining ties with the minority group, protecting the interests of the minority mostly serves as an excuse.

A factor to be considered when explaining ethnopolitics is the relative state capacity:

> "[…] One extreme a situation where the power balance is clearly in favor of the external power(s) supporting the non-core group. In this case, a successful secessionist movement or the capture of the host-state is likely. […] Turning now to the cases where the power balance is clearly in favor of the host-state, enemy external powers will hesitate to support non-core groups […]" (Mylonas, 2013 p. 25).

From those assumptions, Mylonas (2013) deduces which ethnopolitical regime a state most likely adopts. A host-state expects that accommodating a minority allied to an enemy power increases the threat of the state's territorial integrity in the future. From this ensues that accommodation is an unlikely ethnic regime-option for minorities that share ethnic kin or are geopolitically close to states considered an enemy by the host-state's government. Instead, nations choose either assimilation or exclusion vis-à-vis an ethnic minority that is actively supported by an enemy-power. The choice for either assimilation or exclusion depends on the foreign policy goals of a state. If the government's foreign policy follows a revisionist approach, the state is prone to pursue more violent forms of discrimination, most likely exclusionary policies. If, on the other hand, the government's aim is to pursue the status quo, it probably opts for assimilating the minority group, since exclusion would trigger new hostilities and hence increase the risk of a new fighting. Another factor accounting for the choice of the ethnic regimes when minorities are supported by an enemy state is the urgency to act:

> "To be sure, assimilation is more likely than exclusion if there is enough time for it, but otherwise more brutal, decisive measures may be taken. For instance, in wartime a status quo host-state may pursue exclusionary policies if it faces a non-core group supported by an enemy simply because it has no time for assimilationist policies" (ibid., p. 44).

Even if a minority is not actively supported by an external power, a host-state takes into account its relationship with other states and how a potential future intervention of that state could interfere in its nation-building objectives. Mylonas (2013) assumes that assimilating a minority is considered by host-states to reduce the likelihood of future external interventions. From this follows that assimilation is the most likely ethnic regime in case the non-core group is supported by no external power, even more so, if he is allied with enemy-states.

Contrarily, if the minority is actively supported by an ally state, accommodation is the most likely ethnic regime that a state will choose for the respective minority. Mylonas draws this conclusion from the assumption that states regards "the strategic benefits coming from the alliance with an external power [as] greater than the cost of accommodating the non-core group supported by that power" (ibid. p.36).

To summarize Mylonas' (2013) argument explaining states' choice of ethnopolitical regimes: a state's decision between eliminating ethnic differences by either assimilation or exclusion and promoting ethnic differences through accommodation is mainly based on the international alliance system. If a non-core group is actively supported by a state-actor the host-state considers as enemy, the host-state's government is likely to choose a marginalizing ethnopolitical regime. More precisely, assimilation becomes likely in case the host-state wants to avoid a change of the international status quo, while exclusion becomes the most likely scenario in case the host-state is immediately threated by war and has no time to implement assimilationist policies or when the host-state seeks revisionist foreign policy goals. If a non-core group is not supported by any state, especially if the minority holds friendly relations with an enemy power, they are expected to be targeted with assimilationist policies, in order to prevent potential future interferences of the external enemy of the host-state. Finally, a government chooses to accommodate a non-core group when the minority is actively supported by an external power allied with the host-state, since the benefit of accommodation outweighs the costs.

So far, motivations that drive host-states to adopt a certain ethnopolitical regime have been presented. What remains to conceptualize now is the political mobilization of an ethnic minority of a state. What motivates a non-core group to contest the ethnopolitical regime a government has imposed on them, and what, on the other hand, accounts for silent acceptance, despite exclusionary politics?

1.2 Resources for Political Mobilization of Ethnic Minorities

Political mobilization of ethnic minorities in this study refers to a politicized ethnicity and the actions that ensue from it. As Fearon (2006, p. 2) notes, ethnicity can be socially relevant, but not politicized. Ethnicity is a socially relevant characteristic from the moment a group recognizes its ethnic distinction. But ethnicity only becomes politicized – and consequently becomes a potential conflicting element– when political coalitions are organized along ethnic lines in order to gain economic or political benefits (ibid. p. 6). The degree of political mobilization of an ethnic group can vary between different communities as well as between different points in time (ibid, p. 2).

Similarly, Gurr defines minorities as a group "whose core members share a distinctive and persistent collective identity based on cultural and ascriptive traits that are important to them and to others with whom they interact" (Gurr, 1993, p. 163) and adds that their identities can

be defined as politically salient when "the group is the focus of political mobilization and action in defense or promotion of its self-defined interests" (ibid.). The more determined, persistent and extreme those (re)actions to defend or promote the interests of the ethnic group are, the higher we can define the political mobilization. In other words, a stronger political mobilization or politicized ethnic identity entails stronger reactions of an ethnic minority to an exclusionary regime, as well as more decisive political demands. Cederman, Wimmer and Min (2010) show that "a conflict with the government is more likely to erupt […] the higher their mobilizational capacity [of an ethnic group] is […]" (ibid., p. 88). Consequently, a high political mobilization increases the likelihood of conflictual state-minority relations.

Those findings raise the question: how can political mobilization of ethnic minorities be explained? Which factors amount for a higher politization of a non-core group and consequently, stronger political demands of that group? In order to define possible variables that account for a higher degree of political mobilization by ethnic minorities, the study will draw on structural theories of ethnic nationalism. Such structural theories "identify the circumstances in which potential ethnic groups become energetic political actors, typically by specifying how political and economic changes affect the interests and organization of people who already share identity and social organization" (Tilly, 1991, p. 572).

In order to understand the mobilization potential of ethnic minorities, it is crucial to trace back how the ethnic group became a minority in that particular state in the first place. In other words, the historical configuration of a nation and its minorities is one ethnopolitical factor that helps to explain the stance an ethnic minority has towards the central government and vice-versa. One of the first scholars that recognized that the historical formation of a nationhood is crucial in understanding present-day ethnic relations was Richard Schermerhorn (1978), who described the circumstances under which ethnic groups ended up under one state territory as 'inter-group sequences' and defined those as crucial when theorizing ethnopolitics. He then classified five types of inter-group sequences: *pariah groups* (territorially dispersed, socially excluded but economically integrated), *indigenous isolates* (when people historically bound to territory become dominated by a more modernizing group), *annexation* (where a cohesive group is taken over by another group), *migrations* (comprising slavery, forced labor, displaced people and voluntary immigrants) and *colonization* (where the new group becomes majority). Other authors that raised the issue of historical formation were Gurr and Harff (1994). They put a stronger emphasis on the effects of historical formations on ethnic minorities' later stance towards their host-state, stating that past experiences of minorities "provide the fuel for contemporary political movements" (ibid., p. 16). According to the scholars, to understand the scale of political mobilization and demands an ethnic minority develops in the modern nation-building process of the state they live in, grievances and the sense of identity formed through historical processes must be analyzed:

"It is essential, when one is trying to understand the passion and persistence with which ethnic groups pursue their objectives, to analyze the general historical processes and the particular experiences that have shaped each people's sense of identity and their grievances" (Gurr and Harff, 1994, p. 17-18).

Gurr and Harff offer four different categories of historical processes that led to four types of ethnic groups with distinct characteristics, mobilization potentials and ethnopolitical attitudes. The first type of ethnic minority is referred to as *ethnonationalists,* regionally concentrated groups that have at some point in history lost their autonomous or even independent status. The political activity of ethnonationalists is mainly characterized by demands of greater self-rule. The second type of ethnic community refers to original inhabitants of a territory that have been colonized or conquered, so-called *indigenous people.* They do not strive for their own state, but demand that their lands, resources and culture be protected. A third category of ethnic group is termed *communal contenders*, who, together with one or more other ethnic groups share a state that in its historical development has become home for a plural society. They all feel as part of this state and dispose of large political resources. Last, Gurr and Harff categorize the group of *ethnoclasses,* and define them as: "culturally distinct minorities who occupy distinct social strata and have specialized economic roles in the societies in which they now live" (Gurr and Harff, 1994, p. 23). This type of ethnic minority was historically mainly formed by immigration or slavery, and today often faces discrimination. Demands that ethnoclasses may rise are therefore equal political rights, improved public services as well as better economic conditions.

While those conceptualizations are a valuable base for exploring historical circumstances accounting for ethnopolitical power struggles, they are not necessarily applicable to the post-soviet space. Neither Schermerhorn, nor Gurr and Harff distinguish between the original state-formation movements of the 17th and 18th century and the nationalist movements of the late 19th and 20th century, which followed as a result of the spread of nationalism from Europe towards the rest of the world (Greenfeld, 1992). Such a differentiation was made by various scholars (e.g. Breuilly, 1994; Giddens, 1985; Hobsbawm, 1990) with the argument that the new historical context of latter nation-building processes influenced the way elites had to form their nation and exert political authority over people. Similarly, Nodia (1994) differentiates between original democracies (north-western European and North American countries) from so-called imported democracies (like Eastern Europe countries), stating that the ethno-political struggles in the former cases were balanced by decades-old political institutions that had not yet been developed in the latter cases. Hence, Nodia calls for a differentiation of democracy-building in former countries of the SU from the processes that took place in the original nation-states like England or France.

Thus, the following study will apply Pettai's (n.d.) classification of ethnopolitical situations and its implication for political mobilization, since he offers a concept that builds on Gurr and Harff's categorization, but that differentiates first-stage from second-stage ethnopolitics. Thus, it is better applicable to ethnopolitical struggles of the post-soviet era that this case study addresses. Pettai states that the historical formations of the 20th century happened under much more complicated conditions than first-stage ethnopolitics, where ethnic groups were brought together under a new political form – the nation state – on the base of a common ethnicity or territorial contiguousness (e.g. France, Italy, Germany or Netherlands). However, starting from the late 19th century, as a result of the expansion of travel and transport, global human migration as well as conquest, ethnic groups found themselves under much more heterogenous political

constructs. Consequently, the process of dividing and exerting modern state power over ethnic groups was a much more complicated effort in those heterogenous groups than during the birth of the first nation-states.

Based on these assumptions, Pettai offers the following classification of second-stage ethnopolitical situations: *colonialism*, which combined heterogenous ethnic groups into random new territories and made peoples *constituent contenders (*where no group dominated). At the same time, colonialism generated *territorial nationalist groups* who wanted to establish a new territorial identity for their people by transcending the ethnic diversity of their territory. A third group that ensued from colonialism is defined as *sub-territorial nationalists*; they used to be privileged with special status under colonial rule and now seek to restore this special status in their post-colonial state, which can be reflected in demands for autonomy or independence. A second ethnopolitical situation Pettai adduces is *settlement*, in which case a migrating group becomes the dominant majority of the new territory. Such a historical formation generates *indigenous peoples,* who want to protect their group vis-à-vis the *colonizing populations.* Historical processes that generated types of ethnic groups that remained a minority in the new territory were *slavery, organized labor migration and historical migration.* They all generated *communal contenders* in latter-day ethnopolitical struggles. Finally, the two ethnopolitical situations of *dispersed migration* and *modern-day migration* have both created territorially dispersed minority groups, namely *pariah groups*, who seek to maintain their group identity vis-à-vis persecution and *ethnoclasses*, people who fled to countries of the global north where they are subordinated.

