# Nino Kemoklidze

## Identity Construction and Ethno-National Violence in Georgia in the Early 1990s

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Nowadays virtually all serious scholars of nationalism, at least in Western academia, reject such simplistic, essentialist explanations of ethnic violence (often referred to as "primordialism" in the literature on nationalism and ethnicity) that take identities (whether ethnic, gender, sexual or other) for granted and treat different social categories as given. Increasingly in the past decade or two, such views have been vigorously challenged and significantly, if not fully, discredited by new approaches grouped under the term "constructivism". It has become more commonplace among social scientists to argue now that violence is largely due to antagonistically constructed ethnic identities instead (Fearon & Laitin 2000: 847). One of the major criticisms directed towards constructivist scholars, however, is that they rarely go beyond these 'bald assertion[s] of metaphysical possibility' and cannot provide 'an actual demonstration of the claim' (Motyl 2010: 64). In other words, there is still a need for a more 'developed statement of a constructivist theory of ethnic violence' (Fearon & Laitin 2000: 848).

The aim of this Ph.D. thesis is to provide an in-depth study on the causal relationship between construction of ethnic and national identities on the one hand and ethno-nationalist violence on the other hand. This issue is examined by focusing on Georgia and the violent conflicts that erupted in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the early 1990s. The initial question that this study will address is how Georgia turned to violence. By answering this question I am hoping to shed light to the overall question of this study – what role (if any) does ethnic identity construction play in the outbreak of inter- and intra-ethnic violence? As Cross points out, to tell a story of how an event happened does not mean to provide mere description of the process leading up to the conflicts; rather, 'to say how an event happened is to say how it came about, i.e., how it came to happen' (Cross 1991: 258). In this case, this would mean explaining how, what Paul Brass (1997) calls a "grand interpretive framework" of Georgia's "ethnic" conflicts was created.

## Profile

Born and raised in Tbilisi I spent several years studying abroad in the US (Arkansas and Maine), Scotland, Norway, and Australia. I held the post of a diplomatic attaché at the Ministry of Foreign affairs in Georgia and worked with refugees at the Hungarian Helsinki Committee in Budapest before choosing Birmingham as a place for my PhD studies. I have always been interested in the issues concerning nationalism and ethnic violence and have always wanted to study the causes behind ethnic civil wars that erupted in Georgia after the break up of the Soviet Union. I first explored these issues in two masters dissertations and am now able to look at them in more depth in my PhD thesis. During the 2010/11 academic year I was a visiting researcher at the Department of Russian and Eurasian Studies, Norwegian Institute of Foreign Affairs in Oslo thanks to generous funding from the Norwegian Research Council. I am also extremely grateful for financial assistance provided by the Oversees Research Student Award Scheme (ORSAS), Kirkcaldy Postgraduate Scholarship, Postgraduate Incentive Fund, and Global Supplementary Grant Program-Europe that have enabled me to take up this degree.

## Qualifications

- MA International Relations with Peace and Conflict Studies specialisation, The Australian National University (ANU)/ Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)
- MSc Nationalism Studies, The University of Edinburgh
- BA The History of Diplomacy and International Relations, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University

## Research interests

- Nationalism and ethnic violence, particularly concerning Abkhazia and South Ossetia
- Self-Determination and secession
- Peace and Conflict Studies
- International Relations

## Teaching responsibilities

- Guest Lecturer, master's module – 'History, Culture, and Contemporary Politics in the Caucasus' (CREES, The University of Birmingham, 2012; 2009/10)
- Co-Convenor and Tutor, undergraduate module – 'Understanding European Identities' (CREES, The University of Birmingham, 2012; 2009/10)
- Guest Lecturer, undergraduate module – 'The Cultural Politics of Russia and Eastern Europe' (CREES, The University of Birmingham, 2009/10)
- Graduate Teaching Assistant, undergraduate module – 'Introduction to Classical Political Thought' (POLSIS, The University of Birmingham, 2009/10)
- Academic Staff/Tutor, undergraduate module – 'Introduction to International Relations' (The Australian National University, 2008)

