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GROUP DYNAMICS AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN GEORGIA: A FOUR-REGION COMPARISON

Abstract

The study will focus on four regions of Georgia: the autonomous republics of Ajaria and Abkhazia and the regions of Samegrelo and Javakheti. Its aims are the following. First, it will lay down a theoretical basis by providing a taxonomy of collective actors which will include: i) organisations, ii) networks, iii) clans, and iv) ethnic groups. Second, it will attempt to identify which types of collective actor existed in the four regions mentioned above and the extent of interactions between them. Third, it will identify the institutions or 'rules of the game' that govern interactions both within each collective actor (i.e. group) and between actors and will gauge the extent to which these institutions are able to contain conflict within a non-violent framework. Fourth, it will trace the evolution of these groups and institutions in each region; specifically to gauge the extent to which Soviet-era groups and institutions have persisted (static elements). Fifth, it will seek to measure variance or divergence between the four regions in terms of the different groups and institutions that exist there (dynamic elements). Sixth, it will aim to explain both static and dynamic elements of groups and institutions in the four regions in terms of a) legacies, and b) conjunctural factors. Finally, drawing upon the empirical evidence unearthed it will examine how both the dynamic interrelationship between collective actors and the constraining role of institutions may affect the coherence of the modern state.

Theoretical Approach

The key concepts used in this research are **collective actors**, the **state** and **institutions**. I define a **collective actor** as a group of individuals that are a) aware of their membership of the group, b) capable of making collective decisions, c) capable of collective action. I define the **state** as a collective actor that is constituted by a group of individuals vested with the right to make binding political decisions over the population of a particular delimited territory. Finally, I use Douglass North's definition that **institutions** are "the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interactions"¹. These rules can be either formal or informal.

In this research I identify four types of (state *and* non-state) collective actors: official organisations, ethnically-based solidarity groupings, networks and clans. It is expected that each type of actor will be governed by very different internal rules and institutions. It may also be useful to subdivide these types further according to the institutions which govern each sub-type. Thus, in the post-Soviet case it may be highly desirable to subdivide the category of "networks" into networks that were formed within the various branches of the Communist Party, on the one hand, and criminal networks, on the other. Amongst official organisations, it will also be necessary to distinguish between government bureaucracies and NGOs. It must be made clear that the various collective actors may well overlap, or even coincide, and an individual may belong to more than one actor (i.e. group) at the same time. In

¹ Douglass North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 6.

certain cases, for example, a formal and an informal actor may coincide; thus a ministry at one level is an official organisation, but at an informal level it may be controlled and manned by members of a particular patronage network or clan.

Collective actors may belong to the state or may form part of society (non-state actors). Semi-autonomous actors that are themselves a part of the state need not threaten the state's own existence as an actor unless the interests of these 'sub-actors' are sufficiently divergent as to threaten the state's capacity for collective decision-making. Certain key actors may even play an intermediary role between state and society, sometimes loyal to the state, at other times representing the fragments of society to which they belong. In this way the boundaries between the state and society are both blurred and fluctuating, and often there is no clear dividing line between the various segments of the state and corresponding segments of society. Certain actors therefore provide the arena in which state and societal actors struggle for supremacy. The outcome of this struggle depends on the strength and unity both of the state and of the various social actors that exist².

In this context institutions play the role of a kind of "glue". First, some institutions condition and regularise interactions between the individuals that constitute a particular collective actor. Such institutions can be described as *actor-specific institutions*, and apply to one and only one actor. Second, there are institutions that bind together the various 'sub-actors' that make up that overarching actor that we call the state. These are normally well-defined, often written rules or *formal institutions*. Finally, if we are lucky, there may be certain norms and codes of behaviour that bind together all members of a society that reside within a particular territorially defined region. These we can call *culture-based institutions*.

The Research Puzzle

The study that is to be undertaken will be a *comparative analysis* of four regions of the Republic of Georgia: the Autonomous Republics of Abkhazia and Atchara and the regions of Samegrelo and Javakheti. The goals of the research are the following: 1) to identify the collective actors that are present in each region, 2) to identify the actor-specific, formal and culture-based institutions that both provide coherence for individual actors and regulate conflict *between* actors within each region, and 3) to examine how these actors and institutions evolved over time, in particular how they were affected by external shocks such as the collapse of the USSR, economic crisis, pressure from nationalist counter-elites and civil war.

