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## Political stability, transition and conflict: Tajikistan compared with Georgia

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The republics of Tajikistan and Georgia in Central Asia and the South Caucasus, respectively, are both small Soviet successor states. Their postindependence history was one of the political volatilities and instabilities until the mid-2000s. Nevertheless, these independent countries have eventually developed diverging policies, notably with regard to their political alliances and world orientations. Although contingent and actor-driven factors may have influenced the outcome, the influence of structural factors has been far greater than those agency-driven factors.<sup>1</sup>

In many ways, the Tajikistani Civil War resembles that of the Chechen Conflict (1991–2009, ongoing low-intensity conflict) and also helps us understand the Syrian Conflict (2011–present). Similar to Georgia, Tajikistan experienced the collapse of state institutions more intensely than other Soviet republics. It is worth mentioning that during the last days of the former Soviet Union Tajikistan had the highest rate of demonstrations per capita amongst all Central Asian republics.<sup>2</sup> In all these three cases, internal conflicts triggered (to varying degrees) regional conflicts as foreign states and (Islamist) militias interfered in them. The Tajikistani Civil War was the bloodiest conflict in the post-Soviet space after the Chechen War. Despite the fact that Georgia has not been an arena of continuous armed conflict, the sometimes ‘frozen’ sometimes ‘melted’ conflicts have had a profound impact on the political, economic and social affairs in that country. As a young man, a veteran of 2008 Georgian-Russian War told me: ‘Georgia has had a history of wars. Do you believe me? I am in my early 30s, yet I have experienced three wars in my lifetime.’

This review article is primarily based on the books listed below. The scope of this review article is neither writing separate critical book reviews, nor comparing those volumes with each other. Therefore, this list does not necessarily include only recent books, as these books are enlisted primarily for their relevance to this article’s discussion. After having read a number of recent and less recent works on this issue – broadly speaking – I try to discuss a number of relevant issues about political stability, transition and conflict. The information and insight acquired from these works help debate and understand the political transitions and conflict in these two countries. Hopefully they also offer solid insight and knowledge to understand and explain political transitions and conflict in general, or at least in similar cases. Even though in this current article some of the mentioned works weigh heavier than others, all these selected books form the corpus and backbone of this essay and are added with other relevant material.

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## Situating Tajikistan and Georgia

A decade after its termination, Tim Epkenhans's monograph, entitled *The Origins of the Civil War in Tajikistan: Nationalism, Islamism, and Violent Conflict in Post-Soviet Space*, pays attention to one of the bloodiest civil wars in the (post-) Soviet space. This study is very opportune as a reflection on certain events – and their narratives – contribute to a critical understanding of a theme and hence credibility of a study. The reason for this is that more theoretical and factual sources become available after a period of time. Many of these sources were produced earlier and yet they were not given enough attention by scholars. Second, and perhaps more important, after a period of time moods may have been tempered, politicians and key figures may have adjusted their views, and authors are less inclined to take sides, or be accused of taking sides. Finally, every work, especially those produced after a period of time, tends to reflect upon (unexplained) facts and issues, and every scholar's reflection has its own authentic value.

Epkenhans's study is a formidable and comprehensive work by a scholar with substantial knowledge of the Middle East and Central Asia. The author uses sources in Persian, Tajik, Russian, English, German and French. The frequent citations from the Tajik and Persian sources demonstrate the author's proficiency in these languages. Although Tajik can be regarded as a Persian dialect, its Cyrillic orthography, phonology and vocabulary renders it 'unworkable' for modal Persian-speakers from Iran. Generally, an author's linguistic skills may add to the accuracy of his or her discussion.

In addition to diverse published and unpublished sources, Epkenhans uses memoirs of a number of key figures in the Tajikistani Civil war; these include Safarali Kenjaev, who organized the presidential campaign of the former president Rahmon Nabiev (1991) who in turn awarded him the position of the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, Shodmon Yusuf, a former member of the communist party who later co-established the Democratic Party of Tajikistan (DPT) and lived in exile in Iran, Asliddin Sohibnazar, another co-founder of DPT, Buri Karim(ov), deputy chairman of 'the Council of Ministers' (1988–1990), Haji Akbar Turajonzoda, the *Qozikalon*,<sup>3</sup> that is, the highest Islamic religious authority in Tajikistan (1988–1993), and Ibrohim Usmonov, the minister of communication (1992–1993) and a key figure in the peace negotiations between 1994 and 1997, who remained an advisor to President Imomali Rahmon(ov) until 2004. In addition, Epkenhans uses published and unpublished materials, which he collectively names Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan's (IRPT) Counter Discourse.<sup>4</sup> The author compares these authors' 'narratives' with a certain hegemonic narrative that he calls the 'master narrative' of the Tajikistani Civil War and comes to certain conclusions that in turn add to the understanding of this civil war. Although selection of only certain key figures may add to a certain bias in a researcher's conclusion, this may not necessarily be so if the researcher gives all these sources the same degree of scrutiny. After all, all analyses are dependent on human knowledge and analytic skills, and therefore inevitably reflect, to a certain degree, their authors' 'own' interpretation of facts.

*Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution: Delayed Transition in the Former Soviet Union* is the title of Jonathan Wheatley's book originally published in 2005 and republished in 2017. It is cited several hundreds of times. Not surprisingly, because even though the primary scope of this book is about the Rose revolution (2003) in the former Soviet republic of Georgia, its insight and the conclusions it draws have wider relevance and applications. Its main purpose is to explain the Rose Revolution in Georgia and it also tries to answer whether structural or agent-based factors can better explain this transition of power.<sup>5</sup>

Its wider relevance and applications are both thematic and regional. As it describes the political history of Georgia since perestroika in the late 1980s, it also gives insight about the nature of governance, (ethnic) nationalism and conflicts in the later period of the Soviet Union and independent Georgia. It has wider regional relevancy as the Soviet legacy renders political history and dynamics of public administration, governance and ethno-territorial conflicts similar across the post-Soviet space. Nevertheless, while this study is insightful for understanding and

explaining similar phenomena in certain small states elsewhere in the world, yet one still has to be cautious when one wants to generalize the conclusions and theoretical insight of this study to across all of the former Soviet Union and its successor states. The author maintains that this study has case-specific features mainly found in Georgian culture, the level of foreign influence and collapse of state institutions. As the author correctly mentions 'the collapse of state structures during the period 1991–1994 was more marked in Georgia than in any other former Soviet republic with the exception of Tajikistan'.<sup>6</sup>

I agree with the author to a great extent with regard to these groups of factors. I agree completely with the fact that in no other former Soviet republic was the magnitude of state collapse as largely felt as in Tajikistan and Georgia. As I will further argue, I tend to agree with Wheatley about the international and cultural factors, but perhaps also because of different arguments. In the decade since Wheatley wrote his book more has become obvious with regard to the magnitude and the nature of international influences. In addition, as a cultural and political geographer, I have a more focused eye on ethno-territorial and cultural factors, especially when they are (perceived as) structural factors. Therefore, in this article I will also pay attention to such factors.