What follows from this categorization for our explanation of political mobilization? The ethnopolitical situation generates a certain configuration of resources that account for the degree of political mobilization of an ethnic minority. In other words, depending on the historical formation of an ethnic minority, a non-core group disposes of certain political, social, normative and material resources that shape their subsequent ethnopolitical interactions with the host-state, and consequently, their political mobilization (Pettai, n.d). They do so by affecting two elements required for political mobilization: motivation and capacity. Normative resources, for instance, offer incentives to groups to mobilize against a perceived injustice and therefore count as motivation, while material or social resources can equip a minority with the necessary capacity to do so. Both elements – incentives for political rebellion as well as capacity for action – have been recognized by scholars as accountable for the degree of political mobilization (e.g. Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; Siroky and Cuffe, 2015). Those resources are generated not only from the ethnopolitical situation, but also from the ethnopolitical regime that structures the relationship between the dominant ethnic group and the subordinate ethnic group. In other words, the constellation of resources stemming from historical formation processes as well as from the actual ethnic power-distribution brings a kind of power-balance between the national state and the minority. This constellation can permit an ethnic minority to adopt a more or less cooperative stance towards the nation-state and make stronger or weaker claims for political and cultural self-governing rights. The more resources a minority disposes of, the more bargaining capacity and/or motivational incentives it has, and consequently, the higher its political mobilization potential. Those power constellations and resources can vary

among different minority groups, as well as within time (Pettai, n.d). In the following section I will try to systematize such resource array, by adducing structural theories that have dealt with the capacity and incentives for political mobilization and combining them with the ethnopolitical situation accounting for them.

1.2.1 Normative Resources

The first category of resources that an ethnic minority can dispose of comprises normative resources. They include claims that a minority can adduce vis-à-vis the state and that derive from the feeling of political discrimination or threat (Tilly, 1991; Wimmer, 2013), as well as from historical grievances (Pettai, n.d.). Gurr (1993) defines grievances of an unjust treatment in the past as one decisive motor for mobilization and factor that influences the claims a minority makes vis-à-vis the state: "If grievances [and group identity] are both weak, there is little prospect of mobilization by any political entrepreneurs in response to any external threat or opportunity" (Gurr, 1993, p. 167).

Looking at ethnopolitical situations, it becomes clear that colonialism has generated non-core groups that can put forward stronger normative claims, since they can refer to their circumstances as stemming from unjust conquest, the drawing of arbitrary borders, or from the often-adopted practice by the conquering powers to encourage immigration into the territories of ethnonationalists in order to shift the ethnic power balance (Gurr and Harf, 1994, pp. 16-17; pp. 19-20). On the other hand, migration as an ethnopolitical situation generates weaker normative resources. The ethnopolitical legitimacy of communal contenders formed by historical migration is often disputed, since people that migrated "voluntarily" are considered as part of another nation, and hence, political participation rights or forms of self-determination are hardly ascribed to them. Usually, communal contenders therefore limit their demands to simple recognition as equals (Pettai, n.d).

Another important normative incentive that leads to mobilization of non-core groups is the loss of autonomy, since it "[…] fosters ethnic resentment as a result of diminished status, which engenders grievances that are increasingly hard to appease" (Siroky and Cuffe, 2015, p. 5). Such a diminishment of status often applies to sub-territorial nationalist groups, who under Colonial rule enjoyed some privileges that they lost subsequently.

1.2.2 Material Resources

Apart from motivational factors, to which normative resources count, political mobilization of ethnic minorities also depends on the groups' capacity for action (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). For one thing, a rebellion requires material resources. This second overreaching type comprises the extent to which a group disposes of land and economic means. Economic advantages such as fertile land or natural resources can give a minority group more leverage to put forward stronger claims of political accommodation. Additionally, material resources support minority

leaders' argument that autonomy or independence would be economically advantageous for the ethnic community (Pettai, n.d.).

Using the framework of ethno-political situations, the ability to control material resources can be ascribed rather to territorial- or sub-territorial nationalists, since they historically used the land and its resources and might therefore be able to foster good living standards. This becomes harder for ethnopolitical groups stemming from migration, since they only gradually acquired land and resources (ibid.)

1.2.3 Social Resources

This type of resource deals with the social cohesion and organization of a minority group. Is the group as a whole connected through a strong feeling of collective identity? Does the community dispose of social structures, such as religious organizations that bind people together? Prazauskas states that:

> "A group's capacity for political organization and mobilization as a subject of politics will depend directly on its level of cohesion (or group solidarity), which, in turn, is determined by the basic system-forming characteristics of the group […]" (Prazauskas, 1991, p. 583).

Social organization is expected to stay lower, where a consistent homeland is missing (Prazauskas, 1991), as in the case of minority-groups that resulted from migration. Consequently, ethnic groups in immigrant states and communal contenders stemming from organized labor migration are generally less socially cohesive than sedentary groups, who lived on the territory for a longer period of time (Pettia, n.d.).

Lastly, it should be considered how weak social resources on the side of the host-state can affect the politization of a minority group. Wimmer (2013, p. 65) notes that the weaker a state's civil society and the weaker developed its voluntary organizations, the higher the probability that political formations and loyalties form along ethnic lines. He explains this by the fact that a lack of voluntary organizations on the state level means that "non-ethnic channels for aggregating political interest and rewarding political loyalty are therefore scarse" (p. 150). With the rationale of the above stated argument, it can be concluded that if there is no platform to form organizations able to increase cohesion and construct a common political culture for the society as a whole, the social organization forms at the ethnic-regional level. As a consequence, political loyalties result not on the state – but on the regional level, which increases minorities' social cohesion, and hence, their potential to ethnic political mobilization.

1.2.4 Political resources

At last, minorities can dispose of political resources. They include the actual political status a group has in terms of rights and political representation (Pettai, n.d.), as well as the nature of

the minority's leadership. Does the group dispose of radical leaders, a strong regional party or an ethnonational organization that enjoys strong support? To this point, Gurr notes that:

> "Whenever these sentiments can be organized and focused by group leaders who give plausible expression to members' grievances and aspirations, they animate powerful political movements and protracted communal conflicts" (Gurr, 1993, p.167).

Besides inner-political power-positions, external actors can become an important political resource for minorities: Non-core groups that have an external supporter are more likely to put forward political demands than those who enjoy no support from third players (Mylonas, 2013).

Additionally, the degree of mobilization, or the extend of political demands a minority puts forward, depends on whether its external supporter is an ally or an enemy to the host state. Since an external ally makes an effort to keep good relations with the central government, it will try to stabilize the state-minority relations and hence rather moderate a minority's political mobilization. From this Mylonas draws the hypothesis that minority-groups supported by allies of the host state "[…] may demand recognition and/or accommodation of their differences but not much more (Mylonas, 2013, p. 28). A similar argument is put forward by Nagle (2013). He argues that the presence of an external supporter can decrease the motivational and the organizational aspects leading to conflictual forms of ethnic political mobilization, like secession. For instance, military or diplomatic leverage by the external power may induce the host-state to treat their minority in a more respectful way, and therefore, limit the minorities' normative resources, such as claims of unequal treatment. Additionally, a kin state can provide material support in form of funding for the minority group's cultural institutions, education- and employment opportunities which again can yield the minority-group to assume a more moderate position vis-à-vis the host-state.

On the other hand, Mylonas states that "non-core groups supported by external enemies are more likely to demand autonomy or self-determination than those without external support (Mylonas, 2013, p. 28)." Following Mylona's assumptions, if the external supporter of the minority is an enemy to the host state, this might incentivize more extreme forms of mobilization, and lead the minority to put forward stronger demands, increasing the risk of a violent form or ethnopolitics. Ultimately, that is in fact the goal of most of external enemy powers.

To resume the key variables of the study: First, the ethnopolitical regime will examined: Is it exclusionary, assimilationist or accommodative? The theory provides two variables accounting for the political order and power distribution between an ethnic group and the host state: the international alliance system – is the supporter of the minority considered an ally or an enemy and therefore a threat to national security? – and the foreign policy goals of the host state – revisionist or status-quo? –. Second, the degree of political mobilization of an ethnic group will be explained. In other words, how strong are the ethnic group's political demands, and how extreme and persistent the measures to promote those demands? The variable explaining the minority's reaction vis-a-vis the ethnopolitical regime is the resource array of the non-core

group, which derives from its ethnopolitical situation, meaning the historical process of formation. The resources are divided in four types: normative, political, material and social resources, or, to use another categorization, into motivations and capacities for political mobilization.

2. Research Design and Methodology

The literature dealing with ethnopolitics comprises a wide body. The following study does not strive to find causal variables accounting for ethnic conflict, but it starts from a prior step: The aim of the study is to identify contextual factors that determine the ethnopolitical regime vis-a-vis different ethnic groups in Georgia and the different degrees of political mobilization of the groups, since both variables influence the potential for ethnic conflict (Cederman, Wimmer and Min, 2010).

First, the study will analyze when a host-state decides to exclude non-core groups from state power. In other words, what influences a state's choice of an exclusionary ethnopolitical regime? Then, factors accounting for the degree of political mobilization of a minority group will be examined.

This thesis will examine the empirical case of Georgia, because within the heterogenous country reside ethnic non-core groups with similar characteristics that display significant variations in their relationship with the central government. This enables a comparison between the three empirical cases of Abkhazia, Javakheti and Kvemo-Kartli and a distinction of those factors, attributable to the various state-minority relations. Moreover, by using three minority cases that all reside in one country, many factors can be controlled for, such as the phase of nation-building process the state finds itself in, its political system or economic prosperity.

While Abkahzia is an extensively researched case of ethnic war and secession, Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli are marginalized in the study of ethnic conflict since they produced no violent conflict. All three groups are territorially concentrated, Armenians and Azeris reside in border regions adjoining their ethnic kin states Armenia and Azerbaijan, while Abkhazia borders with its external ally Russia, including the North Caucasus region, in which their ethnic kin, the Carcassians, reside (Hewitt, 1999, p. 465). The communities are scarcely integrated into Georgian society, lack in Georgian language skills and live in poor socio-economic conditions. Despite their marginalized and precarious situation, only Abkhazia developed separatism and ended up in a violent conflict with Georgia. While to Javakheti, scholars ascribe a certain conflict potential – e.g. Siroky (2016, p. 69) refers to the region as "ticking bomb"– the political mobilization in Kvemo Kartli is perceived as almost non-existent, producing references such as "the sleeping giant" (Ibid., p. 72) or "the silent mass" (Cornell, 2002, p. 209).

An entitled question is, why this study skips the other two territorially concentrated minorities: Adjara and Ossetia. The former is considered irrelevant in political terms because Adjars do not perceive themselves as ethnically distinct from Georgians and thus their conflict is regional, not ethnic (Toft, 2001, p. 125). South Ossetia, on the other hand, showed a similar outcome to Abkhazia (secession), making a further comparison with this empirical case redundant.

To analyze the cases, this study uses eclectic theorization, a strategy that deduces and combines existing mechanisms of different theories and uses them to explain an outcome (see Beach and Pedersen, 2019, p. 63-67). As Wimmer expresses quite accurately in his critique of quantitative literature on ethnicity and civil war, "[…] most empirical research tends to overlook such causal heterogeneity by assuming that a single set of processes is responsible for all ethnic conflicts […]" (Wimmer, 2013, p. 145). He then underlines the importance of qualitative comparative studies when analyzing ethnopolitical factors as cause for conflict, because they include different ethno-political constellations and can thus better grasp ethno-political dynamics that cannot be traced back to any single variable.