The four regions have been chosen because they vary with respect to three factors that could potentially explain any institutional variation that may exist today. Two of the above-mentioned regions (Abkhazia and Javakheti) contain a significant number of non-Georgians (in Abkhazia, Abkhaz, Russians and Armenians; in Javakheti, Armenians), while two are more or less ethnically homogenous and Georgian (Atchara and Samegrelo). Moreover, two (Abkhazia and Atchara) had previously been administrative sub-units (Autonomous Republics) of the USSR and hence were

² See Joel S. Migdal, "The State in Society: An Approach to Struggles for Domination" in Joel S. Migdal, Atul Kohli and Vivienne Shue (eds.), *State power and social forces: domination and transformation in the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 7-34.

endowed with the sort of pseudo-state institutions that the other two regions were lacking. Finally, only two of the four regions (Abkhazia and Samegrelo) experienced any violent conflict during and after the collapse of the Soviet Union (civil war and expulsions in Abkhazia and sporadic violence between supporters of Zviad Gamsakhurdia and pro-government forces in Samegrelo).

Studying power structures at the local level enable us to examine close up how state and society in Georgia interact. In the regions we can examine the relationship between the various collective actors that lie on the interface between the state and society, including the executive branch of government in the districts (*gamgeoba*), local branches of government bureaucracies, representative bodies (*sakrebuloebi*), local NGOs, and local commercial interests. By discerning the interrelationships and the patterns of dominance and co-optation within and between these groups, one can gain an understanding of the nature and pervasiveness of state power, as well as the coherence of both society and state. Such a study will also throw light on the relevance of formal organisations such as the *gamgeoba* and *sakrebulo* as compared with informal networks of power.

The Evolution of Groups and Institutions

Let us now turn to the evolutionary path that forged the actors and institutions we are considering. Here we must distinguish between gradual incremental change and discontinuous 'big leap' change. To understand the former, we must understand the legacies of yesteryear - in this case the collective actors and institutions that were also present in the late Soviet period. For the latter, our attention must turn to the external shocks which altered formal institutional structures and forced actors to improvise as never before in order to adapt to the new circumstances. Let us deal with each in turn.

Legacies

There are three types of Soviet-era legacies that are relevant in the areas that are being considered: the legacy of collective actors, the legacy of formal Soviet institutions, demographic legacies, and the legacy of informal institutions. Let us examine each in turn:

The Legacy of Actors

As outlined above, collective actors are divided into four categories: formal organisations, networks, clans, and ethnic groups. I will now deal with each type in turn, explaining how each may be relevant in the Georgian case.

1. Formal Organisations. Certain highly influential groups from the Soviet period, both formal and informal, remain powerful even today. Looking first at official organisations in Georgia, the clearest example of a relic of the Soviet past is the Ministry of Internal Affairs (police). In fact, there are five police forces in Georgia that can be traced back to the official administrative division of Georgia during the Soviet period: the Georgian police (belonging to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Georgia), the police force associated with the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the (ethnic Georgian) Abkhaz government in exile, the Atcharan police

(belonging to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Atchara), the separatist police force in Abkhazia, and the separatist police force in South Ossetia.

Certainly the police forces of both the Republic of Georgia and the Autonomous Republic of Atchara are structurally very similar to their Soviet predecessors. Both are highly centralised and hierarchical bodies and many of their staff also served as policemen during the Soviet period (notwithstanding the probable recruitment of members of paramilitary groups to the official police force in the early to mid 1990s). Although the Georgian police force lost its monopoly over the use of force from 1991-1994, when paramilitary groups were dominant, it was restored more or less in its original form by Shevardnadze in 1993-95. There are two reasons why this was possible. First, the Ministry of Internal Affairs was a union-republic ministry during the Soviet period and as such did not depend so much on Moscow for its capacity to act autonomously (see below). Second, Shevardnadze had personally been Georgian Minister of Internal Affairs prior to being appointed First Secretary of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1972, thus on returning to Georgia in 1992, he was able to make use of his police connections to restore the organisation.

While the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs has been penetrated by informal patterns of behaviour since the late 1970s or even earlier, this "informalisation" has accelerated in the post-Soviet period, and the Georgian police have been increasingly involved in extortion and the smuggling of narcotics and tobacco.

2. *Networks*. These include both Communist Party networks and criminal networks. Looking first at those Party networks which were created in the Soviet period, we see that a number of these still play an active role today, both in Georgia as a whole, and in those regions that this project sets out to deal with. Patronage networks that developed around the *raikom* or *gorkom* during the late Soviet period are still highly active. Thus, Temur Shashiashvili, the former First Secretary of the *gorkom* of Georgia's second city, Kutaisi, is today the President's authorised representative for the region of Imereti (of which Kutaisi is the principal town), and several of his former comrades have positions as *gamebeli* or city mayors within the region. Samegrelo too remains dominated by various '*nomenklatura* clans', the most prominent of which is associated with Otar Patsatsia, who had briefly been First Secretary of Zugdidi city *gorkom* in the 1960s and who had also been the director of a paper mill that employed more than half the working population of Zugdidi. The President's authorised representative to Samegrelo, Bondo Jikia, whose roots also lie in the *nomenklatura* of the Communist Party of Samegrelo (also in the Zugdidi city committee), is believed to be affiliated to the Patsatsia network.