Indeed, a comparison between the recent political history of Tajikistan and Georgia is useful, because despite many similarities in the size of population, territory and the level of state collapse, these cases show different outcomes in regime transition and international orientation. In Tajikistan, factions from the former communist elite succeeded in consolidating and eventually monopolizing, to a rather high degree, political, cultural social and economic power, whereas in Georgia the former communists were briefly deposed from power to be replaced again by non-communist reformers after a decade. John Heathershaw's study entitled, *Post-conflict Tajikistan: The Politics of Peacebuilding and the Emergence of Legitimate Order*,<sup>7</sup> about the discourses of peace-building in the post-Conflict Tajikistan describes the recent state of affairs in Tajikistan quite well.<sup>8</sup> Nowadays, Tajikistan has a Eurasianist geopolitical orientation, that is, it is aligned with its Central Asian neighbours and Russia, and it is also a member of the Shanghai Cooperation, whereas Georgia has a Western-oriented, or arguably more independent, international orientation, as it (at least rhetorically) even aspires to NATO membership and has signed an association agreement with the European Union.<sup>9</sup>

Yet, despite many other differences in their ethno-religious make-up and level of wealth, they also show similar outcomes as both states were involved in civil wars and one should not forget the ethno-territorial conflicts either, be they of varying degrees of duration and intention. Tajikistan was perhaps the poorest Soviet republic, whereas Georgia has been one of the more affluent Soviet republics and as Wheatley mentions Georgians had the highest per capita ratio of membership in the Communist party than any other ethnic group, even Russians, in the Soviet Union.<sup>10</sup> Party membership, especially in a one-party political and planned economic system, means provision of more resources for one's own regional, ethnic or political group. The relatively high Georgian participation in the former Soviet political life is manifested in figures such as Iosiba Vissarionis dze Jughashvili – better known as Stalin – Lavrenti Beria and not forgetting Eduard Shevardnadze. The majority of Georgians (of Georgia) are Georgian Orthodox Christians, whereas Tajiks are Sunni Muslims. Georgia and Tajikistan, both, show a very chequered 'mosaic' type of ethnogeographic configuration.<sup>11</sup> This fact, that is, the ethno-religious heterogeneity of Tajikistan, is often underestimated mainly because of the fact that the Pamiri people(s) have not been registered as a separate ethnic or ethnoreligious group in the consecutive censuses since 1936. Although they are bi lingual in Tajik, Pamiri people speak one of the several Pamiri languages – the largest ones being Shughni and Wakhi – and are Ismaili Shia Muslims, whereas (other) Tajiks are Sunni Muslims and speak a Central Asian Persian dialect written in an adjusted form of the Cyrillic alphabet. Although he does not discuss the political and cultural peculiarities of Pamiri identity in great detail, Epkenhans does indeed pay attention to the Pamiri and Uzbek factors.<sup>12</sup> However, a more deliberate focus on the roles and perceptions of these two groups

would certainly add to the value of this already valuable work. I would have paid more attention to the ethno-religious realities of Tajikistan were I to write a similar book. I should say, nevertheless, that I could have not written such a book as it requires access to a wide range of primary and secondary sources and deep knowledge of the state of affairs in Tajikistan that I currently lack. Using memoirs of certain key figures and other published and unpublished sources, Tim Ephenhans tries to explain the root causes and the nature of the Tajikistani Civil War in his masterpiece.

Wheatley legitimately questions whether or not the Rose Revolution and Mikheil Saakashvili's presidency brought about substantial changes in Georgian political culture and its state of affairs. An answer to this question should logically be the task of studies done after Wheatley's study. Certainly, the way of governance of the Soviet and Shevardnadze's periods could not be undone overnight. However, after the Rose Revolution Georgia regained its full sovereignty over Adjara which, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, was ruled as a personal fiefdom of Aslan Abashidze. Also, the rule of law was strengthened. Bribe-taking by police – still a widespread practice in certain former Soviet republics in the first decade of 2000 – was uprooted, and eventually, thanks to the newly achieved economic progress, attracted some foreign investment.

The state of affairs after the Rose revolution is discussed fairly by Stephen Jones and his associates in two books, one edited volume entitled *War and Revolution in the Caucasus: Georgia Ablaze*<sup>13</sup> and a monograph by Stephen Jones entitled *Georgia: A Political History since Independence*.<sup>14</sup> The latter book also pays fair attention to ethno-territorial conflicts and in general to the ethnic and religious map of Georgia in more detail than Wheatley does. All in all, the aforementioned edited volume also answers that question in a rather positive way. As it was published after the Georgian-Russian war of 2008 – after which Russia recognized South Ossetia's and Abkhazia's independence – this book also pays more attention to the (root) causes of ethno-territorial conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia than Wheatley's book does. As mentioned before, ethno-territorial conflicts are not the main scope of Wheatley's book. Nevertheless, his study is a valuable source for studying them retrospectively. Different authors in *Georgia Ablaze* do not necessarily have the same understanding of the state of affairs and ethnic conflicts in Georgia. Paula Garb, for example regards these conflicts from the perspectives of South Ossetians and Abkhazians vis-à-vis Georgia (and the West), rather than from the perspective of Georgians vis-à-vis Russia.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, *War and Revolution in the Caucasus: Georgia Ablaze* – and to my knowledge any other comprehensive book until now – fails to address univocally, and with solid consensus, the root causes of ethnic conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the Russian-Georgian War of 2008 for that matter. It is not a shortcoming of such books as that did not constitute their primary purpose of writing. However, trying to reintegrate and analyze and reflect upon different (causal) narratives of the Russian-Georgian War of 2008, the Civil War and ethno-territorial conflicts will be a most welcome suggestion as a theme for new studies.<sup>16</sup>

James J. Coyle's recent book, entitled *Russia's Border Wars and Frozen Conflicts*, is a useful study because he puts the current 'frozen' untermated separatist conflicts in a wider political and legal context.<sup>17</sup> It is valuable because it discusses the diverging Russian and Western perspectives with regard to these conflicts, notably those in Ukraine and also in Syria. Despite being very critical of the Western attitude towards these conflicts, Coyle's perspective remains a Western one, as he clearly comes with policy advice for the West and NATO.<sup>18</sup> Georgia regards Russia as a former colonizer, occupier and an imperialist entity. However, it is neither scholarly practice, nor very useful in general, to begin a demonizing game. For Georgia and a large part of the post-Soviet space Russia fulfils a similar role as the USA does globally and that the UK did until the early twentieth century. In addition, as mentioned earlier, Russia has its own security concerns because of the ethnic map of the region. Aggression can be condemned. However, it is not very easy to single out Russia; as the USA acts as a global police force, it is not very farfetched to imagine that Russia also wants to act similarly in its former colonies (i.e. post-Soviet Eurasia).

All studies which, after a period of time, reflect upon conflicts are valuable as they pay attention to the newly changed, and changing, global and local political landscapes and Coyle's book is therefore no exception. Such studies usually offer insights and facts that were unnoticed or underestimated before. The power of Coyle's book lies in its discussion of ethnoterritorial wars in the post-Soviet space after the annexation of Crimea, separatism in Eastern Ukraine and the Syrian Conflict. Never before in the past 30 years have relations between the West and Russia been worse. Despite its strengths, I also disagree with Coyle in many instances. Most notably, I cannot agree with him that the new world order, which he regards as a Western product, prohibits separatism and cherishes the territorial integrity of countries.<sup>19</sup> This has arguably only been so after the Russian recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. By consulting press and media material from the end of the 1980s and early 1990s every observer could note that the West had taken a euphoric attitude, at times silently but at other times loudly, supporting separatism and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia which has eventually resulted in the recognition of unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo from Serbia by the West and a lot of other countries.