To extrapolate whether the mechanisms described in the conceptualization indeed influenced the ethnopolitical regime-choice of Georgia, a few-n comparative analysis will be conducted, tracing back two processes historically: the geopolitical alliance system of Georgia with the involved external minority-supporters, as well as Georgia's foreign policy goals. The different degree of political mobilization of our three minority-cases will be linked to their ethnopolitical situation and resource array deriving from it. The analyzed period starts from Georgia's second independence in 1991 until 2013. I decided to limit my examined time period to this date, since after 2013, the government of Georgia changed from a presidential to a parliamentary system, altering the decision process and hence adding potential variables to control for. Moreover, in the last decade, the situation of the minorities in Georgia has not shown any considerable shift.

In order to operationalize ethnopolitical regimes and political mobilization, extensive secondary sources will be adduced, such as scientific papers, analysis through field-research and interviews with leaders of the minority communities that other scholars have conducted. Some media reports will be consulted as well. Through qualitative content analysis the empirical data will give insights into Georgia's policies and permits to define the ethnopolitical regime it chooses for the different minorities. The data will inform on behaviours of the ethnic minorities indicative of the degree of political mobilization such as
the type of political demands an ethnic minority poses and the extent of measures the group uses in order to reach those demands. Similarly, qualitative content analysis of secondary sources will be used to operationalize Georgia's alliance system with the relevant external players and their foreign policy goals that are crucial to trace back the mechanism of ethnopolitical regime-choice. The data will also inform on the ethnopolitical situation of the three minorities and their normative, political, social and material resources that are relevant to explain the degree of political mobilization.

The empirical cases of Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli include a further relevance of my thesis. Both are not broadly studied, and in those papers, which address the two cases, they are mostly

treated as the same empirical manifestation of absent violent conflict. This thesis is the first study that weights the two cases against each other, trying to extrapolate factors accounting for the different outcome of their conflict risk assessment. Finally, as Brubaker (1996) notes, the literature has so far only dealt with the dyadic relationship between the nationalizing state and minorities or between the minorities and their kin state. Thus, a further relevance of my master thesis lies in adding to the literature on ethnopolitics a more comprehensive case study exploring all three relational links involved in ethnic conflict including the wider geopolitical context.

3. The Formation of the Georgian State and its Ethnic Minorities

In the chapter that follows, the ethnopolitical situations of our three empirical cases will be shortly outlined. Tracing the historical formation of the Georgian state and the three minority-territories Abkhazia, Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti is important to understand the respective resource configuration the three minority groups dispose of and how these resources later influenced their different ethnopolitical power-struggles with the Georgian state.

3.1 From ancient times and Russian conquest to the First Georgian Republic

The first national conceptualization of 'Georgia' can be traced back to 978 AD, when the Abkhazian kingdom[2] (including today's Abkhazia and Western Georgia) unified for the first time with the Kartli kingdom[3] (comprising today's Tbilisi and the provinces Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti). The unification to the Georgian kingdom was based on the fact that this geographical area offered church service in Georgian language, setting the cornerstone for Christianity as well as language as decisive elements in the national identity of modern Georgia (Cornell, 2002, pp. 130-131). Moreover, those two elements gave birth to the historical tie between Abkhaz and Georgian elite. Since the Abkhazians did not dispose of a written alphabet, their elite used the Georgian language for religious and cultural issues (unlike the common folk, who only spoke Abkhaz), creating a link with the Georgian upper class. This tie of 'high culture' was preserved over the centuries, even during periods in which Georgia was split among smaller kingdoms, and explains why Abkhazia was often incorporated into the unification projects of Georgia (Nodia, 1997, p. 18).

The first settlement of Azeri populations in Georgia began in the 11th century by nomadic Turkish tribes, continuing in the 16th and 17th centuries, when Iuruq and Qizilbash tribes migrated into southern and eastern parts of Georgia. Over the centuries, they adopted and

[2] Originally called Kingdom of Colchis
[3] In many sources also referred to as Kingdom of Iberia

became mostly peasants in villages, particularly in the Kvemo Kartli region (Sanikidze and Walker, 2004, pp. 21-22).

The 19th century and period of Russian rule was decisive for the ethnic composition of Armenian dominated Javakheti. In 1830, after the Russo-Turkish war, the Muslim population of Samtskhe-Javakheti (especially Meskhetian Turks) was forced to emigrate to Turkey, while almost 60,000 ethnic Armenians settled from Turkey into the southern Georgian territories, who now lived there as a mainly rural population. They were encouraged by the Russian empire that considered the Armenians as the most loyal ethnic group of the South Caucasus and thus granted them special protection against the 'Muslim oppressors' and Georgian nobility. Additionally, Tsarist Russia granted the Armenian dominated Akhalkalaki district its own administrative status within the Tiflis governorship. (Blauvelt and Berglund, 2016, p. 71).

For Abkhazians, the period of Russian conquest is one of their biggest national traumas, defined as 'the exile', as it gave rise to the demographic shrinking of Abkhazians in their historical homeland (Hewitt, 1999, p. 466). Since the population of Abkhazia had resisted Russian invasion, leading to the 'Caucasian War' in 1864, a huge part of the Caucasian people was expelled to Ottoman territory after the Russian empire had finally subjugated Abkhazia. Only a very small number of Abkhazians and Circassians[4] (mostly Christians) remained in their homeland, while the rest (mostly Muslims) became a Caucasian diaspora, which today resides mainly in Turkish territory (Nodia, 1997, p. 21). The demographic balance of Abkhazia has since then changed to the detriment of the Abkhaz population (Tarkhan-Mouravi, 1998, p. 84).

The beginning of the 20th century constitutes a second period of Armenian settlement to the Javakheti province. In 1915, numerous Armenians were forcefully pushed out from the Ottoman empire. Many locals originate from this second period of Armenian migration (Wheatley, 2004, pp. 5-6).

During the Russian Revolution of 1917, Georgian nationalism that had developed over the last decades as a resistance to Russian rule politicized. It focused mainly on the independence from Russia, and had a non-assimilationist character, which means that it was based on ethnicity instead of citizenship (Nodia, 1997, p. 19). In 1918, Georgia (as well as Armenia and Azerbaijan) declared independence from the Tsarist empire. For the Georgian Armenians this meant the dissolution of their old protector, Tsarist Russia. Armenia feared that local Armenians would not be safe under an independent Georgia, which led to fights between Georgia and Armenia, including over territories such as Javakheti. From this ensued a wave of arrests of Armenian politicians, prohibitions of newspapers as well as expropriation of property connected to Georgian Armenians (Blauvelt and Berglund, 2016, p. 6).

[4] Collective term for North Caucasian tribes. Abkhaz is one of those tribes, together with Adyghes and Kabardinians. Abkhazians consider Circassians as their ethnic kin because they share the same ethno-linguistic family (Hewitt, 1999, 465).

The period of the first Georgian republic, which lasted until 1921, was characterized by interethnic tensions and various uprisings from the Ossetians as well as the Abkhazians. Both movements were supported from pro-Soviet Bolsheviks, creating the conviction among the Georgian elite that Russia's intermeddling into minority-issues of Georgia was as strategy to weaken the country and oppose its self-determination (Cornell, 2002, p. 139; p. 141). Even though the majority of the Abkhaz elite was against a unification with Georgia, the Georgian government managed to keep up an alliance with the pro-Georgian forces in Abkhazia, including with military pressure. Therefore, Abkhazia remained within the first Georgian republic. The government foresaw self-rule for Abkhazia and delegated some powers to those Abkhaz representatives it considered trustworthy. Nevertheless, amongst Abkhazians, this period generated heavy resentments against the Georgian oppression and became part of their collective narrative of historic trauma (Nodia, 1997, p. 22).

3.2 Georgia under Soviet rule and its legacy

The Soviet Union was an ethno-federalist construct that comprised various administrative units representing a certain nationality, and which were divided again into sub-units. The division of the administrative- and sub-units was ordered hierarchically and based on the ethnicity of people, instead of their territorial belonging. Administrative units were called Union republics, their sub-units referred to as autonomous republics, autonomous *okrugs* and autonomous oblasts. According to this logic, Georgia represented a union republic. Within it, South Ossetia resided as an autonomous *oblast*. (Wheatley, 2009a, p. 120). Abkhazia's proclamation of independence was acknowledged by the Soviet authorities, and Abkhazia received the status of independent union republic, even if in federation with Georgia (Chirikba, 1998, p. 49). Although Soviets provided better conditions for all Georgian minorities, for instance by granting them education, cultural centers and newspapers in their native language, Armenians and Azeris were considered settlers, and not 'indigenous' to the Georgian regions they now resided in. Thus, Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, unlike Abkhazia or South Ossetia, were not granted any status of Soviet autonomous sub-unit (Blauvelt and Berglund, 2016, p. 8). This nationality policy is often described as a typical Soviet strategy to prevent strong nationalist movements, as well as to divide and weaken the countries in order to keep control over them. Indeed, under Soviet rule the relationship between Georgia and the Armenian minority distanced. Especially the link between Abkhazian and Georgian elite diminished, since Abkhazian (and South Ossetian) leaders turned their loyalty towards Russia, while Georgia remained reluctant to subdue to Soviet rules. (Cornell, 2002, p. 143).

For Abkhazians, this ethnic-territorial principle provided a higher degree of national emancipation than it had ever before under union with Georgia. Abkhaz was introduced as official language and ethnic Abkhaz were favored in regional political positions, since they were considered indigenous to the region. This experience as union republic marked the first Abkhazian statehood and hence gave birth to Abkhaz national consciousness. This period later became the reference point for Abkhazians in any demand for self-determination. From now on, "[…] Georgia and the Georgians exclusively filled the slot for enemy image in the Abkhaz

national project [while] Russia became the chief protector against Georgian imperialism" (Nodia, 1997, p. 22).

In 1931, after Stalin had come to power, Abkhazia was incorporated into Georgia as an autonomous republic. This downgrade from independent union republic to autonomous sub-unit within Georgia meant a heavy setback for Abkhazians. Additionally, in the early 30s a massive immigration of Georgians into Abkhazia was encouraged, leading to a gradual demographic weakening of the Abkhaz community. By the 1980s, Abkhazians proportion of the local population had shrunk to 17%, while Georgians constituted almost approximately 46% (Tarkhan-Mouravi, 1998, p. 94). Consequently, Abkhaz fear of assimilation and the diminishing of their ethnicity in their historical homeland resurged. This 'Georgianization' of Abkhazia increased the wish to maintain the Abkhaz people as ethnically distinct group and became an essential element in Abkhaz nationalism. Furthermore, this period increased the construction of Georgia as an enemy, since it was Stalin, an ethnic Georgian, who withdrew the independent status from Abkhazia and settled ethnic Georgians into the region. After Stalin's death, the situation for Abkhazia improved again, which was a further confirmation for the Abkhaz that the true enemy to their group identity was Georgia (Nodia, 1997, p. 23).