Networks associated with the Communist Youth League (Komsomol) also play a very major role in the regional power structures in Georgia today. Most *gameblebi* (heads of the *raion* administration) in Georgia have a Komsomol background. This network of Komsomol officials came into being because Komsomol people had very broad connections and knew individuals in other districts and in the centre. The main 'patron' of this network was Badri Khatidze, formerly a high-ranking member of Komsomol who was the head of the Co-ordinating Service for Local Government and Regional Policy within the State Chancellery from 1996 until he resigned from his post in April 2002 amidst allegations of corruption. It was Khatidze's task to "recommend" to Shevardnadze who to appoint as *gamebeli*. Previously this task had

been performed by Vazha Lortkipanidze, first secretary of the Georgian Komsomol from 1983-1986, who was Shevardnadze's Chief of Staff from 1992 until he became ambassador to Russia in 1995. Lortkipanidze and later Khatidze were particularly influential in promoting their clients from the former Komsomol as *gamgebeli*.

Criminal networks have also played a very major role in Georgia's social dynamics, both before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. These groups even controlled Georgia for a brief period of time in the early 1990s. Of key importance for the emergence of these networks was what Nodia calls the "shadow economic elite", which straddled the gulf between the political elite and the criminal underworld during the late Soviet period. According to Nodia the shadow economic elite were those "involved in legal production who stole raw materials and finished products and sold them on the black market"³. Such an elite undoubtedly existed throughout the Soviet Union; in Georgia (and I suspect in the other Transcaucasian republics and in Central Asia as well), the density of interactions between the political elite and the shadow economic elite on the one hand, and between the shadow economic elite and the criminal underworld on the other, was particularly great. It is very likely that parts of the shadow economic elite financed the Mkhedrioni, and enabled it to develop into a well-organised paramilitary force.

3. *Clans*. Clans, defined by Rubin as "unit[s] of social action whose solidarity is based on kinship or a kinship-like form of solidarity"⁴, are known to play a significant role in Central Asian politics⁵. My own research would suggest that clans play some role (albeit a secondary role) in the local power structures of Samegrelo, but no role at all in eastern Georgia⁶.

4. *Ethnic groups/Nations*. Ethnic groups have proved to be very important in-groups in the Transcaucasian republics and have frequently been used as a basis for mobilisation. This factor is particularly important when one compares the southern Caucasus with Central Asia, where national identity is weak, if not absent. In the two most serious conflicts that have occurred within Georgia - in Abkhazia and South Ossetia - the ethnic principal has formed the basis for mobilisation in violent conflict, and nationalism has proved an important mobilising factor in the rest of Georgia as well.

The Legacy of Formal Soviet Institutions

Of particular interest here is the legacy of the administrative status of the four regions. Here I refer to the official status of the regions in question during the Soviet period. Those regions that enjoyed some special administrative status on grounds of ethnicity or religion (for example Autonomous Republics and Autonomous Oblasts) had their own formal institutions and their own apparatus. Thus they possessed their own political

³ Hanf and Nodia, *Georgia Lurching to Democracy. From agnostic tolerance to pious Jacobinism: Societal change and peoples' reactions* (Baden Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2000), 48.

⁴ Barnett R. Rubin and Jack Snyder (eds.), *Post-Soviet Political Order: Conflict and State Building*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 147.

⁵ For more on clans in Central Asia, see Kathleen Collins, "Clans, Pacts and Politics in Central Asia", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.13, No.3 (July 2002), pp.137-152.

⁶ Jonathan Wheatley, *The Problems of Post-Soviet Regime Change: Dynamic and Static Elements of the Georgian Regime 1989-2001*, unpublished PhD dissertation for the European University Institute, Florence (2002).

elite which formed a solidarity grouping in its own right with its own self-defined interests. In the cases that are of interest to us here, both Abkhazia and Atchara had Union Republic status, South Ossetia had the status of Autonomous Oblast, while Javakheti, Samegrelo and Kvemo Kartli had no official status at all. I would suggest that administrative status is important because those regions with their own officially-recognised status also had their own political elites, who often strove for greater autonomy from the union republic once the "imperial centre" in Moscow collapsed. The fact that two of the three regions with special administrative status, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, experienced armed conflict during the early 1990s serves to underline this point.