### *Wars, political stability and transitions in Tajikistan and Georgia*

Epkenhans and Wheatley try to offer understandings and explanations for the recent political histories of Tajikistan and Georgia respectively. Their studies and methodologies also fit agent-based types of explanations in addition to structure-based ones. Although it is largely true that Epkenhans's approach is primarily an agent-based one, this is not completely true of Wheatley's study. Wheatley, inspired by works of Terry Karl and Philippe Schmitter,<sup>20</sup> believes that 'structured contingency' is the best way of looking at Georgian regime transition, and similar to (other) path-dependent approaches believes that decisions taken in critical phases can co-determine future political history. Epkenhans applies thick description, discourse analysis and qualitative reflective methods. His design of study, which could best be called comparative discourse analysis, is designed in a way that makes his approach, though not necessarily his conclusions, agent-based.

In order to discuss the path to the Rose revolution, Wheatley identifies five critical phases in the history of modern Georgia that eventually led to the Rose Revolution.<sup>21</sup> The first was the violent suppression of Georgian nationalist uprisings on 9 April 1989. This damaged the communist elite to the extent that there was no reconciliation possible with them, at least for some time. The second critical phase was the presidency of Zviad Gamsakhurida. This was a time when the state institutions had nearly totally collapsed, a war in South Ossetia was begun, and even though it still did not officially separate itself from Georgia, the ethno-nationalist conflict in Abkhazia had already begun. Gamsakhurida's era was also a time of civil war during which different factions and warlords stood against each other. Somehow unable to govern the country, and perhaps also to consolidate their gains, mainly against the supporters of Zviad Gamsakhurida, Tengiz Sigua a former dissident politician, and paramilitary chiefs, better known as warlords Jaba Ioseliani and Tengiz Kitovani, invited Eduard Shevardnadze, the former Soviet minister of foreign affairs (1985–1991) and the Georgian Communist Party's first Secretary (1972–1985), to do so. Indeed, the third critical phase was the consolidation of Shevardnadze's power, which culminated in the adoption of a new constitution, the fourth phase. However, the power of Shevardnadze was not absolute and eventually dissent, mainly from reformers and a younger generation of politicians, grew to a considerable extent. Allegedly, the re-election of Shevardnadze in 2001, the fifth critical phase, was fraudulent. Since that time, the fall of Shevardnadze's regime was gaining more and more momentum, notably under the leadership of reformers such as Zurab Zhvania and Mikheil Saakashvili who was eventually elected in 2004 and held the office of president of Georgia until 2013. Following Wheatley's methodology, perhaps, two other critical phases should

be distinguished, which may answer his question as to whether the Rose Revolution had brought about a significantly new type of political regime or simply repackaged the old one. These critical phases were the Russian-Georgian War of 2008, and Saakashvili's, and his political associates' peaceful departure from office after their party, the United National Movement, was defeated first in the parliamentary election and then in the presidential election (2013). For this and other reasons, Wheatley's question could be answered positively even though many of the former practices have proven to be resilient, yet less pervasively than before, the Georgian political regime was indeed significantly and substantially changed.

Despite the fact that Wheatley's applied model of critical phases invites an agent or actor-driven explanation, his explanation of Georgia's Rose Revolution is mainly structure driven. The same can be said of the history of ethnoterritorial conflicts and Georgian political history in general. Although, it is true that certain figures such as Gamsakhurdia, Shevardnadze and Saakashvili have played pivotal roles in Georgian political history, their acts were constrained and mediated by longstanding structural conditions. I agree with Wheatley's findings in general. Wheatley's study, even though a qualitative analysis, is robust, and his conclusions are convincing. However, after nearly two decades, reflection upon some of his conclusions requires some adjustments and qualification. Therefore, I also will discuss my views where they differ from those of Wheatley.

Wheatley identifies a number of conditions that as causal factors explain the occurrence of the Rose Revolution in Georgia. According to him, these conditions are Georgian Culture, the Soviet legacy of governance, the typical constitution of 1995, (lack of) nationalism, contagion from abroad, extensive presence of foreign non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and capital, and neutrality of the USA and Russia. However, as will be discussed further below, I believe that the last two decades of Georgian history teach us different conclusions with regard to neutrality. Wheatley's identification of these conditions is also useful in understanding the case of Tajikistan. Below I will discuss these conditions and examine the extent to which they can explain the civil wars, ethnoterritorial wars and political transitions in general in Georgia and Tajikistan.

According to Wheatley, Georgian culture, in the context of typically hierarchical Soviet administrative governance, strengthens clientelism. I can agree with Wheatley that Georgian culture ideally values friendship. One has to be loyal to family, friends and colleagues and there is no sharp distinction between business and personal life. Wheatley is also right that the Georgian patriarchal culture burdens men with the protection of women. Assaulting and insulting women is strongly despised. The fact that among those killed on 9 April 1989 – when the communist government's militia opened fire on demonstrators – were many women, alarmed and touched a sensitive chord in Georgian society. Since that time no peaceful negotiation with the Soviet establishment, often associated with the Russian colonialism, has been possible, and hence nationalist figures such as Zviad Gamsakhurdia were able to take advantage of the political forum for their own ends. The cultural factor is also valid in the case of Tajikistan. However, it needs some qualification. The notions of dignity and honour are also valid in Tajikistani society where, similar to Georgian society, a patriarchal culture also prevails. However, it is debatable whether the cultural factors have played a similar role in the courses of conflicts and political transitions in Tajikistan and Georgia to the same extent. It is fair to say that despite religious similarities, the Georgian attitude vis-à-vis Russia was more negative, and the perception of danger about the violation, and hence focus on the preservation, of their country's territorial integrity has been stronger in Georgia compared with the case in Tajikistan. One possible reason may be, paradoxically, the religious similarity itself, as Russia, after incorporating Georgia into the Russian Empire, had dissolved the Georgian Kingdom and abolished the autocephalous Georgian Orthodox Church and incorporated it in the Russian Orthodox Church. Another probable reason, somehow related to the former one, is the degree of Russification. The percentage of Russians both in Dushanbe and Tajikistan in total was larger compared with those in Tbilisi and Georgia

as a whole. Indeed, the Russian language has had, and still has, a much stronger position in Tajikistan than it did and does in Georgia. In contrast to Georgia most secondary schools and universities in Tajikistan used Russian as their language of instruction.

The fact that Tajikistan does not border Russia is yet another possible reason. It may be fair to maintain that Uzbekistan fulfils a similar role as a large strong neighbour in relation to Tajikistan as it does with most other Central Asian countries. Another reason is the fact that in the case of Tajikistan Russia is not the main adversary to the country's territorial integrity as the political history has demonstrated in the case of Georgia. Tajikistani territorial grievances are primarily directed towards Uzbekistan, a country that has incorporated main 'Tajik', that is, Persian-speaking, areas in the provinces of Samarkand, Bukhara and Surkhan Darya. Perhaps the very historical legacy of attitude towards, and emotional attachment for, territorial integrity itself is yet another possible reason. Mountainous areas of the Caucasus have a history of rebellion against Russia and other imperial powers, and this freedom-loving attitude may have influenced Georgian political culture until today. It is also important to note that Tajikistan had already lost the afore-mentioned Tajik-speaking areas in central and south Uzbekistan before the collapse of the Soviet Union and Tajikistani independence, whereas Georgian territorial integrity was effectively violated during the collapse of the Soviet Union and after Georgian independence. These historical and cultural factors, may partially explain the fact that Georgia, in contrast to Tajikistan, has adopted a geopolitical orientation more towards the West than towards Russia, and rather strong anti-Russian sentiments in general.