For Samtskhe-Javakheti, the Soviet era was a time of isolation from the rest of the Georgian republic. Since the region was a direct neighbor to the NATO-country Turkey, Soviet authorities declared Javakheti a 'closed zone'. This meant that non-residents were not allowed to enter the area except with a special permission. During this time, ties between the Russian military, who had installed a base in Alkhalkalaki (capital of Javakheti) in 1910 as a bastion against the Ottoman empire, and Javakheti-Armenians strengthened, since Armenians started considering Russians as protectors against their Turkic enemy. Moreover, the military base turned out to be the most crucial employer of the region, since the Russian soldiers represented an important market for the local agriculture, but also because it enabled contacts with Russian staff, who could facilitate labor migration to Russia. Finally, those years of isolation made smuggling of goods from Armenia into Javakheti flourish. Contrarily, relations with Georgia edged further away (Øverland, 2009). Stalin's rule also affected the demographic composition of the region. In the 1940s Muslims of Samtskhe, but also of Javakheti[5] became victims of deportations to Central Asia. Those of Samtskhe were replaced by around 30.000 ethnic Georgians. This is the reason why today the districts of Samtskhe are inhabited by a majority of Georgians, even though most districts have a considerable number of Armenians. In Javakheti, on the other hand, no replacement occurred. Therefore, the area is today dominated by Armenians (Nodia, 2002, p. 26).

In Kvemo Kartli, the relationship with the Georgian government remained stable. Still, during those years, the demographic balance started to change in this region as well. Traditionally, Georgians ins Kvemo Kartli constituted a small number. However, during the 1950s a wave of

[5] The province Samtskhe-Javakheti consist of the two regions: Samtskhe, including the districts Borjomi, Akhaltsikhe, Adigeni and Aspindza and the region Javakheti, in which Armenians constitute more than 90% of the population and which includes the two most southern districts of Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda (Wheatley 2009a).

Georgian immigration started to increase the proportion of Georgian inhabitants in Kvemo Kartli (followed by a second Georgian-migration wave in the 1980-90s). Georgians settled mainly in the Gardabani district, which today inhabits one of the highest percentages of ethnic Georgians, outnumbering the local Azeris (Wheatley, 2005, p. 6). At the same time, the Soviet era was a time during which Azeri populations increased considerably due to high birthrates. Between 1958 and 1989 the number of Georgian Azeris doubled (Sanikidze and Walker, 2004, p. 22).

In the 70s, *perestroika* gave fuel to political activists, who now had the right to reassemble, causing nationalism and separatism in Georgia to spread. Since moderate nationalists were not cohesive, more radical groups increasingly found support among the population (Cornell, 2002, p. 154). One prominent figure was Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who described minorities as 'ungrateful' and as obstacles for Georgia's formation of an independent state. Minorities were increasingly seen as 'guests' that had not the same rights as indigenous Georgians (Wheatley, 2009a, pp. 121-122). As a response to the growing nationalism and anti-Soviet sentiments, the ruling Georgian communist party introduced a law that strengthened Georgian language within minority areas, hoping to regain popularity. As a reaction, Abkhaz intellectuals demanded a status of Union Republic to Moscow. This demand prompted anti-Soviet marches in Tbilisi on the 9th of April 1989 that were suppressed violently by the Soviet authorities and led to 19 deaths. After this traumatic event, the Georgian government lost almost all legitimacy, and the population merged together even more determined around its quest for independence. The communist government tried again to appease nationalist tendencies by further promoting the rights of Georgians in minority areas, as well as by changing non-Georgian toponomy into Georgian (Cornell, 2002, pp. 156-157).

For the Azeri population in Kvemo Kartli, those years constitute a national trauma that remained present in the collective memory. In 1989, Georgians started to call against the 'Islamization' of Georgia due to the high birth rate of the Azeri community, which led many Azeri families to leave the region and their land properties[6] (ibid., pp. 159-160). A similar call for 'Georgianization' was directed towards Javakheti, to which between 1989 and 1990, several hundred Muslim Georgians were settled, most of them stemming from Adjara. However, no Armenian emigration ensued from those policies. The only population to leave were Russian Dukhobors. Ethnic Armenians were financially supported by the Armenian church and could therefore buy those houses sold by the Dukhobors (Wheatley, 2009b).

In November 1989, the Georgian Republic called the incorporation into the Soviet Union as annexation and declared it illegal. The ethnic minorities were worried about this growing spiral of nationalism, especially ethnic Abkhaz and South Ossetians. They held most of the local power positions in their territories due to Soviet minority policy, and thus feared to lose their influence in case of a Georgian independence. Hence, Abkhaz and Ossetian leaders, who had a lot to lose, mobilized their population along ethnic lines as a counter-reaction and an attempt to keep power. This led to tensions among the elites in Abkhazia and Tbilisi (Wheatley, 2009a,

[6] According to Azeri sources, by 1991 around 2,000 families had left Georgia (Cornell 2002).

p. 122). In March 1991, Georgia initiated an independence referendum, to which over 91% declared themselves in favor (Jones, 2013). This was the beginning of Georgia as independent nation.

4. Analysis of Georgia's Ethnopolitical Regimes and State-Minority Relations from 1991-2013

The final chapter will deal with the analysis of Georgian ethnopolitics. Following Mylonas' theory of the politics of nation-building, I will explain Georgia's policies vis-à-vis their minorities and examine the factors that led to the ethnopolitical regimes Georgia adopted in the course of three governments from 1991 to 2013. Additionally, the analytical framework of ethnopolitical situations and the resources those historical processes generate will be used to analyze the different degree of political mobilization of the three Georgian minority regions Abkhazia, Kvemo Kartli and Javakheti to Georgia's various nation-building policies. The first section will analyse Georgia's ethnopolitical regimes vis-a-vis the three minorities and the factors that explain the regime-choice, namely the geopolitical alliance systems of Georgia and the minorities. The second section analyses the reaction of the minorities and, in case of Abkhazia, the eruption of conflict, linking their diferent degree of political mobilization to the resources that the groups disposed of based on their ethnopolitical situation.

4.1 From Violent Exclusion to Assimilation: Georgia's Ethnopolitical Regimes vis-à-vis Kvemo Kartli, Javakheti and Abkhazia

Georgia adopted an ethnopolitical regime vis-à-vis Abkhazia that can be described as exclusionary. As outlined in the theoretical chapter, exclusionist measures represent the most violent form of ethnic regime, that can be aimed at the physical removal of a minority but can also take a less physical form such as policies aimed at segregation (Mylonas, 2013). Such exclusion is often based on the perception of minorities as foreigners accused of 'ethnic swamping' (McGarry and O'Leary, 1993). In the case of Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, a clear distinction between exclusion and assimilation is harder to make. While during the first years of Georgian independence, they were targeted with the same exclusionary policies and marginalizing rhetoric as Abkhazia, the ethnopolitical regime vis-à-vis Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli never reached the violent extend of the Abkhazian case. Mylonas (2013, p. 23) adduces violence as one dimension to distinguish exclusion from assimilation: While the former often includes violent means, the second rarely assumes violent traits, despite remaining coercive. Moreover, the goal of the policies must be taken into account in order to define the ethnopolitical regime as exclusionary or assimilationist. Hence, the ethnopolitical regime vis-à-vis the Armenian and Azeri minority can be described as non-violent exclusionary regime,

which, after Abkhazia's secession, assumed some soft assimilationist tendencies. Exclusionary, because despite not being violent, the policies caused segregation of the minority communities. Soft Assimilationist, because the declared goal of the following governments were 'national integration and homogenization' without assuming strong coercive measures aimed at a complete homogenization. The arguments and empirical proof sustaining this analysis will be now be presented.

The first government of nationalist leader Zviad Gamsakhurdia from 1991-1992 held the perception of minorities as a foreign force to be eliminated and adopted exclusionary policies leading to segregation. In his speeches, Gamsakhurdia defined Georgian minorities as a 'threat' infiltrated by Russia (Blauvelt and Berglund, 2016, p. 8) or as 'temporary guests' (Tonoyan, 2010, p. 297). Gamsakhurdia had already based his election on the slogan 'Georgia for Georgians' (Blauvelt and Berglund, 2016, p.8) and promised to strengthen the rights of Georgians in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. They were territories that he saw as part of Georgia and hence as territories, where Georgians should enjoy privileges vis-à-vis Abkhaz or Ossetian people (Wheatley, 2009a, pp. 121-121). Gamsakhurdia's exclusionary rhetoric was also translated into exclusionist polices. For instance, he introduced a law that excluded all ethnic-based parties from national elections. The introduction of Georgian as sole official language, and the change from Russian media to predominantly Georgian media, was additionally perceived as exclusion from Georgian minorities, which now had less access to information, since their knowledge of Georgian was low, and hence isolated them from the rest of Georgia (Toft, 2001, p. 133-134). The exclusionary ethnopolitical regime, however, did not take physical violent forms towards none of the Georgian minorities during the first two years of Georgian independence. Additionally, Abkhazian autonomy, granted under the constitution of the SU, remained active during those years and was not attempted to be removed by Gamsakhurdia (Nodia, 1997, p. 27).

After Gamsakhurdia was removed from power in January 1992 through a military coup, and a military council (later: 'state council') with Eduard Shevardnadze on the lead was installed (Cornell, 2002, pp. 166-167), the exclusionary ethnopolitical regime intensified vis-à-vis Abkhazia, while remaining unchanged for Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli. This was the time, when exclusionary policies towards Abkhazia took violent forms, finally escalating into violent conflict with Abkhazia.

The first exclusionary policy that the Georgian state council introduced aimed at the removal of Abkhazia's political status: in summer 1992, the council announced to revoke all laws adopted during Soviet times and to return to the political status of the first Georgian republic. This included the abolition of Abkhazia's autonomous status (Chirikba, 1998, p. 21) and represents a decisive turning point in Abkhaz-Georgian relations. The reaction of Abkhaz leader Ardzinba to this policy was the reinstalment of the constitution of 1925 for Abkhazia, which granted them independent status – a step that represented a direct confrontation with the Georgian government (Coppieters, 1998, p. 139). The second indicator of a violent exclusionary regime is Georgia's military attack on Abkhazia on 14 August 1992 and aimed at a physical removal of Abkhaz people (ICG, 2006a, p. 5). This led to 13 months of ethnic war

with 10.000 deaths on both sides and 200.000 ethnic Georgian refugees (Wheatley, 2009a, p. 123). In 1993, Russian forces intervened, and in summer of the same year they mediated a ceasefire between the two parties. It was broken by Abkhazia, and only in May 1994 Moscow managed to mediate a second agreement which formally ended the Abkhaz-Georgian conflict. Georgian peacekeepers were deployed in the conflict zone (ICG, 2006a, p. 6). Georgia lost complete control over the region. Until today, the conflict is frozen and Abkhazia an unrecognized de facto state (Wheatley, 2009a, p. 123).

To explain Georgia's choice for a violent exclusionary ethnopolitical regime vis-à-vis Abkhazia, the geopolitical alliances and interests of Georgia, as well as the alliance system of Abkhazia are indicative. As outlined in the theoretical chapter, leaders seek to eliminate non-core groups that are perceived as a threat to their nation-building objectives. What shapes the government's perception of 'threat' is the external power that is allied with a non-core group. If the external supporter is an enemy, the minority is likely to be either assimilated, when the foreign policy goals of the host state are to keep the status quo, or excluded, when the host state follows a revisionist foreign policy and time is short (Mylonas, 2013).

In the case of Abkhazia, Russia constituted such an external supporter. Abkhaz' closeness to Russia could be deduced from various episodes and features. First, in 1989 Abkhazia addressed Moscow for its demand of secession from Georgia (Gachechiladze, 1998, p. 67). Abkhazian leader Vladislav Ardzinba openly declared that he wanted to become part of Russia (Toft, 2001, p. 138). Additionally, the high number of Abkhaz native or bilingual Russian-speakers and their affinity with the Russian culture made Abkhaz look russophile and hence suspicious in the eyes of many Georgians (Anchabadze, 1998, p. 76). Indeed, as outlined in the previous chapter, Russia had come to be considered by Abkhazia as the 'protector' of their statehood in the early years of the Soviet Union, which remained another thorn in the side of Georgia's statehood-project.