Another important Soviet institutional legacy is the configuration of formal organisations that made up the power structure of the Soviet Union. Of particular importance was the division of executive bodies into all-Union and union-republic ministries. I have already mentioned that the Ministry of Internal Affairs was a union-republic ministry and that this gave it a greater possibility to maintain its coherence following the collapse of the structure of the Soviet state. Union-republic ministries also covered education and healthcare⁷. These ministries had their counterparts at all-Union level, which would exercise a supervisory role; thus there was a *Georgian* Ministry of Internal Affairs as well as a *Soviet* Ministry of Internal Affairs to supervise it.

The task of implementing the Politburo's key policies was assigned to the all-Union ministries, which had no counterparts at republican level. All the main ministries responsible for implementing economic and industrial policy, as well as the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Defence, were all-Union ministries. The fact that all the key ministries of the economy and industry were all-Union gave little (formal) scope for autonomy to economic sub-units within the *nomenklatura*. For example, the centralised agencies would dictate to an industrial manager how much he must pay his workers, how many people he must employ, and even where he must obtain his raw materials. This extreme degree of centralisation made rule-breaking and corruption a functional necessity. It also made the formation of hierarchically-based patronage networks an essential 'insurance policy' against possible punishment for such unavoidable malfeasance. In short, the over-centralisation of Soviet power structures had a crucial impact in structuring institutions and collective actors, some of which would have a continuing impact in the post-Soviet era. It also fostered particular a kind of organisational culture amongst the Soviet *nomenklatura* that still persists today and that will be described in greater detail below.

Demographic Legacies

Closely related to the legacy of administrative status is the demographic legacy of the ethnic mix within each administrative unit, both with respect to the population at large, and also with respect to the ruling political elite within the unit. Clearly the ethnic composition of the population of a region must be considered as a major factor. Some theorists claim that the likelihood of conflict is greatest in situations of *ethnic dominance*, when the largest ethnic group makes up between 45% and 90% of the

⁷ For details of the division between all-Union and union-republic ministries, as well as a translation of the Constitution of the Soviet Union (complete with the 1991 amendments), see Gordon B. Smith, *Soviet Politics: Struggling with Change* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992).

total population⁸. However, the ethnic composition of *elites* may also be highly relevant in post-Soviet states, especially when this composition is at variance with that of the rest of the population. In the Soviet Union, even if the titular nationality of an Autonomous Republic or Oblast formed quite a small minority in the territory, that minority was generally over-represented within the political elite. For example, in Abkhazia, where only 17.8% of the population were ethnic Abkhaz, one source estimates that during the late communist period 41% of members of the Supreme Soviet, 67% of republican ministers and an even greater proportion of lower level officials belonged to the titular nationality⁹. This imbalance made the elites view the collapse of centralised power in Moscow and steps towards democratisation with increasing alarm, as independence of the Union Republics and democratic reforms threatened to deprive them of their hegemonic position.

The Legacy of Informal Institutions

Informal institutions, or informal "rules of the game", consist both of culture-based norms and actor-specific norms. Considering first cultural norms, it would appear that of particular relevance to the Caucasus region as a whole, and to Georgia in particular, are those norms that are bound up with the notion of *honour*. The core value of Georgian society is that of honour, not so much individual honour as honour accrued to one's family. This notion is clearly central to Georgian networks, as the head of a Georgian family gains honour by widening his personal network. His network consists not only of family members, but also friends, neighbours and colleagues. Networks are built on bonds of mutual obligation based on trust, and are reinforced by competitive displays of hospitality (feasts, bouts of excessive drinking etc.). An individual also accrues honour through his willingness to take risks and to face down his opponents by acts of courage, which may include the use of violence if it is felt that the opponent has insulted his honour¹⁰. In certain mountainous regions of Georgia, disputes in which family honour is threatened may even be regulated by means of a blood feud. Informal rules regarding the notion of honour tend to prevail in informal groups, such as patronage networks and (especially) criminal networks, but may also govern informal behaviour within official organisations.

Actor-specific institutions, on the other hand, are those institutions which regulate behaviour within a particular group, but are not shared by all, or even most groups within society. The criminal underworld in particular has its own code of honour, known by the Georgian term *kurduli gageba*, or "thieves' understanding". In Georgia during the late Soviet period, the criminal underworld invoked in much of the younger generation a particular admiration; in contrast to the perceived hypocrisy of those who joined Komsomol and embraced an ideology they hated for personal gain, the criminal was seen as somehow more honest, more noble. Thus the *kurduli gageba* was (and still is) quite highly esteemed among young Georgian males. In particular, there is what Koehler calls the "school of the street", which has its own hierarchies

⁸ See, for example, Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler "Greed and Grievance in Civil War" (October 21st, 2001), available at http://econ.worldbank.org/files/12205_greedgrievance_23oct.pdf.