The second condition mentioned by Wheatley is the existence of a shadow political economy. This condition was strongly present in both republics. I agree with Wheatley and Epkenhans that in Georgia and Tajikistan, respectively, there existed a shadow economy that was connected to certain political figures. As Wheatley maintains, 'By the late Gorbachev period, criminal networks also played a major role in most republics of the USSR. Criminal bosses, or *vory v zakone* (thieves in law), had considerable authority not only in the criminal world but also amongst society at large, particularly in cultural settings (such as Georgia) where a certain romanticism was associated with the profession of the thief.'<sup>22</sup> I do not agree with him that thieves are valued positively in Georgian culture. Today Georgia is, indeed, one of the safest places in the post-Soviet space. However, as mentioned earlier, in the Caucasus, particularly in its mountainous parts, people have a mentality of noble warriors, they value fighting against oppression and certain Robin Hood-like figures are renowned for their bravery in Caucasian (oral) histories.<sup>23</sup> As both cases, that is, Georgia and Tajikistan, indicate the existence of shadow economies or 'markets of violence',<sup>24</sup> availability of weapons and manpower by defection of law enforcement specialists and availability of mercenaries often called 'Rackets' were instrumental in the mobilization of armed militias.<sup>25</sup>

The third condition mentioned by Wheatley is the Soviet organizational legacy of governance. Both republics were subject to and shaped by the hierarchical ethno-territorial manifestations of the Soviet nationalities policy. By virtue of this policy large ethnic groups were awarded a union republic – which ultimately became the 15 independent successor states of the Soviet Union after its collapse – whereas smaller ethnic groups were awarded lower ranking autonomous republics or provinces within some union republics. These were Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia and Gorno-Badakhshan in Tajikistan. The Pamiris – who in contrast to the Sunni and Persian-speaking (West Iranian) (other) Tajiks were Ismaili Shi'ites and spoke a few related Pamiri (East Iranian) languages – constitute the majority of the population in Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous province. Indeed, until the Soviet Census of 1939 the Pamiri people and Tajiks were registered as separate ethnic groups. In consecutive censuses they were merged into the Tajik census category, but they continue to demonstrate cultural and political peculiarities. Several studies showed that these 'ethnic autonomies' were instrumental in the nationalist mobilization of population.<sup>26</sup>



According to Wheatley, another Soviet legacy was its practice of governance in which political graft corruption was widespread and in which breaking the laws and using *kompromat*, that is, compromising material, was a means of control. Although I am not sure whether it is correct to speak about widespread corruption in the former Soviet Union, corrupt practices did occur there frequently. In this respect Tajikistan and Georgia were very similar.

Another condition was nationalism. The hierarchical ethnoterritorial system in the Soviet Union encouraged ethnonationalism as it offered certain privileges to ethnic groups who lived in their titular territories.<sup>27</sup> Ardent ethnonationalist resurgence prevailed during the last days of the Soviet Union. These demonstrations were either centred around outright political issues, or around social, environmental or economic issues but demonstrated in each case an ethnonationalist character as the mobilization occurred along ethnic lines. The aforementioned protest on 9 April 1989 was such a case in Georgia that was aimed at the alleged Russian/Soviet instigation of ethnic separatism in Georgia. In Tajikistan, two events deserve attention: the demonstration against the alleged affirmative housing policy for Armenians in Dushanbe, who supposedly arrived in Dushanbe after they fled the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh (11 February 1990).<sup>28</sup> In addition, as the place of Islam in Tajik national identity has been a contested issue, the protests at the two squares in Dushanbe could also be regarded as such protest. In the protest that could be regarded as the beginning of the Tajikistani Civil War, protestors in Lenin Square, renamed Ozodi (Freedom Square), supported the secular government, whereas the demonstrators at the T-crossing of Putovsky (now Ismoil Somoni) Street and Lenin (now Rudaki) Boulevard, named Shahidon (martyrs) after the riots of February 1990, proposed a more prominent place for Islam in Tajikistan (25 March 1992). It should be mentioned that the protests on 25 March were initiated by the regionalist Pamiri party, La'li Badakhshan, and also attracted secular oppositional parties but was dominated later by Islamists after the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan joined the protests.<sup>29</sup> Although the number of protests was low in Central Asia compared with the Caucasus and the Baltics, as mentioned before, Tajikistan had a relatively high number of protests and a high rate of participation per capita in protests.<sup>30</sup> Wheatley correctly mentions that the nature of Soviet society has left the society with a weak class awareness and a strong identity politics that remains a serious issue of political activism.<sup>31</sup>

Wheatley also points to the constitution of Georgia (adopted in 1995) in Shevardnadze's era, which promoted contested oligarchy.<sup>32</sup> This atypical constitution abolished the Cabinet of Ministers and put each individual ministry under the direct but loose monitoring of the president. As a result, different 'enclaves' of the state – the State Chancellery, the Parliament, Government of Adjara and individual ministries – could function and even participate in economic life fairly autonomously. This constitution enhanced political clientelism and oligarchy. A more important condition, which could be explained by the constitution and Georgian political culture at that time, was the fact that the elected parliaments were not true representations of the citizens but an arena of contestation between a few factions. Arguably, Georgia after the Rose Revolution has either remained a contested oligarchy or has moved towards representative democracy. There is evidence for both positions. On the other hand, the Tajikistani party-political landscape displays an increasing centralization as President Rahmon's People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan dominates the parliament and official state positions. The Islamic Renaissance Party that was able to function for a time as an opposition party was labelled a terrorist organization and banned from parliamentary and political activism. The party-political landscape of Georgia remains somehow volatile. However, in no sense does it display signs of centralization and monopolization of power by one party as is the case in Tajikistan. It is also not very likely to happen as Georgia has signed an association agreement with the European Union. Hence the European Union assists Georgia in many spheres as long as Georgia fulfils certain formal and democratic criteria.

A very important condition mentioned by Wheatley is the existence of a large number of Western NGOs in Georgia, and I may add to that foreign aid in general. Georgia has been one of

the post-Soviet republics that has attracted a lot of foreign NGOs and aid. Amongst these was George Soros's Open Society Foundations, which are often alleged to have orchestrated or at least assisted the Rose Revolution. Tajikistan also attracted a number of NGOs. Nevertheless, these were not as large a number compared with those in Georgia. Even only in Central Asia, the number of foreign NGOs in Tajikistan was still fewer than in Kyrgyzstan. However, a more important issue is the fact that these NGOs provided income to a significant part of the population in Georgia, in an economy in which the state was unable to produce much in the way of public goods or offer employment to a significant part of the population.<sup>33</sup>

Contagion is yet another condition mentioned by Wheatley. He mentions that the revolution in Georgia followed those in Serbia and Ukraine. One may add Kyrgyzstan to the list. Tajikistan saw a different path as in Tajikistan part of the former elite eventually became victors in the political process. Contagion was also a condition that played a role in the civil and ethno-territorial conflicts which took place nearly at the same time all around the Soviet Union. The mechanism of contagion is present in the 'mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration' that enhances ethno-nationalism and increases the chance of the emergence of ethno-territorial conflicts.<sup>34</sup>