This explains why Abkhazia was addressed with the strongest exclusionary measures from the Georgian government: Russia, the ally of Abkhazia, constituted Georgian enemy-state *par excellence*. This enemy-relationship was cultivated already during the first Georgian independence, when protest movements of Abkhazia were supported by Russian Bolsheviks. Hence, Abkhazia, in the eyes of the Georgian government, constituted the potential gateway for Russia's intermeddling into Georgian affairs (Cornell, 2002, p. 139; p. 141). The worry about an Abkhazian-Russian alliance which consequently led to the intensification of the exclusionary rhetoric towards Abkhazia was exacerbated by the specificity of Georgian historically cultivated nationalism. The Georgian nation-building process at that time was very strongly connected with the idea of emancipation and independence from Russia. Reversed, any form of Russian connection was perceived in a highly sensitive manner as a threat to the national integrity. This association of the Georgian national project with the independence from Russia dates back to 1917, when Georgian nationalism had first developed out of resistance against the Russian conquest (Nodia, 1997, p. 19).

Another indicator links the alliance between Abkhazia and Russia to Georgia's ethnopolitical regime vis-à-vis Abkhazia: When Russia started to show active support for Abkhazia, the Georgian exclusionary ethnopolitical regime assumed more violent traits. Before that, in 1991, the exclusionary measures towards Abkhazia had not reached a higher level in comparison to Kvemo Kartli or Javakheti yet. This stems from the fact that – as Mylonas' theory outlines – the relative state power of Russia in comparison to Georgia was not higher at that time, due to Russia's internal struggles right after the dissolution of the SU (Nodia, 1997, p. 33). Russia had not even created a defense ministry (Hopf, 2005, p. 230). Hence, the probability of a Russian intervention was very low, Abkhazia was not yet considered such a high threat, and hence, the exclusionary measures had not reached higher levels yet. However, by 1992, the Russian state was unified and strengthened again and assumed a militaristic great-power attitude (Hopf, 2005). This shifted the relative state-power in favor of Russia, which possesses greater military resources than Georgia (Tarkhan-Mouravi, 1998, p. 83), and thus increased the probability of an external intervention according to Mylona's theory. Indeed, in July 1992, Russia actively supported Abkhazia with materials, as Ardzinba openly claimed it in a key statement (Siroky, 2016, p. 75). Consequently, in the eyes of Georgia, Abkhazia turned into a greater threat to its nation-building process, and the government as a response assumed a more violent form of exclusionary ethnopolitical regime towards Abkhazia.

Finally, Georgia's foreign policy goals explain why the government opted for an exclusionary, instead of an assimilationist ethnopolitical regime vis-à-vis Abkhazia: Georgia aimed at the dissolution of the SU by declaring independence as one of the first soviet republics, and wanted to restore the independent Georgian state of 1918, as well as consolidate its power on the international arena – aims, that follow revisionist goals. Furthermore, the time for assimilationist policies was very scarce in times of collapse, independence, democratic transition and inner-political unrests as it was the case in the chaotic beginnings of the modern Georgian state.

While Javakheti and Kvemo-Kartli were similarly targeted with the exclusionary rhetoric of Gamasakhurdia and his policies aimed at segregation, such as the ban of ethnic parties, they did not face the physical violent form of exclusion addressed at Abkhazia. After Abkhazia had seceded from Georgia, succeeding governments started to follow the aim of reconciliating and integrating the Georgian nation, but failed to accommodate Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli in a democratic and inclusive matter (Nilsson and Popjanevski, 2009). Hence, the ethnopolitical regime of Georgia remained exclusionary, despite being physically non-violent. Moreover, the Georgian ethnopolitical regime adopted some policies that with the theoretical framework of this study can be categorized as softly assimilationist.

For instance, President Shevardnadze in 1997 granted minorities the right to participate in cultural activities on a local level and introduced a law that granted ethnic communities the right of primary and secondary education in their native tongue (ibid., p. 282). However, he also included demographic and political measures to exclude elites of the minority group from political participation and refused to grant minorities self-administrative rights, practices that are described in the theoretical chapter as assimilationist policy. In 1995, Shevardnadze created

the provinces Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo-Kartli, merging Armenian- and Azeri-dominated districts with Georgian-dominated districts. By bringing together those provinces into one administrative unit, Shevardnadze altered the population balance to the disadvantage of the minority-communities, who were now underrepresented in their local territorial units (ICG, 2006b, p. 9). Such a policy contradicts the basic idea of an accommodative regime, where the territorial unit affected by the federal policies (be it some form of autonomy, cultural or educational self-determination etc.) must reflect the territory of the minority community (McGarry and O'Leary, 1993, p. 33). The measure can also fall under the category of assimilationist policy, since it was a demographic alteration aiming at the homogenization of an administrative unit in favor of the ethnic majority or 'titular nation'. Moreover, Shevardnadze's government continued to be suspicious about minorities and considering them as less loyal to the state than the 'indigenous' population (Wheatley, 2004, p. 32), an exclusive rhetoric similar to that of the predecessor Gamsakhurdia. This view was also reflected in Georgian's dominant identity discourse vis-à-vis minorities, which was still based on the idea that Georgia 'owns' the Georgian state and that minorities are a source of vulnerability for this territorial unity (Broers, 2008, p. 287).

When Mikheil Saakashvili became president in 2003, the main tenor of the ethnopolitical regime remained exclusionary and marginalizing vis-à-vis both Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli. For instance, under Shaakashvili, local political representation decreased: The 'Law on Local Self-Governance' centralized the power in Georgia, by dissolving councils on the smallest local level. (Lohm, 2007, pp. 23-24). At the same time, with the stricter enforcement of Georgian language requirements in public positions since 2005, many Armenian officials lost their jobs in Javakheti and were replaced with ethnic Georgians. Communication between the minority areas and the center became more complicated, since Tbilisi started to refuse documents in Russian, which until now had been the primary language for communication between the two groups (Nilsson and Popjanevski, 2009). Like Shevardnadze, the new president followed in part a reconciliatory symbolic policy, without in practice accommodating or including ethnic minorities (Nilsson and Popjanevski, 2009).

For the new president, the aggregation of Georgia became an even stronger priority, and the assimilationist tendencies of the exclusionary ethnopolitical regime increased slightly (Broers, 2008, p. 276). For example, a formal minority protection has never been implemented, and Georgia was very reluctant to apply two conventions of the Council of Europe, which Georgia had accessed in 1999: The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Minority or Regional Languages, which Saakashvili didn't ratify (Nilsson and Popjanevski, 2009, pp. 20-28). This denial to safeguarding minorities' distinct traits (ibid.) indicates the government's wish of non-core groups to adopt the ethnic majority's culture, a goal ascribed by Mylonas to assimilationist policies (Mylonas, 2013, p. 21). Similarly, Saakashvili implemented the 'New Bill on General Education', which caused frustration among minorities and was interpreted as attempt to assimilation. Despite the teaching of Georgian language and literature, history and social sciences in all Georgian secondary schools, with the new law, Georgian textbooks were sent to Kvemo Kartli and Javakheti, who's schools had been supplied with textbooks by Azerbaijan and Armenia

previously. This was interpreted by locals as attempt to restrain their children from learning cultural and historic peculiarities of the region. Most importantly, the law introduced a Georgian language national entrance exam as requisite to access Universities, which made it hard for many Armenians and Azeris to access higher education (Nilsson and Popjanevski, 2009). Albeit those measures did not reach a coercive level that strong assimilations ethnopolitical regimes would, it nevertheless indicates the attempt to push non-core groups towards adopting the majority's culture and language.

Again, this choice of a non-violent exclusionary regime with soft assimilationist tendencies vis-à-vis Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli can be explained with the geopolitical alliance system: In comparison to Abkhazia, the alliance-system of Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli posed no real threat to the Georgian nation-building process. The allies of the two groups – Armenia in the case of Javakheti and Azerbaijan in the case of Kvemo Kartli – did not actively support any political demands or forms of unrest of the two Georgian ethnic minorities, since both countries were interested in preserving good relations with Georgia out of strategic considerations. First, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan costed both countries many resources and had weakened the countries considerably. An active support of a Georgian minority would have opened the possibility of an additional conflict with another neighboring country, and both states were keen to avoid such an unfeasible situation (Ter-Matevosyan and Currie, 2019, p. 353). Second, the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan gave Georgia a strategically important position as only transport territory between the two enemy countries – especially for oil and gas– because their trade links had been interrupted (Wheatley, 2004, p. 9). Finally, Armenia wanted to avoid any risk of an Azeri-Georgian alliance in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the same as Azerbaijan wanted to avoid Armenia to be supported by Georgia in this conflict. Therefore, in order to keep Georgia on their side, and avoid it to turn against them on the Karabakh front, both Armenia and Azerbaijan refrained from actively interfering in Georgian affairs (Ter-Matevosyan and Currie, 2019, pp. 353-354).

Instead, both strategic allies of Georgia made efforts to stabilize the Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli minorities and improve their relationship with the Georgian government. That Armenia valued the supported of Georgia more than the support of its ethnic diaspora became evident, for instance, in 1997, when Javakheti Armenians organized a petition to abolish the province Samtskhe-Javakheti introduced by President Shevardnadze. Shortly after, Armenian President Ter Petrosyan, met with Shevardnadze, underlying that he did not support actions of Javakheti Armenians that destabilized the situation in Georgia (Wheatley, 2004). Similarly, the Azeri government always called upon the Azeri community in Georgia to integrate into Georgian society and learn their language. The Azeri government continuously stressed that the Azeri community in Georgia would never present any troubles or develop separatist views. Azerbaijan's support of the Georgian government became most visible in the late 1999, when President Heydar Aliyev visited Kvemo Kartli to invite locals to vote for Shevardnadze and his party Union of Georgia (Siroky, 2016, p. 73). The Georgian government built its ethnic regime choice vis-à-vis Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli on this rational: The fact that the two minorities were not actively supported by either of their kin states – thanks to Georgia's geopolitical strategical situation – allowed a less violent-exclusionary regime.

Since neither of the two minorities enjoyed active external support, following Mylonas theoretical framework, assimilation would be the most likely outcome. The fact the regime still is mainly exclusionary, and only in parts assimilations, might derive from the fact that Armenia and Azerbaijan show a very low probability to intervene in favor of their ethnic diasporas also in the future. Mylonas assumes that assimilation is thought to prevent potential future interventions from enemy-powers and is therefore especially likely to be adopted vis-a-vis minority groups that are allied with an enemy power. Reversed: when the ally of the non-core group is a friendly power to the host-state, and the potential of an external intervention in the future is therefore low, the assimilationist policies are less urgent, and the likelihood of an assimilationist ethnopolitical regime decreases.