⁹ Ketevan Tskhelashvili, *The Case Studies of Abkhazia and South Ossetia* (draft chapter, 30 September 2001), available at www.ecmi.de/cps/download/Abkhazia_SouthOssetia.pdf.

¹⁰ See Gerald Mars and Yochanan Altman, "The Cultural Bases of Soviet Georgia's Second Economy", *Soviet Studies*, vol.25, no.4 (1993), p.555.

and its own normative discourse based around the notion of "speaking true and just". As Koehler points out, not all Georgians had command of this social language:

Career-communists relying for their options on the logic of power in Moscow or nationalist dissident believers saw no use in the complicated middle-world of polytaxis [the ability to have command over more than one social language, including the language of the street]. To them, this world seemed criminal or treacherous.¹¹

However, careers communists also had their own very distinctive social language and their own set of norms. In response to the structural constraints imposed by a highly-centralised Soviet system, the nomenklatura developed its own particular kind of 'organisational culture' and its own discourse. The norms associated with this 'organisational culture' included arbitrariness, rule-breaking, dissimulation, and clientelism, and the discourse was characterised by an almost sycophantic loyalty towards one's superiors (irrespective of one's "true" feelings towards the boss) and, often, boorishness towards one's subordinates. These informal rules that governed the behaviour of apparatchiks offered rewards for unquestioning (outward) loyalty to one's superiors but also for breaking the rules in order to achieve one's goal. Superiors would enforce loyalty by collecting 'kompromat' on their subordinates, which was always possible given the functional necessity of breaking formal rules.

These institutions persist amongst political elites in the former Soviet Union today, especially in those republics in which former communist apparatchiks are still represented in the structures of power. The publication of taped conversations between Ukraine's president, Leonid Kuchma, and his subordinates during the 1999 presidential election campaign vividly illustrates the continuing prevalence of this culture:

Kuchma speaks with STA head Azarov

Azarov: Good morning.

Kuchma: Hi. Sit down, let's have some tea.... Well, I have several (definitions, directions?) (for you). You should gather all your, *bliad*¹² tax workers in the rayons - I don't know, at least the ones from the oblasts. And you should warn them: those who lose elections in the rayons, after the elections, they won't be working.

Azarov: ...

Kuchma: We will not leave one of them (working). You understand – all the way down to the rayon village. You have to sit down with every head, *bliad'*, and tell him, do you (want to), *bliad'*, that he will go to jail (and I have the most on you), or you have to provide votes. Yes, or no?

¹¹ Jan Koehler, "The School Of The Street: Organising Diversity And Training Polytaxis In A (Post-) Soviet Periphery".

¹² *Bliad'* in Russian literally means "whore", but in this context it should probably best be translated as "fuck".

Azarov: I understand... Everything's going to be (like you say)...

[...]

Kuchma, over the phone, purportedly speaking to SBU chief Derkach

The militia will have to work seriously... It's necessary for a tax worker to go to every collective farm head in every village and say: dear friend, you understand clearly how much material we have on so that you could find yourself in jail tomorrow... And there is probably more than enough material on every collective farm head. Yes or no? Probably yes. That's why the militia,... that is, the services... they all have to, that is, take to (the task) and have a serious talk with every collective farm head. It's them, *bliad'* arseholes, they're trying, that is, to arrange... The village there is voting against.¹³

Although the above example is set in Ukraine, it could just as easily have been a conversation amongst members of the Georgian political elite.

Contingent Factors

By contingent factors I mean shocks that are external to a given collective actor or even to society as a whole, as well as actor-driven events - in other words choices, decisions and bargains made by individual and collective actors. Of particular importance with regard to the second category is the decision by political and economic elites whether or not to use violence to pursue their goals. Generally speaking, contingent factors mark "critical junctures" where the structure of collective actors and the institutions that bind them together experience a period of rapid change. In part it is the task of this study to gauge the relative weight of contingent factors as against the legacies of institutions and collective actors. In particular, we must shed some light on the question of how "sticky" institutions actually are: in other words, do critical junctures actually change institutions, or do they merely change the balance of power between actors? To what extent do institutions determine - and restrict - the "window of opportunity" that is open after each "critical juncture". I will first describe the different types of contingent factors that are relevant to the Georgian case.

1. External Shocks. External shocks are important because they change the incentive structures of actors. The most significant "external shock" was the collapse of state institutions and the corresponding loss of the legitimate monopoly of violence by the state at the time of the demise of the USSR. The collapse of formal rules meant that tasks hitherto carried out by the state were increasingly carried out by groups whose incentives were structured by an informal institutional framework. The removal of the state's power to impose sanctions also triggered a scramble amongst the various informal groups and patronage networks to seize the most valuable resources of the moribund state. This, in turn, led to a redistribution of power amongst the various actors, and especially a rise in the power of various networks of organised crime, who took advantage of the situation by seizing ammunition from Soviet weapons stores.