Wheatley mentions the neutrality of the USA and Russia in Georgia's political affairs as yet another condition. Even though I do not fully agree with Wheatley in this regard, it is imaginable that these countries may have been neutral before the Rose Revolution and notably before the re-occurrence and manifest internationalization of ethno-territorial conflicts in Georgia. After the Rose Revolution and the closing down of the Russian military basis in southern Georgia (2007), Georgia has charted a Western course. It also made Russia increasingly worried because Georgia bordered the North Caucasian region of Russia and the separatist regions in Georgia were populated by ethnic groups whose ethnic kin lived over the border in Russia. Ossetians live on both sides of the border, whereas Abkhazians' ethnic kin in Russia is the neighbouring Adygheys, the Cherkess and the Kabardians, collectively called Circassians, and the Abazas. A likely reason that Russia agreed with letting down Shevardnadze was that perhaps Russia had lost its temper with Shevardnadze's lack of control of Pankisi Gorge, which, according to Russia, harboured a significant number of Salafi (pro-)Chechen fighters. The fact that Russia did not support its ally, Abashidze, then the president of the Adjara autonomous republic is perhaps also a sign that Russia did not initially oppose the Rose Revolution.<sup>35</sup> A fact that may corroborate this is the existence of too many Western (financed) NGOs and pro-Western reformists already in pre-revolutionary Georgia, and Russia may not have been afraid of further Westernization as it was deemed to have reached its peak. Perhaps another important reason that Russia let Shevardnadze down was his unpopularity among the former communist hardliners, who had become proponents of the geopolitical code of Eurasianism, and perhaps the Russian accusations of Wahhabi/Salafi fighters in the Pankisi Gorge in Georgia was not just a rhetoric and that Russia genuinely believed that these fighters making use of Shevardnadze's weak government infiltrated Chechnya and assisted factions of Chechen fighters.

After the recognition of the separatist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Russia could hardly be seen as a neutral power in Georgian geopolitical affairs. After one decade, it is fair to say that the USA's position towards the Rose Revolution was not neutral. The USA might have been cautious in the beginning and have been waiting for a *fait accompli* yet could welcome the regime change in Georgia with open arms. Georgia is attractive for NATO, because it is located in a strategic place between the Middle East and Russia and hence NATO could exploit its uneasy political historical relations with Russia. As Turkey is already a NATO member, Georgian membership of NATO could be a possible and viable option. The same could be said about Ukraine, which also borders NATO countries. Tajikistan, in contrast, did not share the same political history and geopolitical location. For this reason, Western interest in post-independence Georgia has been and remains much higher than it was and is in Tajikistan, a country that remains under the Russian-dominated Eurasian structures, that is, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Tajikistan is also in the process of accession to the Eurasian Economic Union.

Wheatley also mentions the predominance of a certain degree of consent among the political elite in Georgia. Indeed, there existed a large degree of consensus among the Georgian political elite, and even among ordinary citizens, that the separatist territories should be recovered and hence there was also sensitivity towards Russia, if not outright Russophobia, which in turn encourages a Western orientation, in addition to consensus about political and economic reforms.

Perhaps maintaining *mirostitelstvo* (peacebuilding in Russian) or *Tinji* (wellness/peacefulness in Tajik) could be called a case of consensus in Tajikistan.<sup>36</sup> Epkenhans maintains that discussion of the Civil War had become a kind of taboo in Tajikistan, which was not enthusiastically talked about. However, as Epkenhans observed a recent change of attitude meant that the Civil War began to be discussed cautiously. Some colleagues maintain that an 'illiberal peace' exists in Tajikistan.<sup>37</sup> It is premature to speak with any precision about whether there is a large consensus among the Tajikistani population about all aspects of this mode of peacebuilding. However, the political and social affairs in Tajikistan may testify to such a consensus to certain degree.<sup>38</sup> One should be aware of the fact that the current global situation is very advantageous for President Rahmon. As the Wahhabi/Salafi groups have also created havoc in the West, there happened to be a greater sympathy for secular authoritarian regimes which ban their Islamism opponents in the name of defending civil liberties and order. As many authors (as Coyle)<sup>39</sup> have correctly noted, the recent geopolitical situation, notably the Ukrainian and Syrian conflicts, drive the West and Russia further away from each other, and there are no tangible signs of change visible in Tajikistani (geo)political orientation as of early 2018. However, despite its state of stability and peace and 'even though a widespread apolitical mood prevails in post-conflict Tajikistan, still the danger of violent conflict initiated by Wahhabi/Salafi militants remains real'.<sup>40</sup>

Wheatley's approach of critical phases allows some degree of voluntarism and liberty of action for political actors and agents. However, regarding his choice of factors (conditions) it is clear that his approach is predominantly a structure-based one. In contrast, it is clear that Epkenhans holds an agent-based approach. He even maintains that the civil war in Tajikistan is best explained by contingency and interaction between politicians and notably warlords. Perhaps it is fair to say that the course of the civil war as it unleashed in Tajikistan did indeed depend on personal agendas of politicians and warlords. Nevertheless, I believe that the dynamics and the result of that war were primarily determined by structures. Epkenhans truly mentions that regionalism is too often discussed as one reason, or perhaps the most prominent reason, behind the Tajikistani Civil War. Even though he does not maintain it wholeheartedly his rich description of the actions and tactics of Sangak Safarov, the warlord from Kulob, suggests that the Kulobi faction emerged as the victor out of the War because of Sangak Safarov, and Sangak Safarov just happened to be from Kulob. However, I believe that the ascendance of Kulob was not accidental. Indeed, the elite from Leninobod (now Khujand) dominated the political life of Communist Tajikistan.<sup>41</sup> That is not very strange as Leninobod was the sole urban centre when Tajikistan was established as a Soviet republic. However, in the course of time, other regions of Tajikistan were urbanized and Kulob is now the most populous region of Tajikistan. Kulobis are indeed the largest ethnographic groups of Tajiks. In addition to these facts, Khujand, the administrative centre of the Sughd province, is separated from the rest of Tajikistan by high mountains which make the transportation to the rest of the country very difficult and nearly impossible in the winter. During Soviet times, transportation between the northern and southern parts of Tajikistan usually went via Uzbekistan. Therefore, due to these structural factors, population and location, it was very likely, if not totally predictable, that Kulobis would eventually come out of the civil war as the primary victors.

## Cultural and geopolitical orientations

In its recent history, the aversion towards Russia was probably much higher in Georgia than in Tajikistan and there was consensus even in Shevardnadze's era that the country should have a Western geopolitical orientation – such an orientation was advocated to varying degrees by

different political currents. In Georgia, a nationalism existed in which the Georgian Orthodox Church had a central role and place but remained secular in many respects. In Tajikistan, however, even though a sense of Tajik nationalism existed, it became a bipolar nationalism: *Yurchiks* vs. *Vovchiks*. As Epkenhans describes, *Yurchiks* were secular Tajiks associated with Russians. *Vovchik* is a diminution of Wahhabi and referred to extreme conservative Islamists.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, a secular and irreligious Tajik nationalism was associated with Russia and with communists and Islamists were associated with Islamist fighters in Afghanistan, Chechnya and elsewhere, and perhaps also with Basmachi rebels of early twentieth-century Central Asia. Therefore, religion had an uneasy relationship with Tajik nationalism, whereas it did not with the Georgian nationalism. In Georgia, the consensus was that Georgian Orthodox Christianity had an instrumental and functional position in Georgian identity. In contrast, no consensus existed about the relationship of Islam with Tajik identity. Tajiks were Muslims, and Islamic rituals play a significant role in Tajik culture. However, different opinions existed and exist about the degree of incorporation of (political) Islam in the social and political lives of an independent (secular) Tajikistan.