Finally, it is worth to note one minor difference between the ethnopolitical regime Georgia adopted vis-à-vis Javakheti and the one that applied to Kvemo Kartli. While on the political sphere, the measures were quite similar, on the economic level, Javakheti was excluded in a broader manner in comparison to Kvemo Kartli. The Armenian minority was especially a target of economic neglect: many local factories that existed during Soviet times had been closed, increasing unemployment in Javakheti; urgently needed agricultural machineries, fertilizers and seeds were not provided, blocking agricultural production; technology to preserve products hindered their exportation to other parts of Georgia. The bad road conditions that were not addressed by the government, isolated Javakheti from other Georgian cities (Wheatley, 2004, pp. 33-34). Although Azeris lived under poorer socio-economic conditions than other Georgian regions, the community was less economically marginalized than Armenians. The Georgian provinces around Kvemo Kartli and Tbilisi were and still are important markets for Azeri agricultural products, offering Kvemo Kartli-Azeris better business prospects in Georgia (Wheatley, 2005, p. 7).

This could stem from the fact that Javakheti, among all Georgian minority communities, is still considered the most unpredictable with regard to conflict-escalation (Nodia, 2002). A look at the broader geopolitical alliance system can again give answers to this condition. As described in the theoretical framework, an external enemy-power, even if not intervening actively, influences a host-state's ethnopolitical regime-choice to a certain extend. Hence, the perception of Javakheti as a higher threat to the nation-building project of Georgia in comparison to Kvemo Kartli, might stem from Armenia's cultural link with Russia, a country that after its involvement in the Abkhaz conflict, has advanced to a national enemy state even more. Javakheti-Armenians have historically formed a close connection to Russia. As outlined in chapter 3, during Tsarist rule, Armenians viewed Russians as protectors against the Ottomans, while Armenians were considered the most loyal group to Russia. Moreover, Armenian settlers in Georgia were encouraged by Tsars to move to Georgian lands. This link with Russia was kept up to modern times: Not only did Javakheti-Armenians continue to use Russian as main language in official interactions with Georgia as well as consume Russian-speaking media and literature. But there seems to reign a high soviet nostalgia in Javakheti, contrary to the rest of the country (Wheatley, 2004, p. 33). Additionally, with a military base installed in Javakheti, Russia possessed important military and economic links to the region – the local population

relied on the base in terms of security and employment. This had always been a thorn in the side of Georgia's presidents, as show the many attempts of Saakashvili's predecessors to reach a withdrawal of the base. In the end, it was Saakashvili, who successfully implemented the closure of the Russian military base in Javakheti's capital Akhalkalaki in 2007 – another heavy political strike against Javakheti and contribution to the economic deterioration of the region (Øverland, 2009).

Azerbaijan, on the other hand, after the breakup of the Soviet Union, started to search for an alliance with Turkey, which it viewed as a natural partner considering their ethnic and religious affinity (Nodia, 1997, p. 41). Today, the cooperation between Azerbaijan and Turkey is very close, especially in the field of energy relations, but also in the form of collaboration between NGOs, Universities or research projects. Since Georgia is a transition country for the pipelines that transport oil and gas from Azerbaijan to Turkey and from there to Europe, Georgia's relation towards Turkey is marked by a strategic friendship as well. Turkey ascribes to Georgia an important role as grantor of the regional stability and has therefore gradually tightened its relationship with the neighbor, for instance by recognizing Georgia's independence as one of the first countries or wit support in the political development after the Soviet Union's collapse. The two countries additionally cooperate in the military sphere, testified by several military agreements and Turkish financial aid in the modernization of the Georgian army (Aras and Akpinar, 2011, pp. 57-58; 62). Thus, the Georgian government displayed a higher concern for and a stronger economic exclusion of the Armenian minority (Nodia, 2002, p. 8), because the external ally of Kvemo Kartli and Azerbaijan are friendly powers to Georgia, while Russia, the natural ally of Armenia and Javakheti-Armenians, represents the opposite.

4.2 From Secession to Indirect Loyalty: The Various Degrees of Mobilization among Abkhazia, Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli

Looking at the different reactions and demands the three minorities adopted vis-à-vis the Georgian regime, Abkhazia can be ranked as the minority with the highest degree of political mobilization that ultimately cumulated in secessionism. Abkhazia already showed opposition before Georgia became independent, in 1990, by boycotting the elections of Gamsakhurdia to the Georgian Supreme Leader and declaring independence (which shortly after was annulled by the Georgian Supreme Soviet), as well as by voting in favor of preserving the SU in the All-Union referendum organized by Moscow, which Georgia had ordered its citizens not to attend (Toft, 2001, p. 134). The reaction of Abkhazia against Georgia's declaration to reinstall the constitution of 1918, described in the previous section, indicates the high political mobilization of Abkhazia. It included the demand of independent status (Coppieters, 1998, p. 139) and quickly escalated into a militaristic response by late 1992 and separatism. The development of Abkhaz mobilization to a more radical and violent political response reached its peak in 1993, when the first ceasefire was broken by Abkhaz forces and the war continued until the subsequent year (ICG, 2006a, p. 6).

The Armenian-dominated region of Javakheti did not show the same level of opposition as the Abkhazians and never developed separatism. During the referendum, more than half of the Armenian community in Javakheti expressed a favorable stance towards a Georgian independence. Although this indicates a narrow approval, it nevertheless shows a certain level of loyalty towards Georgia (Cornell, 2002, p.163). However, during the first years of Georgian independence, Javakheti-Armenians showed some political opposition, even though the local mobilization was not as strong as to last for long and bring any substantial change. The political mobilization of Javakheti-Armenians was expressed most visibly in the emergence of the movement *Javakh*, advocating the protection of minority rights and the expansion of Armenian language. At the beginning, the organization promoted friendly relations with Georgians, and their goal was to oppose Gamsakhurdia's ethnic nationalism by creating the idea that Armenians were part of Georgia too. When threats against Armenians and calls for them to leave Georgia from armed gangs started to occur, the movement assumed militaristic traits. By 1990 the movement disposed of a strong popular support, and people started pushing the movement towards more decisive action. This indicates that a substantial political mobilization in Javakheti had emerged not just among the intelligentsia, but also among the broader population. In 1991, as a response to Georgian growing nationalism, Javakh established a provisional council in Alkhalkalaki, taking control over the region that was maintained until 1994. This was the time, where tensions between Javakheti and Georgia reached their peak: when Georgian troops and paramilitaries wanted to enter the region, in order to install a centrally appointed prefect, armed forces of Javakh stopped them and defended the territory against this imposition. Instead, they installed a leader of Javakh, Samvel Petrosyan, as prefect. The political mobilization, however, did not last and was never ment to advocate separatism, as many former leaders of Javakh declare (Ter-Matevosyan and Currie, 2019, pp. 349-351). Indeed, the provisional council, during its period of regional administration, had rejected a motion demanding independence for Javakhet. In 1994, when the Georgian government accepted the local prefect that the Javakh-movement had installed as official regional leader, the provisional council dissolved voluntarily. This indicates that political mobilization in Javakheti was not strong enough to keep the rebellion up and increase demands. By the end of 1990, the movement Javakh lost most of its support and mobilization in Javakheti lowered (Wheatley, 2004, pp. 13- 14). Although Javakheti repeatedly became a setting of minor protests throughout the 1990 and early 2000s, the region was described as peaceful by experts (Nodia, 2002, p. 8). Similarly, the closure of the military base in Javakheti brought no large-scale mobilization or violence (Øverland, 2009). Only in March 2005 around hundreds of locals in Javakheti protested twice against the withdrawal plans ('Ethnic Armenians Protest Against Closure of Russian base', 2005). But the political mobilization flattened very quickly and did not escalate into political demands for self-determination or any violent episodes.

The degree of political mobilization in Kvemo Kartli compared to Javakheti and Abkhazia was the lowest. Especially the support for the Georgian government among the Azeri-community was striking. In Marneuli[7], 86% of voters were in favor of a Georgian independence (Cornell, 2002, p. 163). The only sign of some insubordination was the local organization *Geyrat,* which

[7] This represents the district of Kvemo Kartli with the highest number of Azeris (Wheatley, 2009b, p. 5).

formed in answer to the peoples transfer of 1989. Their goal was to prevent mass emigration of Azeris from Georgia and their thematic issues remained within the range of culture and education. Their approach was conciliatory, since Geyrat's leaders met with Gamsakhurdia to establish a dialogue with his national liberation movement and they constantly emphasized their loyalty to the Georgian state (Wheatley, 2005, p. 13). Some sources ascribe Geyrat the goal of receiving greater autonomy for Kvemo Kartli (Sanikidze and Walker, 2004). However, apart from minor petitions demanding special autonomy at the beginning of Georgian independence, no further mobilization ensued in the region and no political demands were posed (Nodia, 2002, p. 8). The political activity during the height of Georgian nationalism was mainly borne by Intelligentsia and did not reach a broad enough support to last for long or bring substantial change in favor of Kvemo Kartli. Until today little to no nationalist or separatist sentiments were recorded in Kvemo Kartli (Sanikidze and Walker, 2004, p. 23). The topic of land distribution was raised by locals in 1998, when 1500 Azeris accused the governor of selling forged property certificates and demanded his resignation. However, no more action followed the gathering (Siroky, 2016). Most importantly, whenever Azeris put forward claims of ethnic injustice, they were always based on economic issues, never political. The discord between Georgia and Kvemo Kartli regarding economic manners, did not reflect to the political sphere, reducing the risk of high political mobilization and rebellion to a minimal. Generally, to the Azeri community scholars ascribe social apathy and a low level of political activism (Nodia, 2002, p. 9). Scholars during field research not only noted that the political engagement among the Azeri community was very low, but Kvemo Kartli-Azeris seemed to display a high loyalty towards the Georgian government. In interviews with local political actors, some respondents criticized autonomy proponents as provocateurs and they unanimously supported the Shevardnadze government. According to the interviewers, Azeri respondents showed strong patriotic feelings towards Georgia and said that this was a reason not to emigrate to their historical homeland. The high support for the Shevardnadze government became visible in the 1995 presidential elections, as well as in the 2000 presidential elections, when voters in the Azeri dominated Marneuli to 99 % voted in favor of Shevardnadze (Wheatley, 2005).

The different degrees of political mobilization can be linked to the ethnopolitical situation that differentiates Abkhazia from the other two minorities. Following Pettai's categorization of second-stage ethnopolitical situations, Abkhazia can best be conceptualized as sub-territorial nationalist group. The Northwestern coast of today's Georgia is the historical homeland of Abkhaz people, as both Georgian and Caucasian scholars generally agree to. But the modern political units of the ethnic heterogenous and complex Caucasus have been created by its Russian rulers in the 20th Century, making the modern countries of the South Caucasus a product of second-stage ethnopolitical situations as described by Pettai. So too, is the modern Georgian state based on the borders drawn by Soviet authorities (Nodia, 1997, p. 20). Hence, the ethnopolitical situation that brought Abkhazia and Georgia together in its modern constellation was the period of colonial rule under the Soviet Union, despite some historical periods of unification between Georgia and Abkhazia (Hunter, 2006, pp. 117-118). Just like Pettai describes sub-territorial nationalists as enjoying privileged status under colonial rule that they seek to restore in the post-colonial era, Abkhazia was granted special autonomous rights and privileges in local power positions under the SU, which influenced their later pursuit for

independence after its dissolution. It follows that as a sub-territorial nationalist group, Abkhazia's political, material and normative resources deriving from their historical formation are quite abundant, explaining their high degree of political mobilization, strong political demands and determined measures to obtain them.