¹³ See www.pravda.com.ua/?10211-3-1, translation by Kyiv post staff.

In the Georgian case we can see vividly how the process of state collapse led inexorably to violent conflict in Abkhazia. The war in Abkhazia was the result of an attempt by Georgian paramilitary groups (particularly Tengiz Kitovani's National Guard and later Jaba Ioseliani's *Mkhedrioni*) to gain control of the region's lucrative resources, as they had already plundered those in most of the rest of Georgia. It was also due to a perception by the Abkhaz political elite, which from the late communist period controlled almost all state goods within the Autonomous Republic, that the Georgian centre was striving to deprive it of political power and the resources that went with it. The result was that members of this elite believed that violence was the most effective way to "protect what was theirs".

State collapse affects all actors within society, and affects all actors differently. On the surface it could be said that the Georgian police force, once it had been restored by Shevardnadze in the early- to mid-nineties, was very similar to its Soviet-Georgian predecessor. It remained hierarchical, monolithic and corrupt. However, there was one very important difference. Following the collapse of the Soviet state and the incapacity of its Georgian successor to extract a revenue, the police were no longer able to obtain significant resources legally from the official state budget. This inevitably made the Georgian police far more predatory and forced them to operate as one large centralised mafia.

2. *Violence*. Once violence starts it creates its own dynamic. Thus the decision made by elite actors to use violence - or to resist the temptation to use it - is a very crucial one that leaves its own institutional legacy. Once the "point of no return" is breached and the dynamic of violence begins, the "rules of the game" change irrevocably. As memories of peacetime recede, many of the norms and codes of conduct that hold violence to be unacceptable also fade away. Periods of warfare are therefore periods in which there is a very marked change in norms, institutions and individual identities. Incentive structures change very rapidly too; in civil wars that are marked by ethnic cleansing and genocide, there is very often the incentive to "kill or be killed". Amongst the so-called "entrepreneurs of violence" there are also financial incentives to continue the cycle of violence, as a self-perpetuating "market of violence" is formed¹⁴.

Even when the cycle of violence is more or less exhausted, a stalemate situation of "no peace, no war" may become entrenched and institutionalised. This is precisely what has happened in Abkhazia, where the present stalemate in the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict has proved highly advantageous for those actors that can exploit the porous 'border' between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia by smuggling over contraband goods. At least one of the pro-Georgian partisan groups that is waging war against the unrecognised government of Abkhazia, the Forest Brothers, is involved in this activity and is believed to enjoy the backing of the official structures of the (ethnically Georgian) government in exile of Abkhazia. Trade in contraband goods from Abkhazia is also believed to provide a source of revenue for certain clans in Samegrelo. It would appear to be to the advantage of certain informal groups (including those within the official structures of power) to make sure that the so-called "frozen conflict" persists.

¹⁴ See Georg Elwert, 'Intervention in Markets of Violence' in Jan Koehler and Christoph Zurcher (eds.), *Potentials of (Dis)Order: Explaining Violence in the Caucasus and in the Former Yugoslavia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

As well as the obvious example of Abkhazia, other cases in which violence has been used have also left a lasting legacy. Particularly crucial was the decision by the leadership of the Communist Party of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (GSSR), initially with the backing of Moscow, to use violence against unarmed demonstrators (mainly young women and teenage girls) in the square in front of Government House on 9 April 1989. The result was around twenty deaths. It is hard to under-estimate the long-term effects of this act of violence; in my view it greatly complicated the transition process, by radicalising the opposition to such a degree as to close off the possibility of a peaceful, negotiated transition and by creating a moral climate in which violence was perceived to be justified. Moreover, this act served as a pretext for the establishment of paramilitary groups, the *Mkhedrioni* in particular, as the discourse it provoked often focused on the need of the Georgian people to defend themselves against Soviet aggression. Such groups provided a rallying-point around which disenchanted, rebellious and patriotic young men were able to gather. The events of 9 April 1989 are therefore key to understanding the evolution of group dynamics and institutional change during the transition period.

A decision to avoid violence also leaves its own legacy, especially as peace deals often include an informal agreement to share revenues or lucrative state posts. This can lead either to a form of institutionalised (if informally institutionalised) power sharing or to continued instability with a continued potential for violence if the power-sharing deal is poorly-institutionalised and each side remains convinced that its adversary intends to renege on the deal. In the mid-1990s it would appear that a power-sharing deal was struck between Georgian government and the Armenian Javakh movement of Javakheti, which had originally been established as an Armenian cultural movement but which later became associated with Armenian paramilitary groups that controlled certain lucrative black market resources. Tbilisi was able to co-opt the main power-brokers in Javakh by offering them posts in the local administration, for example in the local police or administration of the Georgia-Armenia border. Conflict was therefore avoided. It is the task of this research to examine the legacy of that deal, and in particular to investigate how well-institutionalised it has become.