The Soviet state authorities have always been involved in regulating and even engineering cultural lives of ethnic groups and territories. As a result of such Soviet legacy, the Tajikistani authorities intervene rather intensively with the material and immaterial, political economic, social and cultural lives of the country. Any traveller to Tajikistan can observe frescoes and murals that depict flower motifs alien to Tajikistan and more at home in China or Western Asia. Objects are displayed in museums or as urban fora of arts (such as murals and statues), which may be interpreted in one way or another to relate to Tajikistan, even if not found in the territory of Tajikistan, or even if in many cases their linkages with Tajikistan or Tajik culture and history are interpreted too liberally – for example, the Samanid Mausoleum in Bukhara in Uzbekistan and Manichean paintings in China. However, they also include those objects, which are clearly alien to the Central Asian country of Tajikistan, such as pre-Islamic Iranian Achaemenid or Sasanian paintings or petroglyphs. The assemblage of all these forms of art gives at times an unlikely ‘artificial’ impression.<sup>43</sup> Recognizing their cultural and historical affinity with Afghanistan, it is to be expected that Tajikistani arts and culture shows similarity with Afghani ones. However, Afghanistan is also associated by many members of the Tajikistani elite as a risk factor, as the Islamist militants are still active in that country.<sup>44</sup>

Unlike in Georgia, where consensus exists about the cultural heritage and also political orientation of the country, no such consensus seem to exist yet in Tajikistan. A sense of confusion or ambiguity has been manifest in Tajikistan in the recent (political) past: at least three currents have competed and at times allied or fought with each other. One is the Soviet or Imperial Russian past which is a symbol of progress for some but subjugation for others. The second is Islamism and the third is Iranism (rather than Central Asianism). Despite his uneasy relationship with Islamic movements, and perhaps in order to neutralize the extremist Wahhabi/Salafi type Islamism, President Rahmon announced 2009 as the year of Imam A'zam Abu Hanifa, the founder of the Hanafi madhab, or school, of Sunni Islam. As the vast majority of the Tajikistani people, with the notable exception of the Pamiri minority who are 'Ismaili' Shi'ites, are Hanafi Sunnis, the Tajikistani authorities are not very concerned about the Shi'ite Islamic ideology of the Iranian state and hence – unlike the authorities in the republic of Azerbaijan – permit and even cherish Iranism, detached from its specific Twelver Shi'ite Islamic connotations, in the cultural life of the country. Iranism in Tajikistan, despite the manifold obvious Turkic influences on Tajik culture, dares to wrestle with a competing Turkism, much more than is the case in Iran where the Turkic cultures of the Middle East and Central Asia are regarded as a subset of Iranian culture (also called Turco-Persian civilization). However, even clearly visible in the social and cultural life of Tajikistan, Iranism should not be exaggerated either, as the Russian cultural influence is more substantial and fundamental, and as the political elite of Tajikistan are educated in the Soviet system. In addition, the economic ties between Tajikistan and Russia, China and Turkey are

stronger than between Tajikistan and Iran. Unlike in Georgia, the West, Europe and NATO are absent from the foreground of the political landscape of Tajikistan.

In Georgia, Christianity and Westernism or Europeanism have an uneasy love–hate relation. They manifest a competition of modernity (West) and tradition (Orthodox Christianity). More than a century of a turbulent relationship with Russia has caused a neglect of the fact or perhaps purposeful denial in public awareness in Georgia that Western modernity came into Georgia via the similarly Christian Orthodox Russia. In fact, Russian Imperialism created a sentiment that Russianism was a yoke on the shoulder of Georgia that had its own European credentials, perhaps much more than Eurasian Russia had as an heir to empires of Eurasia ruled by equestrian hordes. Accordingly, the history of Georgian contacts with Europe, without the intervention of Russia, is cherished in Georgia: for example, the Georgian Sulkhan Saba Orbeliani, a seventeenth century author and an emissary to France and Vatican, or Jean Chardin, a seventeenth century French traveller, who visited the Caucasus on his journeys to Safavid Persia. Georgians usually state that they ‘want to become Europeans’, not that they ‘are Europeans’. Most Georgians are aware of the European bias and know that the reality of their cultural embeddedness is more complex.<sup>45</sup> It is worth remembering that although a large share of Georgians in Georgia are Christians, when Georgians in Iran (Shi’ite Muslims) and the Georgians, and their relatives the Laz, in Turkey (Sunni Muslims) are counted, the share of Muslim Georgians worldwide becomes significant. It is not clear whether they outnumber the Christian Georgians, but it certainly balances their number. It is not always clear what constitutes a Western or European orientation; whether these are European values related to enlightenment or it is just Christianity. Europeanism and Western orientation may have opponents; however, it is the hegemonic geopolitical orientation in Georgia, for they provide Georgia welfare and security, mainly against perceived threats from Russia.

Although nothing can be forecast with certainty in international relations, there are as yet no signs that the cultural and (in many ways the interrelated) geopolitical world orientations of Tajikistan – that is, Russian-oriented Eurasianism – and Georgia – that is, cautiously pro-West and notably oriented towards the EU – will change in the foreseeable future.

## Conclusion

Structural factors, most notably geographical location and cultural factors, are crucial in understanding the difference of outcome between the international orientation of Tajikistan and Georgia. Hence, similar processes that began almost simultaneously in two small Soviet republics could eventually end in two very different outcomes.

Both countries have experienced civil wars and ethno-territorial separatism. However, Tajikistan was more affected by civil war, and less so by separatism, than Georgia. Nevertheless, the outcomes are very different. Georgia experienced a revolution after one decade of oligarchic pluralism formed by an uneasy coalition of former communists and reformers. In Tajikistan, however, the former communists could consolidate and nearly monopolize political lives. Because of its location and religious similarity with the West (Christianity), there is a consensus in Georgia that a Western orientation is a viable destiny for that country.<sup>46</sup> This orientation, itself, is for a significant part also caused by the large influence of Western or Western-funded domestic NGOs. Such NGOs were very active in Georgia, whereas they were much less present in Tajikistan.

Georgia borders Russia and, historically, has had uneasy relations with Russia and therefore was more interesting for the West. Tajikistan’s traditional main ‘Other’ is not Russia but the regionally stronger Uzbekistan. It also borders Afghanistan and China. Therefore, it welcomes Russian and Chinese influence in its political and economic lives, particularly in the spheres of trade and security.

The legacy of the Soviet political system is still visible in all post-Soviet republics, albeit to different degrees. In addition, territorial, geographical and cultural, in other words ethnogeopolitical, factors are instrumental in order to explain the similarities and dissimilarities of the recent political history of both countries, Tajikistan and Georgia.<sup>47</sup> The best way to understand and explain political affairs in one country is an in-depth qualitative study. However, as these books have demonstrated comparison between relevant cases may offer valuable factual knowledge and theoretical insight.

### Books discussed in this review article

James J. Coyle, *Russia's Border Wars and Frozen Conflicts* (Berlin, London & New York: Springer, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), XI 333 pp., \$125, ISBN 978-3-319-52203-6 (Hardcover).

Tim Epkenhans, *The Origins of the Civil War in Tajikistan: Nationalism, Islamism, and Violent Conflict in Post-Soviet Space* (Lanham, London & New York: Lexington Books, 2016), XI 401 pp., \$110.00, ISBN 978-1-4985-3278-5 (Hardback).

John Heathershaw, *Post-Conflict Tajikistan: The Politics of Peacebuilding and the Emergence of Legitimate Order* (London: Routledge, 2009), 240 pp., \$150 ISBN: 978-0415484039 (Hardcover).