Javakheti and Kvemo-Kartli, on the other hand, fall under the category of communal contenders. Both Azeris and Armenians came to Georgia as settlers in the 16th and 17th and the 19th and 20th century respectively. Hence, the minority communities of Kvemo Kartli and Javakheti formed through historical migration. As outlined in our theoretical framework, communal contenders stemming from historical migration are not able to aggregate a high amount of political or normative resources (Pettai, n.d.). Consequently, their mobilization potential is expected to remain low. However, Javakheti's situation under the Soviet Union allowed them to collect some more resources than their neighbor community Kvemo Kartli, leading to a stronger political mobilization in the early years of Georgian transition. A more detailed analysis of the respective resource arrays of Abkhazia, Kvemo Kartli and Javakheti will now follow.

4.2.1 Material Resources

Material resources where not the most substantial factor that led to political mobilization in neither of the three minorities. Abkhazia disposes of some material resources, but they were probably not decisive for Abkhaz mobilization. They do not suffice for economic self-reliance, nor for the argument that Abkhazia would be better off without Georgia financially. Although scarce in natural sources like fuel or mineral as well as industrial production, the pleasant climatic and natural conditions made Abkhazia a valuable tourist destination. Moreover, climate conditions favored agricultural production, and Abkhazia became an important producer of citrus fruits, tea, and tobacco (Gachechiladze, 1998, p. 58). Additionally, the port of Sukhumi represented an important transit point for shipping international goods as well as for transport of people between Georgia and Russia (Toft, 2001, p. 129).

Javakheti had some material resources that backed their decisive actions when Georgia wanted to install their prefect in the region, even though they did not stem from the Armenian community itself. Life in Javakheti is based on agriculture, and due to the bad climate and the mountainous area, harvest is rather poor. However, two important sources of income existed for the local population: One was, and still is, the income of migrants who work abroad, mostly in Russia (Wheatley, 2004, p. 10). The second was the Russian military base in Javakheti's capital Akhalkalaki which constituted the greatest employer of the region as well as a stable market for local agricultural products. In addition, the base played an important role for the local smuggler scene over the Armenian border and facilitated migration for local Armenians to Russia thanks to the connections established on the military side between inhabitants and Russian soldiers. The fact that Russian ruble was the primary currency of Javakheti underlines the importance of the base for local economic structures (Øverland, 2009). This shows the impact the Russian alliance with Armenians had on Javakheti's mobilization potential, without

Russia directly interfering or actively supporting the region: it fed the perception among the Javakheti-population that they were backed enough to be able to resist to Georgian external control in the form of a prefect.

Similarly, in Kvemo Kartli, agriculture is the main economic activity. However, unlike Javakheti, the Azeri provinces are economically integrated much stronger with Georgia. Most agricultural exports are sold to the Georgian capital. This might be one reason for the loyalty towards Georgia, since Azeris disposed of no material resources that would have hold the argument in favor of separation. Their little financial income depended on the Georgian market, instead of an external power that would have supported their demands for more self-determination (Wheatley, 2005, p. 7).

4.2.2 Social Resources

With regard to social resources, Abkhazia disposed of strong social ties. This stems from the nature of territorially concentrated ethnic groups with a constant homeland and history of collective communal structure and social organization, typical for sub-territorial groups (Pettai, n.d; Parazauskas, 1991; Gurr and Harff, 1994). Abkhazia's experience of 'statehood' during the first years under soviet rule has additionally strengthened the group's cohesion and its feeling of a common identity (Nodia, 1997, p. 11-12). Even during periods of Abkhazia's incorporation into Georgia, the region usually enjoyed a certain territorial autonomy. As described, past experiences with autonomy generate collective action capacity, necessary for a future political mobilization. Finally, as cited from Parazauskas, social cohesion arises as a response to interethnic contacts, out of necessity to separate from the surrounding "other". Considering the growing numbers of Georgian settlers into Abkhazia, the social cohesion of the Abkhaz minority should have constantly grown over time, which is supported by a reported strong ethnic divide among the groups in Abkhazia (Toft, 2001, p. 130).

The capacity of Javakh to install their own regional prefect is closely connected with the strong social cohesion of Javakheti Armenians. Although communal contenders usually show less cohesive communal structures than sedentary groups (Pettai, n.d.), Javakheti-Armenians seem to be an exception (ICG, 2006b, p. 15). The isolation that they were exposed to as 'closed zone' during Soviet times might explain their strong social cohesion. As outlined in the theoretical section: the weaker the presence of state structures like civil society organizations, the more probable political loyalties will form along ethnic lines (Wimmer, 2013). Since in Javakheti, during times of isolation, the state was basically not present and contact with the rest of Georgian civil society almost impossible (Øverland, 2009, p. 2), the ethnic cohesion among the Armenian community grew, and consequently did their mobilization potential. By the mid-1990, however, the strong social resources started to erode, exactly at the time, when the political mobilization of Javakheti-Armenians started to diminish. Although the group still enjoyed a strong feeling of community, Shevardnadze strategically managed to disrupt the cohesion among the elite of Javakheti. He followed a "divide and rule" approach, offering higher political offices to local leaders – many from the movement Javakh – in exchange for

their loyalty to the Georgian state. This contributed to the internal division of the Javakh movement, the erosion of local public support for the movement and hence, a diminished degree of political mobilization (ICG, 2006b). The link between low social cohesion and the low political mobilization became most visible when Shevardnadze merged the province of Javakheti with Samtskhe, suddenly transforming Armenians into a minority within the new administrative unit of Samtskhe-Javakheti. Altough 1997, members of various movements in Javakheti collected signatures to demand the abolition of the administrative region of Samtskhe-Javakheti and the establishment of a Javakheti province, the process was stopped due to pressure from the central government and disagreements among the organizers, indicating the lack of social coherence as contributing factor to the diminished mobilization potential of the local population (Wheatley, 2004).

The common group identity among the Azeri population is also strong. Although religion is traditionally lived in a moderate way among Georgian Azeris, and their identity feeling is based on cultural and ethnic elements rather than religion, after the fall of the SU, Islam's role has increased and hence become a stronger marker of group identification (Prasad, 2012, p. 5). The fact that Azeri culture (and religion) diverges from Georgia substantially may have contributed to the strong social cohesion of the Azeri minority. However, their group-identity remains very private and has not translated in a strong civil society (ICG, 2006b, p. 15).

4.2.3 Political Resources

The political resources that Abkhazia disposed of belonged to one of the most crucial type of resource that contributed to Abkhazia's strong opposition to Georgian nation-building policies. Abkhazia's political status as independent union republic, institutionalized in the early years of the SU, and still codified in the Abkhaz constitution of 1925 (Toft, 2001, p. 129), represented such a political resource. This legal parameter was used by Abkhazians to reinforce their claims for self-determination and was therefore decisive in the escalation of conflict. Additionally, the local political power-distribution was in favor of Abkhazians: although they only represented around 20% of local population, they assumed 65% of the ministries (Siroky, 2016, p. 74). Another strong political resource constituted Abkhaz leader Ardzinba, a hard-line separatist, who enjoyed a strong support for his decisive acting and cultivated a close relationship with Russia. When Gamsakhurdia threated to abolish Abkhaz autonomy, after Ardzinba had participated in the Soviet All-Union Referendum, Ardzinba responded by organizing the deployment of a Russian airborne assault battalion in Sukhumi (Petersen, 2008, p. 194). Finally, a political resource that can be linked to Abkhazia's high degree of political mobilization is the support of external forces. The announcement of leader Ardzinba that Abkhazia would be "strong enough to fight Georgia" (Siroky, 2016, p. 75) and his hint at guarantees of external support indicate the confidence Abkhazia gained due to the prospect of an external intervention. After Georgia had entered the capital Sukhumi, the rhetoric was quickly followed by actions: Although Russia officially stressed Georgia's territorial integrity, it sent soldiers and weapons across the borders to the Abkhaz rebels, and in the beginning of 1993 Russian fighters started to bomb the Georgian army from the air. Another episode shows

the link between Abkhaz political mobilization and Russian support: When Abkhazia relaunched an attack after the first ceasefire was agreed upon, Russian defense minister, Pavel Grachev, demanded that all Georgian forces leave Abkhazia (Hopf, 2005). This encouraged local Abkhazians in their strive for independence.

Political resources were available in the early 1990s in Javakheti to a certain extend. Again, parts of the political resource array, exceptional for a communal contender, stems from Javakheti's experience as closed zone during the SU and its consequent rapprochement with the Russian military. The Russian military base during those years constituted a crucial political resource, as it made arms easily available in the region that could be used to defend themselves against a new enemy: Georgian nationalists (Øverland, 2009). Additionally, many locals, who had before fought in the Nagorno-Karabakh war constituted an important source of fighters for the militia of the Javakh movement (Blauvelt and Berglund, 2016, p. 10). However, after this conflict over the central prefect dissolved, and after 2007, when the military base was closed, no substantial political resources remained for Javakheti. Political representation amounted to locally elected legislative and executive bodies on the town or village level with mainly supervisory functions, as well as two governmental bodies at the district level. Their heads were appointed by the center in Tbilisi, and thus, they practically delegated no actual power to Javakheti, but rather served the president to secure that local elites would cooperate with the central government. Other higher positions in public life such as police chief, prosecutor or head of tax inspectorate were held by Javakheti-Armenians, but also appointed by the Georgian central government (Wheatley, 2004, pp. 11-13). Moreover, local representation decreased considerably with Saakashvili's reforms. Hence, political resources in Javakheti were too low to foster a higher mobilization among the Armenian minority in the region. Similarly, the central representation of Javakheti-Armenians was low. During the 2004-2008 legislative period, Armenians hold 5 parliamentary seats. Even tough they represent (together with Kvemo Kartli-Azeris) 12.2% of the population, only 3.6 % of MPs belong to those comunities (ICG, 2006b). In general, the amount of non-Georgian MPs in the legislation period 2004-2008 shrunk in comparison to previous parliaments from 7.0 to 4.0% (Broers, 2008). Consequently, minorities could not forward their demands for minority rights out of lack of public representations, while the government felt no pressure of accelerating the process of formal minority protection (Nilsson and Popjanevski, 2009). As regards external support for Javakheti: Javakheti-Armenians were culturally and socially integrated with their ethnic kin, as they received textbooks from their homeland, consumed Armenian-Russian media and often traveled to Yerevan for educational purposes (Wheatley, 2004). But neither Russia nor their ethnic kin state Armenia showed willingness to support the Javakheti Armenians in their political demands, for the reasons that were outlined before. Armenia still stood on the side of Georgia, as an episode, in which Armenian Special Forces arrested one of the most active nationalists of Javakheti, most visibly shows (Lohm, 2007).

Kvemo Kartli, even more poorly than Javakheti, disposed of no considerable political resources that would have strengthened their bargaining position vis-à-vis Georgia. Their local control was almost non-existent: All political power positions and top administrative jobs were held by ethnic Georgians (Wheatley, 2005, p. 12). The little support for the organization Geyrat

eroded for similar reasons the Javakh movement had lost support in Armenia: Members of Geyrat had been co-opted into political positions by Shevardnadze via patronage networks and Azeri leaders today are more loyal to Georgian central authorities than to the local population (Wheatley, 2005, p. 14). As for external support: Although Kvemo Kartli Azeris were culturally and socially integrated with their kin state, consumed their textbooks for schools, followed Azeri media and chose Azerbaijan as place for their higher education (Wheatley 2004, pp. 29-31), on the political sphere, Azerbaijan defended Georgia's claims more than the interests of their ethnic kin, as described in the previous sub-chapter. Therefore, no political resources in the form of external support applied to Kvemo Kartli, and hence, decreased the minority's potential for active political mobilization.