3. Other Actor-Driven Events. It is not only the decision by political and economic elites whether or not to use violence that can change institutions and alter group dynamics. Contingent choices that at first sight may seem relatively unimportant can have profound effects in the medium to long term. For example, the decision of the Georgian Military Council (consisting of Jaba Ioseliani, Tengiz Kitovani and Tengiz Sigua) at the beginning of 1992 to accommodate all political groups and parties (with the exception of Gamsakhurdia in person) meant that many individuals with no communist past (particularly from the anti-Gamsakhurdia wing of the national liberation movement) took key positions in local and national power structures. At the local level, turnover of local elites (in those districts in which it occurred) had a profound impact on issues such as land privatisation, which in turn conditioned the future structure of local institutions and power relations.

Another highly significant decision was that taken by Shevardnadze in September 1993 to appoint himself Minister of Internal Affairs (a post which he held until the following month, when he appointed a loyalist, former KGB member Shota Kviraia,

to the post), replacing Temur Khachishvili, who was a leading member of the *Mkhedrioni*. This event marked the beginning of Shevardnadze's campaign to re-establish the Ministry of Internal Affairs according to the Soviet model - a campaign which proved highly successful and which within two years led to the defeat of the paramilitary groups.

4. *Windows of Opportunity*. Very often actors can only have a profound effect on the dynamics of groups and institutions during certain "windows of opportunity" when they enjoy greater freedom to act. In more "normal" periods of time, behaviour is determined to a far greater extent by structural constraints. Clearly the collapse of official state structures presented a "window of opportunity" for certain actors to make a bid for power. In particular, it could be argued that in 1992 the Abkhazian elite saw the collapse of state authority in the rest of Georgia as a window of opportunity, especially given the unrest in Samegrelo, which formed a kind of "buffer zone" between Abkhazia and Georgia proper. The opportunities presented probably encouraged the Abkhazian leadership to press their claims by reneging on a power-sharing arrangement made with Gamsakhurdia the previous year and declaring sovereignty. It was that act that provided the pretext for the attack on Sokhumi by Tengiz Kitovani's National Guard. For Kitovani too, weak state structures may have led him to perceive an attack on Abkhazia as more or less cost-free. In Atchara, however, Kitovani had no such "window of opportunity", as by then power in Atchara had already been more or less consolidated in the hands of the authoritarian Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Autonomous Republic, Aslan Abashidze, and the costs of challenging Abashidze's hegemony would have been high. The cost of conflict with Armenian elites in Javakheti would also have been too high in 1994-95, when circumstances provided for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Having suffered defeat in Abkhazia, the more pragmatic Georgian leadership was prepared to offer ethnic Armenian power-brokers state patronage, rather than solve the problem by violence.

Of crucial importance when we consider "windows of opportunity" is the *sequencing* of events; thus the perceived costs of engaging in violent conflict in Javakheti *after* Georgia's defeat in Abkhazia were unacceptably high, as were the perceived costs of challenging the Abkhaz leadership *before* the collapse of the Gamsakhurdia government.

The Main Steps: How the research will be carried out

The research will be carried out in three steps: first a theoretical framework will be established, then the existing collective actors and institutions will be thoroughly researched and investigated, and finally - by tracing the processes leading to their formation and transformation - an attempt will be made to investigate the *evolution* of these actors and institutions with respect to the putative explanatory factors described above. According to Bennett and George, "process tracing provides a strong basis for causal inference only if it can be established whether an uninterrupted causal path existed linking the putative causes to the observed effects"¹⁵. It is the aim of this

¹⁵ Andrew Bennett and Alexander L. George, *Process Tracing in Case Study Research* (paper presented at the MacArthur Foundation Workshop on Case Study Methods, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs (BCSIA), Harvard University, October 17-19, 1997), available at www.georgetown.edu/bennett/PROTCG.htm, accessed May 2002.

research to discover whether or not such a causal path exists, and how legacies on the one hand, and contingent factors on the other, determine it. I will now briefly outline how to proceed with respect to the three steps listed above.

Establishing a Theoretical Framework

The innovative potential of the theoretical framework lies in its ability to map out a typology of collective actors and their associated institutions. In particular, the typology will seek to distinguish between formal organisations, networks (which will be further subdivided into 'nomenklatura networks' and criminal networks and possibly into other categories too), clans and ethnic groups. Clear definitions of each will be provided, as well as clear criteria for distinguishing between them.