## Professional memberships

- ASEN (The Association for the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism)
- BASEES (British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies)

## Language Skills

- Georgian (native)
- English (fluent)
- Russian (fluent)
- Spanish (intermediate)

## Conference papers

"Why Secession is not a Viable Tool for Conflict-Resolution: The Case of Georgia" presented at the workshop "20 Years on From the Collapse of the Soviet Union: Prospects and Opportunities for Conflict Settlement in the Post-Soviet Space", Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London, 4 July 2011

Gave a brief on Georgia and the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia at the Section for Russia, Eurasia and Regional Cooperation, the Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, Oslo, 30 May 2011

“Russia and the Abkhazian War in the 1992-93” presented at the workshop “Russia’s Next-Door: Comparative Experiences and Influences of Neighbouring Countries”, Finnish Embassy in Oslo, Norway, 17 March 2011

“The Complexities of Secession and the Cases of Kosovo and South Ossetia” presented at the Norwegian Institute of Foreign Affairs (NUPI), Oslo, 24 February 2011

“The Role of the Archives in the Study of Identity Construction and Ethno-National Violence” presented at the conference “XX Century in the Materials of the Georgian Security Archive: Post-Soviet Archives and Memory”, Batumi, 23-25 October 2010

“The Kosovo Precedent and the ‘Moral Hazard’ of Secession” presented at the conference “Encounters between the Caucasus and the West: Image and Reality” at VU University Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 23-24 April 2010 (earlier draft presented at the conference “Caucasus and Central Asia: Theoretical, Cultural and Political Challenges” at the University of Birmingham, 3-4 July 2009)

“Identity Construction and Ethno-National Violence in Georgia” presented at the workshop “Central Asia and Caucasus Studies in the UK: Focusing on Communities, Societies and States”, the University of St Andrews, 6-7 November 2009

## Publications

- Academic Publishing:

Kemoklidze, Nino (2011) “Nationalism and War: The Case of Georgia in the Early 1990s”, Working Papers in Nationalism Studies, University of Edinburgh **http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/69218/Kemoklidze_WPiNS_6.pdf (http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/69218/Kemoklidze_WPiNS_6.pdf)**

Blakkisrud, Helge; Kemoklidze, Nino & Øverland, Indra (2011) “Georgia: Political Stability and Potential Risks”, Nupi Report, Oslo: NUPI

Kemoklidze, Nino (2009) “The Kosovo Precedent and the Moral Hazard of Secession”, Journal of International Law and International Relations (JILIR), 5(2): 117-140

Kemoklidze, Nino (2009) “Victimisation of Female Suicide Bombers: The Case of Chechnya”, Caucasian Review of International Affairs (CRIA), 3(2) **http://www.cria-online.org/7_6.html (http://www.cria-online.org/7_6.html)**

- Popular Publishing:

Interview given to the Radio Liberty Georgian Bureau [Radio Tavisupleba] (11 Aug. 2011) **http://www.tavisupleba.org/audio/audio/321683.html (http://www.tavisupleba.org/audio/audio/321683.html)** ; transcript of this interview can be found at: **http://www.tavisupleba.org/content/interview_nino_kemoklidze/24293562.html (http://www.tavisupleba.org/content/interview_nino_kemoklidze/24293562.html)** under the title “We Like to Play the Role of the Victim” (in Georgian)

Interview given to the national weekly newspaper Kviris Palitra (9 December 2010) “In Order for Georgian Language to be Taught at the University of Birmingham” **http://www.kvirispalitra.ge/specialurad-saitistvis/5913-birmingemis-universitetshi-qarthuli-ena-rom-dainergos.html (http://www.kvirispalitra.ge/specialurad-saitistvis/5913-birmingemis-universitetshi-qarthuli-ena-rom-dainergos.html)** (in Georgian)

Article about me in the national weekly magazine Gza (2 December 2010) “First Recipient of the ‘Oslo Peace’ Scholarship”, 48: 32-33 (in Georgian)

## Contact

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