4.2.4 Normative Resources

Abkhazia disposed of a considerable portion of normative resources that increased in 1992, and hence adds to the explanation of conflict escalation. Gamsakhurdia's exclusionary language-and media-policies were interpreted by Abkhazia as an attempt to deny them their autonomy and cultural recognition. It activated historical grievances among Abkhazians, that now nourished normative resentments against Georgia. One such historical grievance dates back to the first Georgian republic, during which Abkhazia was forcefully integrated into the Georgian state project. This normative resource had become part of Abkhazia's narrative of collective trauma and was often adduced by Abkhaz leaders in ethnic disputes (Siroky, 2016, p. 5). In 1992, Abkhazia gained tow decisive normative resources that accelerated its political mobilization and led to violent confrontations with Georgia: First, the sudden loss of autonomy. The theoretical chapter outlined how the loss of such a past autonomy creates heavy resentments against the actor that withdraws the rights of self-determination the group enjoyed. When Georgia announced the reinstalment of the status of the Georgian republic from 1918-1921, Abkhazians intended it as attempt to diminish their political status by withdrawing their rights of self-determination. This fear is typical for sub-territorial nationalists. Finally, Abkhazia interpreted Georgia's policies as an attempt to eliminate their cultural specificity (ibid., p. 8), which leads to the second normative resource that was activated in 1992 and enhanced Abkhazia's secessionism: The fear of the decline of Abkhaz nationhood. As described in chapter 3, this normative resource goes back to Abkhazia's ethnopolitical situation and experience of radical diminishment of their population. This trauma was activated in 1992 and became a decisive normative resource and fuel for the mobilization of Abkhaz people.

In Javakheti, normative resources could be also drawn from Gamsakhurdia's nationalist rhetoric and exclusionary language- and media policies, as well as from the direct threats Armenians faced from armed gangs, prompting them to leave Georgia. Historically, Javakheti could have activated some grievances from the short war that Armenia and Georgia fought over some border territories, including Javakheti, in 1918. However, no indications that this episode was included in the collective narration of grievance among Armenians exist. This may stem from the fact that Armenians and Georgians had been connected through a good relationship over centuries (Ter-Matevosyan and Currie, 2019, p .354). Additionally,

normative disputes during those times were concentrated on the Karabakh-war, leaving little space for old grievances against Georgia, that represented only a short episode in a centuries long brotherhood (ibid.). One normative resource that was present in Javakheti in a more substantial level than in Kvemo Kartli was the feeling of economic neglect. Especially during the early years of 1990, the central state of Georgia was almost non-existent. The state council was composed of many former Soviet elites, who carried out clientelism and corruption. Hence, the state did not distribute wealth to the population, but provided public goods exclusively to close networks. Since most minority areas were excluded from those clientelist networks, their situation was even more precarious, and forced them to live just on their lands and savings. These years considerably decreased the legitimacy of Georgian rule over the minority areas (Wheatley, 2009a, p. 123-124). At the same time, minority groups viewed socio-economic issues within the framework of ethnicity as well. As predicted in the theoretical chapter, the incapacity of a state to provide socio-economic goods often lead to ethnic mobilization; the lack of economic provisions for a group that is already excluded in ethnopolitical terms will cause resentments to rise. Even though the economic and social neglect during those years applied to other Georgian regions as well, especially in Javakheti the failure of providing basic security and necessities was mostly interpreted as ethnic discrimination and even as deliberate policy aimed at pushing Armenians to emigrate. Such views often proved to be a basis for mobilization in the form of mass meetings (Nilsson and Popjanevski, 2009, p. 143). In interviews, Wheatly (2004, pp. 33-34) precisely collected those grievances of local Armenians, in which many addressees stated that the increasing unemployment and lack of Georgian investments in Javakheti increased the resentment of many Javakheti-Armenians towards Tbilisi. These economic frustrations can be linked to the higher mobilization potential in Javakheti, compared to Kvemo Kartli, which was economically better integrated into Georgian society (Wheatley, 2005, p. 7). When Georgia accepted the local prefect of Javakheti in 1994, a certain appeasement of grievances in Javakheti resulted, dismantling some of their normative resources. This ultimately led to the appeasement of the broader rebellion movement that Javakheti displayed between 1991 and 1994.

A normative resource for Kvemo Kartli constituted the grievance of Azeri families with regard to the names for localities. The Azeri names were replaced under Gamsakhurdia with Georgian names and their restoration is a demand that can still be heard among some Azeris today (ibid., pp. 8; 40). Another main grievance of Azeri people that dates back to this time is land distribution. After the Soviet collapse, the collective farms were divided, and most were distributed to Georgians. This led to a feeling of injustice and second-class treatment among local Azeri people. However, the grievances remained on the economic spheres, and no considerable political tensions formed (Wheatley, 2009a). Most importantly, the seize of power of Shevardnadze with time displayed a reduction of criminality and return to stability in the region. This completely overshadowed the few normative grievances, leading to the perception among the Azeri minority that complete loyalty to the president seemed to be the best way to protect their interest, and preserve peace in the region (Wheatley, 2005, p. 14). And even more, the stability that Shevardnadze installed positively influenced the economic situation of Kvemo Kartli, which, as stated before, is closely connected to other Georgian provinces (unlike the economically marginalized Javakheti). This gave Azeri people one more reason to accept

Georgia's ethnopolitical regime as it was, as long as it brought them enough financial income and stability.

Conclusion

This master thesis started from a puzzle: why did Abkhazian-Georgian relations turn into violent conflict, whereas Javakheti's political mobilization eased quickly and Kvemo Kartli remained relative passive vis-à-vis Georgia's policies from the beginning? To answer this, I took one step back, asking what factors influenced the decision of a host-state to exclude a non-core group, and what factors led to a strong political mobilization of the respective non-core group. In short, the thesis was an attempt to explain Georgian ethnopolitics.

Describing Georgia's historical configuration, the mode in which its ethnic constellation was formed, I could deduce motivations and capacities that accounted for the degree of political mobilization the ethnic minorities assumed after Georgian independence. Those mechanisms were based on Pettai's theory of ethnopolitics and applied to the empirical cases through secondary literature. For the explanation of Georgia's shifts of ethnopolitical regimes between 1990 and 2013, I looked at the wider geopolitical alliance systems of the three minorities and at the government's foreign policy goals. Those mechanisms were deduced from the theoretical assumptions after Mylonas and operationalized via qualitative content analysis of papers based on field-research and interviews from other scholars, as well as some media reports.

The exclusionist ethnopolitical regime vis-à-vis Abkhazia could be linked to Georgia's revisionist foreign policy goals, and to Abkhaz affinity towards Russia, which led to a higher securitization of the region. The violent escalation of the exclusionist ethnopolitical regime after the military coup in Georgia could be linked with the sudden emerging threat of a Russian intervention, which before had been lower. But since Moscow had recovered from the soviet collapse and internally shifted to a discourse that supported military intervention, the perception of Abkhazia as a threat for the Georgian nation-building process led to a more violent form of ethnopolitical exclusion.

The ethnopolitical regime towards Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli resulted as exclusionary, but in a non-violent and softer approach. Additionally, the ethnopolitical regimes vis-à-vis Kvemo Kartli and Javakheti included some elements assimilation that grew under Saakashvili. This was explained with the strategic geopolitical situation of Georgia, which secured the government of a non-intervention from the Armenia and Azerbaijan. The low probability of external support for Kvemo Kartli and Javakheti allowed the government to apply a non-violent form of exclusion and partly assimilationist ethnopolitical regime.

Javakheti was securitized to a higher degree than Kvemo Kartli, and hence, more strongly targeted with exclusion-especially on the economic sphere. The different handling of the two minorities was explained with their different alliance systems: While the external ally of Azeris, Turkey, is a friendly power for Georgia, Russia, the ally of Armenia Javakheti-Armenians is considered an enemy.

The strong mobilization of Abkhazia could be connected to the extensive array of normative, social and political resources that Abkhazia as a sub-territorial nationalist group disposed of, such as de jure status as independent union republic and abundant local power (political); a strong collective action capacity and social cohesion due to Abkhazia's experience of "statehood" (social); and the historical trauma of Georgian oppression (normative). Abkhazian increase of mobilization, which ultimately sharpened the conflict, could be related to the sudden add of grievances that emerged in response to the loss of autonomy, as well as to the active support of Russia.

Using the same approach, the relative high mobilization of Armenians could be explained, even though their categorization as communal contenders stemming from historical migration would predict a low political mobilization: Javakheti was backed (indirectly) by Russia through the presence of a Russian base, showed strong social cohesion among the elite, leading to a broadly supported local movement (Javakh) and disposed of numerous normative resources. They were inherited mainly during the Soviet Union, due to the region's role as 'closed zone'. After 1994, Armenia's social and normative resources eroded, especially the cohesion and broad support of the Javakh movement, which explained the rapid fall of Armenian political mobilization after 1994. Together with the Azeri minority, who similarly lacked in motivation and capacity for a higher mobilization, both groups disposed of no significant external support to allow higher demands for self-governing rights.

The absence of a stronger political mobilization and rebellion among the Azeri communities on the other hand corresponded to the assumption about communal contenders: They basically disposed of very little resources to be able to mobilize along ethnic lines in a considerable manner: their little financial income depended on the Georgian market, all local power positions were held by ethnic Georgians, and no external intervention by Azerbaijan was foreseeable in the near future.

Conclusively, the combined theoretical mechanisms were able to explain the empirical outcome in a sufficient manner since there existed no decisive aspects of the analyzed cases that the proposed mechanisms could not explain. It is important to note, however, that this conglomerate of explanations is very case-specific and can hardly be exported to other cases (see Beach and Pedersen, 2019).

The recent developments in the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno Karabakh may have a future impact on Georgia's ethnopolitical struggles, especially with Javakheti. As the analysis has shown, the Nagorno-Karabakh war decisively limited Armenia's and Azerbaijan's interference into Georgian state-minority disputes, moderating the political

mobilization of Kvemo Kartli and Javakheti. Armenia was especially prone to step in at the side of its kin in Javakheti, for instance, during the 1990s attempted expulsion of Armenians, but was limited by its strategic dependence on Georgia. Consequently, Armenia's prioritization of Georgian ties over the support of Javakheti could change in case a Georgian-Azeri alliance in the Karabakh-war emerges. Latest episodes underline this prediction: In October 2020, unknown players instrumentalized precisely on this mechanism, spreading fake news in social media about and alleged Georgian support of the Azerbaijani side in the conflict in October 2020. Armenian authorities later dismissed the misinformation, but initially, the fake-news had triggered protests in both Armenia and Javakheti ('Georgia Targeted in Disinformation, Armenia Official Says', 2020). Therefore Georgia has always maintained a neutral position in the Karabakh conflict, prioritizing regional stability, as the actual Georgian president Salome Zurabishvili emphasized (Nüssel and Ålander, 2020).

The agreed ceasefire between Armenia and Azerbaijan averted a destabilization in Georgia for the time being. If it proves to be successful on the long-term, and no external support for Javakheti (or Kvemo Kartli) emerges, mobilization of the minorities will diminish further, since no considerable other factor would be able to halt the government-implemented assimilation and the gradual loss of political, social, and normative resources of the two groups. Even if a shift towards a more exclusionist ethnopolitical regime would follow, and grievances as a result increase, the limited political and social resources of Javakheti (and even more limited for Kvemo Kartli) would very unlikely suffice to increment their political mobilization.

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