Existing Actors and Institutions

This study will first investigate the collective actors and institutions that exist in the four regions today. It will therefore attempt to ascertain what actors exist in the four target regions and will then seek to determine the special characteristics of each actor; for example, the type to which it belongs (see above), its size, its coherence (i.e. the strength of the bonds of loyalty that bind it together), and whether it is restricted to political or economic elites or whether it penetrates society at large. It will also examine the institutions and rules that determine how these actors mobilise and how they process competing interests. The research will therefore seek to discover what these rules and institutions are, and in particular their ability to regulate conflict in such a way as to minimise the potential for violence. It will also examine the variation between the four regions in terms of what actors and institutions exist and how they contain conflict. These variations will provide the basis for our subsequent investigation on the evolution of actors and institutions, which will seek to explain these variations in terms of Soviet-era legacies and contingent factors.

The Evolution of Actors and Institutions

The third step of the research will be to investigate how collective actors and institutions evolved, and specifically how they responded to external shocks and other contingent factors. Of particular interest is how such events impacted upon the institutional capacity of collective actors and of society as a whole to process competing interests in such a way as to minimise the possibility of violence. The research will also investigate how 'sticky' institutions are, in other words how rapidly do they change in response to external shocks and to the outbreak of episodes of violence.

Methods Used

The following formal institutions will be studied during the course of the research: the de facto (mainly ethnic Abkhaz) government in Sokhumi (Abkhazia); the (mainly Georgian) Abkhazian government in exile in Tbilisi and the official structures associated with it (here particular attention will be paid to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Abkhazian government in exile); the Supreme Soviet of the Autonomous Republic of Atchara; the Council of Ministers of the Autonomous Republic of Atchara; the organs of local government (both the elected *sakrebuloebi* -

councils - and the appointed *gamgeblebi* and *gamgeobebi* - executives) in all districts of Samegrelo and in Ninotsminda and Akhalkalaki districts (Javakheti). At local level NGOs and business groups will also be considered. Central organs of power will also be studied, including the Georgian Parliament, the relevant ministries, the State Chancellery and the Presidency. Finally informal groupings that operate both within and outside these official structures will be identified and studied. These will include clans, patronage networks of former communist officials, as well as criminal networks.

The empirical research is expected to consist of at least five elements:

- 1) Secondary sources such as the Internet, interviews with 'experts', and archives will be used to identify the power holders (past and present) in the four regions. It is hoped in this way to ascertain who held the top posts in the local bureaucracy in the three regions, ideally from 1970 until the present day. One major source of data is Tbilisi's public library where back issues of all official journals and newspapers are kept. This element of the research will shed light on the formal institutional structure and the formal organs of power (bureaucracies) and will allow us to chart the evolution of these institutions and bureaucracies over time.
- 2) Elite interviews will be used to identify "networks of power"; power-holders in the regions, identified in (1) above, will be asked to identify other influential figures in the regions in question. Once identified, these individuals will also be asked the same question in order to identify still further individuals. The process will continue either until no further individuals are identified or until a shortage of time and resources makes it inexpedient to continue this process¹⁶. This method should reveal the informal collective actors that exist in these regions today.
- 3) More in-depth, semi-structured "biographical interviews" will be carried out with a select group of individuals from each region (members of regional political elites) to confirm (or disconfirm) data obtained in (1) and (2) above, and to gain an understanding of how the various formal organisations and networks of patronage have evolved over the past twenty years. These interviews should also shed light on the informal, actor-specific institutions that condition the behaviour of local elites.
- 4) If time and resources permit, questionnaires will be given to a relatively large sample of the population in each region (ideally 200 from each region) in order to ascertain whether groups and networks at the level of local elites are reflected in solidarity groupings at grassroots level. If available resources are not sufficient for this, it may be possible to "tag on" a couple of questions to surveys that are already to be carried out. GORBI allows for such "tagging on" in its surveys. Possible questions would include: a) Please identify (0-5) leaders within your region whom you esteem, b) Please identify the five most influential leaders in your region.
- 5) Participant observation at local level will also be useful for assessing patterns of local solidarity, social structure, and linkages between social actors and local elites. Comments from ordinary citizens, information on local extended families

¹⁶ For more details of this method, see Koba Turmanidze, "Models of Governance in Divided Communities: The case of Georgian Devolution", research paper funded by the International Policy Fellowships Program (IPF) of the Open Society Institute, Budapest, Hungary, available at www.policy.hu/turmanidze/.

(obtained by examining censuses if they exist, voting registers, and even cemeteries) will all add valuable data in this regard.

It is envisaged that I will carry out tasks (1), (3) and (5), while (2) and (4), if possible, will be out-sourced to local experts.