Stephen F. Jones (ed.), *War and Revolution in the Caucasus: Georgia Ablaze* (London: Routledge, 2010), 176 pp., \$130, ISBN: 978-0415565271.

Stephen Jones, *Georgia: A Political History since Independence* (London: IB Tauris, 2015, New Edition), 400 pp., \$65.00, ISBN: 978-1784530853.

Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution: Delayed Transition in the Former Soviet Union* (London: Routledge, 2017, first published in 2005), 262 pp., \$55, ISBN: 978-1138259164.

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### Notes

1. Agents act within social, cultural and political structures and their actions may even alter these structures and more notably these structures influence the actions of agents as they set limits to the voluntariness of agents' actions and also set the parameters of actions within which political actions get their meaning.
2. See J. Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution: delayed transition in the former Soviet Union* (London: Routledge, 2017, first published in 2005), p.32, table 2.1.
3. This word is derived from *Qādhi*, which in Arabic means judge, and *Kalān*, which in Tajik and Persian means great, big or large.
4. T. Epkenhans, *The Origins of the Civil War in Tajikistan: Nationalism, Islamism, and Violent Conflict in Post-Soviet Space* (Lanham, Boulder, London etc.: Lexington Books, 2016), pp.12–20.
5. Given my academic background as a cultural and political geographer, a methodological preference for structure-based approaches seems understandable if not evident. Indeed, most factors and conditions in the discipline of human geography are structural as they are derived from the geographic environment. However, as I argued there is, in reality, a meaningful interaction between agents or actors and social, cultural and political structures. Although agents may bring changes to these structures, their actions are conditioned by these structures.
6. Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, p.219.
7. J. Heathershaw, *Post-conflict Tajikistan: The Politics of Peacebuilding and the Emergence of Legitimate Order* (London: Routledge, 2009).
8. Although, I certainly use insight and information obtained from his study, I won't discuss John Heathershaw's study in depth in this current article as I have previously written a review of his book. See B. Rezvani review of Heathershaw's *Post-conflict Tajikistan: The Politics of Peacebuilding and the Emergence of Legitimate Order*, *Ethnopolitics* Vol.10, No.3–4 (2011) pp.470–472.

9. See for example Mark Bassin, 'The emergence of ethno-geopolitics in post-Soviet Russia', *Eurasian Geography and Economics* Vol.50, No.2 (2009), pp.131–149; D. Kerr, 'The New Eurasianism: The Rise of Geopolitics in Russia's Foreign Policy', *Europe-Asia Studies* Vol.47, No.6 (1995), pp.977–988; M. Laruelle, 'The Two Faces of Contemporary Eurasianism: An Imperial Version of Russian Nationalism', *Nationalities Papers* Vol.32, No.1 (2004), pp.115–136; P. Mojtahed-Zadeh and M. R. Hafeznia, 'Prospective on the Caspian Sea Dilemma: An Iranian Construct', *Eurasian Geography and Economy* Vol.44, No.8 (2003), pp.607–617; P. Mojtahed-Zadeh, H. Amiri & R. Salarian, 'Maritime Political Geography: Iran's legal dilemma in the Caspian Sea ends up in geographical certainties for all', *Forum of EthnoGeoPolitics* Vol.4, No.1 (2016), pp.9–18. N. Morozova, 'Geopolitics, Eurasianism and Russian Foreign Policy under Putin', *Geopolitics*, Vol.14, No.4 (2009), pp.667–686; B. Rezvani, *Conflict and Peace in Central Eurasia: Towards Explanations and Understandings* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2015), pp.205–206; B. Rezvani, 'Reflections on the Chechen Conflict: Geopolitics, Timing and Transformations', *Middle Eastern Studies* Vol.50, No.6 (2014), pp.870–890; B. Rezvani, *Ethno-territorial Conflict and Coexistence in the Caucasus, Central Asia and Fereydan* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), pp.235–238; B. Rezvani, 'The Ossetian-Ingush Confrontation: Explaining a Horizontal Conflict', *Iran and the Caucasus* Vol.14, No.2 (2010) pp.419–429; G. Sanikidze, 'Critical Response to Pirouz Mojtahed-Zadeh et al.'s "Maritime Political Geography: Iran's legal dilemma in the Caspian Sea ends up in geographical certainties for all"', *Forum of EthnoGeoPolitics* Vol.4, No.1 (2016), pp.19–20. D. Shlapentokh, 'Eurasianism: Past and Present', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* Vol.30, No.2 (1997), pp.129–151; D. Shlapentokh, 'Dugin, Eurasianism, and Central Asia', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* Vol.40, No.2 (2007), pp.143–156; G. Smith, 'The Masks of Proteus: Russia, Geopolitical Shift and the New Eurasianism', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series Vol.24, No.4 (1999), pp.481–494; A. P. Tsygankov, 'Finding a Civilisational Idea: "West", "Eurasia", and "Euro-East" in Russia's Foreign Policy', *Geopolitics* Vol.12, No.3 (2007), pp.375–399; A. P. Tsygankov, 'Mastering Space in Eurasia: Russia's Geopolitical Thinking after the Soviet Break-Up', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* Vol.36, No.1 (2003), pp.101–127.
10. Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, p.35.
11. Rezvani, *Conflict and Peace in Central Eurasia*, p.309.
12. Epkenhans, *The Origins of the Civil War in Tajikistan*, pp.60–65 and 104–110.
13. S. F. Jones, ed. *War and Revolution in the Caucasus: Georgia Ablaze* (London: Routledge, 2010, first published in 2009 as a special issue of *Central Asian Survey*).
14. S. F. Jones, *Georgia: A Political History since Independence* (London: IB Tauris, 2015).
15. P. Garb, 'The View from Abkhazia of South Ossetia Ablaze', in S. F. Jones, ed. *War and Revolution in the Caucasus: Georgia Ablaze* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp.150–151.
16. I am preparing two such papers with an ethnogeopolitical approach and applying reflective, discourse and geographic qualitative cognitive analyses. See also J. E. Strakes, 'Political opposition, external threats, and elite responses: analyzing domestic security policy in post-Rose Revolution Georgia', *Defense & Security Analysis* Vol.29, No.4 (2013), pp.308–322; J. E. Strakes, 'Taming Post-Soviet Peripheries: Divergences in Human Security and Borderland Administrative Strategies in Georgia and Azerbaijan', *Forum of EthnoGeoPolitics* Vol.3, No.3 (Special Issue on Human Security, 2015), pp.21–46.
17. James J. Coyle, *Russia's Border Wars and Frozen Conflicts* (Berlin; London; New York etc.: Springer, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).
18. Coyle, *Russia's Border Wars and Frozen Conflicts*, pp.2–8 and 271–273.
19. Coyle, *Russia's Border Wars and Frozen Conflicts*, p.37.
20. See Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, 'What democracy is... and is not', *Journal of Democracy* 2.3 (1991), pp.75–88; Terry Lynn Karl and Philippe C. Schmitter, 'Modes of transition in Latin America, southern and eastern Europe', *International Social Science Journal* 128.2 (1991), pp.267–282; Philippe C. Schmitter, 'Civil society east and west', in P. C. Schmitter, L. Diamond, M. F. Plattner, Y. H. Chu, and H. M. Tien (eds.), *Consolidating the third wave democracies: Themes and perspectives* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997).
21. Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, pp.119–227.
22. Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, p.34.
23. See for example A. M. Jaimoukha, *The Chechens: A Handbook* (London & New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005); S. M. Khasiev, 'O roli i meste religioznogo faktora v glubnykh prichinakh Rossiysko-Chechenskogo konflikta [The Role and the Place of the Religious Factor among the Main Causes of the Russian-Chechen Conflict]', in A. Iskandarian (ed.), *Religia i Politika na Kavkaze [Religion and Politics in the Caucasus]* (Yerevan: Kavkazskiy Institut SMI, 2004), pp.110–120; J. Swirszcz, 'The Role of Islam in Chechen National Identity', *Nationalities Papers* Vol.37, No.1 (2009), pp.59–88; C. Ten Dam, 'The Tragedy of the Chechen Conflict', *Forum of EthnoGeoPolitics* Vol.5, No.2 (2017), pp.42–53. C. Ten Dam, 'The Limitations of Military Psychology: Combat-stress and Violence-values among the Chechens and Albanians', in U. Bläsing, V. Arakelova and M. Weinreich, *Studies on Iran and the Caucasus: In Honour of Garnik Asatrian* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2015), pp.577–627; C. Ten Dam, C. and T. Polanski, 'Brutalities in Anti-Imperial Revolts. Commonalities and Differences in Distinct yet Overlapping Forms of Violence by Peripheral Ethnic-Indigenous Communities and Imperial Powers in Classical,

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24. Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, p.34.
  25. Epkenhans, *The Origins of the Civil War in Tajikistan*, pp.263–265 and 263–367.
  26. See for instance R. Brubaker, 'Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutional Account', *Theory and Society* Vol.23, No.1 (1994), pp.47–78.; S. E. Cornell, *Autonomy and Conflict: Ethnoterritoriality and Separatism in the South Caucasus – Cases in Georgia* (Uppsala: Department of Peace and Conflict), pp.123–124; T. Martin, 'An Affirmative Action Empire: The Soviet Union as the Highest Form of Imperialism', in R. G. Suny and T. Martin (eds), *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp.67–90; Rezvani, *Conflict and Peace in Central Eurasia*, pp.45 and 254–296; Rezvani, *Ethno-territorial Conflict and Coexistence in the Caucasus, Central Asia and Fereydan*, pp.281–323; M. Roessingh (2001). 'Ethno-nationalism and Political Systems in Europe', in G. J. Dijkink and H. Knippenberg (eds). *The Territorial Factor: Political Geography in a Globalising World* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press), pp.293–316.
  27. See for example I. Bremmer, 'Post-Soviet Nationalities Theory: Past, Present, and Future', in I. Bremmer & R. Tarras (eds), *New States, New Politics: Building the Post-Soviet Nations* (Cambridge, etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.3–26; Martin, *An Affirmative Action Empire*, pp.67–90; R. Nalbandov, *Not by Bread Alone: Russian Foreign Policy Under Putin* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), pp.188–190; Rezvani, *Conflict and Peace in Central Eurasia*, pp.57–73; Y. Slezkine, 'The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism', *Slavic Review* Vol.53, No.2 (1994), pp.414–452.
  28. Epkenhans, *The Origins of the Civil War in Tajikistan*, pp.114–115.
  29. Epkenhans, *The Origins of the Civil War in Tajikistan*, p.226.
  30. Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, p.32, table 2.1.
  31. Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, pp.31–33.
  32. Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*, pp.217 and 225.
  33. This is often mentioned as a reason to explain the differences in the magnitude of power and influence the foreign NGOs had in Georgia and those post-Soviet republics that had natural resources such as gas and oil. See Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution*.
  34. Rezvani, *Conflict and Peace in Central Eurasia*, pp.191–193.
  35. Rezvani mentions his encounter with a North Ossetian political analyst who maintained that by not supporting Abashidze in Adjara, Russia wanted to demonstrate its goodwill to Saakashvili. Accordingly, it wanted to give Saakashvili a message that Georgia might regain South Ossetia and Abkhazia if it remained friendly with Russia. See *Conflict and Peace in Central Eurasia*. See Rezvani, *Conflict and Peace in Central Eurasia*, p.182 ff.36.
  36. Heathershaw, *Post-conflict Tajikistan*, chapters 4 and 5, pp.60–117.
  37. D. G. Lewis, J. Heathershaw, and N. Megoran. 'Illiberal Peace? Authoritarian modes of conflict management', *Cooperation and Conflict* (forthcoming 2018).
  38. Almost all Tajikistani scholars, political analysts and citizens alike to whom I spoke maintain that the largest part of the population is happy about how the Tajikistani authorities (with assistance of Russia) are maintaining order and security in that country.
  39. See Coyle, *Russia's Border Wars and Frozen Conflicts*, pp.93–97.
  40. Rezvani, *Conflict and Peace in Central Eurasia*, p.235.
  41. Several spellings are used for Leninobod, Leninabad, Lenin Abad, Kulob, Kulyab, Kulab.
  42. Epkenhans, *The Origins of the Civil War in Tajikistan*, p.230.
  43. See for example this video clip <https://youtu.be/dSXD9ajqyEI?t=322> (accessed 20 December 2017).
  44. For example, Afghano-Indian style of singing reveals a sense of identity confusion in Tajikistani material art and reality.
  45. I have heard such arguments mainly from my students and intellectuals from Georgia, who are aware of their history as well as the geopolitical realities of the time. Coyle, for example represents Georgia by focusing on the traits that may appear European (e.g. Greek mythology, antiquity of Christianity in the country and viticulture). See Coyle, *Russia's Border Wars and Frozen Conflicts*, p.179. Representing Georgia by such traits indeed help distinguish the Georgia and Georgians from (Georgia's neighbouring) Muslim countries and while they are silent about other traits that show similarities between these countries' material and immaterial cultures. There may exist materials such as racist incidents that Russians and Georgian may use in social



media in their smear campaign of the 'Other'. For example, see these news items for Georgia refusing South Asians to enter Georgia, allegedly against the prevailing rules <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/we-got-deported-no-reason-why-georgia-refusing-entry-indians-70649> and <http://gulfnews.com/news/uae/tourism/holiday-makers-turned-back-from-georgia-3-250-worth-of-holiday-expenses-wasted-1.1643273> (accessed 12 April 2018). However, these may be facts, one should be aware that they are often used instrumentally in propaganda campaigns. In contrast, there is a core of truth that that Russia and the West use incidents and historical fact instrumentally in their propaganda campaigns. For example, the contemporary Western media have been relatively silent about the collaboration of West Ukrainian nationalists with Nazi Germany, whereas the Russian media not only blame the West but also accuse all the Ukrainian revolutionaries of being Nazi collaborators. See for example <https://www.rt.com/news/414827-bandera-torch-marches-ukraine> (accessed 12 April 2018).

46. Owing to its present geographical spread, it is often forgotten that Christianity has its roots in the Middle East and not in Europe!
47. For a succinct definition of ethnogeopolitics in its narrow and broad sense see B. Rezvani and M. Ilyasov [Резвани, Бабак и Ильясов, Марат], 'Этногеополитика и Форум Этногеополитики' [Etnogeopolitika I Forum Etnogeopolitiki], *Forum of Ethnogeopolitics* Vol.5, No.2 (2017), pp.7–8; B. Rezvani, 'EthnoGeoPolitics and its Forum', *Forum of Ethnogeopolitics* Vol.1, No.1 (2013), pp.4–6. For a general discussion, specially about the application ethnogeopolitical theory in regional and global politics see Mark Bassin, 'The Emergence of Ethnogeopolitics in Post-Soviet Russia', *Eurasian Geography and Economics* Vol.50, No.2 (2009), pp.131–149.