

The Five-Day War and Transnational Politics

A Semiospace Spanning the Borders between Georgia, Russia, and Ossetia

KIMITAKA MATSUZATO

Abstract: Two decades of conflict regulation between Georgia, Ossetia, and Russia created a transnational semiospace, which continues to exist even after the Five-Day War in August 2008. This article analyzes stories provided by Georgian pro-presidential politicians, the Georgian opposition, and North and South Ossetian experts to explain crucial issues around the war and future reconciliation. Unexpectedly, the most significant coincidence of opinions exists between the Georgian opposition and North Ossetian experts. Although both North and South Ossetians think that Georgia–Ossetia relations had passed the point of no return during the Five-Day War and a future democratization of Georgia will not allow it to reunify South Ossetia, the South Ossetians’ excessive nationalism and anti-Georgianism make the North Ossetians distance themselves from their Southern coethnics.

Keywords: Five-Day War, Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili, South Ossetia, transnationalism

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In this article, I scrutinize the impact of the Five-Day War of 2008 on the domestic politics of the Black Sea countries. Rather than focusing on one country involved in the war—either Georgia, Russia, or the de facto Ossetian polity (combining its northern and southern territories)—I try to show the existence of a political semiotic space spanning the borders of Georgia, Russia, and Ossetia that emerged as a result of two decades of conflict regulation and continues to function even after the Five-Day War. To put it differently, this is a case study of transnational politics.

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This article is a byproduct of my research on the Joint Control Commission for Georgian-Ossetian Conflict Resolution (JCC), which was active from 1992 to 2008.¹ When I first visited Vladikavkaz in January 2009, I started conducting interviews to learn “objective” information about the JCC. Before long, I became fascinated by my subjects’ narratives, which were full of wit and humor despite their unpleasant memories of the war. When I visited Georgia in March 2009, meetings, demonstrations, and rock concerts demanding the resignation of (or criminal sanctions against) Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili, attended by thousands of participants, were held every day. I collected as many commentaries and stories from the opposition leaders as possible, conveyed them to the South Ossetian experts, and asked them whether the new tendencies in Georgian society were worth making them rethink their relations with Georgia. I essentially tried to organize virtual debates between the experts severed from each other by the military line after August 2008. This method of virtual debate is often used in historiographical studies.²

In this article, I organize the further analyses according to questions that both Georgian and Ossetian experts recognize as relevant: (1) Who started the war, Russia or Georgia? (2) If Georgia started the war, was this because Saakashvili was trapped by Russia? (3) Why did Russian troops march toward Tskhinval so slowly, thus inflicting evitable casualties on the South Ossetians? (4) Was the creation of Dmitry Sanakoev’s government a provocation or an attempt at peace? (5) Can Georgia expect to reunify South Ossetia in the future, despite the atrocities in August 2008? and (6) Should the Georgian nation bear collective responsibility for the Five-Day War?

I will try to convey the experts’ lively voices, particularly those of the Georgian opposition and the South Ossetians. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate that a virtual transnational semio-space of Georgian and Ossetian experts continues to exist, even after the Five-Day War.

Theoretical Proposition: Why Can the Unrecognized States Be a Nursery for Transnational Politics?

As a theoretical proposition let me explain what significance my focus on unrecognized states may have in transnational studies. By *unrecognized states*, I mean the four polities that emerged during the collapse of the Soviet Union: Nagorny Karabakh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transnistria. I continue to regard Abkhazia and South Ossetia as unrecognized states, since recognition only by Russia, Nicaragua, and possibly a few other countries will hardly change their international status, although it has drastically improved their military security.

Criticism of a state-centered understanding of world politics and attention to nonstate actors has a long history, traceable at least to the classic work by Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye.³ If Keohane and Nye promulgated a new research agenda for transnational politics, twenty-three years later, Thomas Risse-Kappen and others tried to specify the agenda.⁴ Criticizing Keohane and Nye’s zero-sum understanding of relations between transnational and traditional interstate politics, Risse-Kappen and his contributors examined under what conditions transnational, nonstate actors matter. Proposing an important concept of transnational coalitions (to which this article owes much), Risse-Kappen’s book limits its interest to the activities of multinational corporations and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), leaving aside religious organizations, trade unions, and revolutionary movements, which Keohane and Nye included in their collection. However,

the narrowing of issues by Risse-Kappen would seem ephemeral, because the second wave of transnationalist studies generally exploited the constructivist methods popularized after the first wave and focused on competition of ideas and “epistemic communities.”⁵ I have also analyzed Orthodox churches and transborder nationalities, such as the Moldovans and Mingrelians, as transnational actors in an essay focused on Abkhazia and Transnistria, and I repeat this method in this article.⁶

Despite booming transnationalism, the idea that unrecognized states are a typical area in which transnational actors matter would seem untraditional. Extreme cruelty characterized the South Ossetian, Karabakh, Abkhazian, and Transnistrian conflicts in the first half of the 1990s, 2004, and 2008, and it inevitably strengthened nationalism and hatred against the “Other” in both parties. Even less fortunately, the issue of the unrecognized states has been interpreted in the context of global confrontation between the transatlantic alliance and Russia. This situation generated what Gerard Toal calls the *traditional geopolitical imagination*, which “offered a means of affixing and calibrating the meaning of the local within a global whole. Not much empirical content from that local was required, however, for its meaning was often overdetermined by preconceived categories dominant among the major powers and the small cabal who occupied the inner sanctums of such state.”⁷ Thus, two myths emerged: that the countries involved in the issue of unrecognized states are supposed to have a unified public opinion and that the unrecognized states are puppets of Russia (or Armenia). Even after the Five-Day War, some Western observers continue to equate Saakashvili with the Georgian nation, underestimating the harsh confrontation between him and the Georgian opposition.

In fact, the politics around the unrecognized states must be transnational for several reasons. First, because the wars in the first half of the 1990s left a huge number of invalids, widows, and orphans, various kinds of NGOs developed to assist them. The more painful a war is, the greater its social consequences are, and thus the demand for NGOs is greater. Because of this, Nagorny Karabakh and Abkhazia have better developed networks of NGOs than Transnistria and South Ossetia. In 2006, there were seventy-two NGOs operating in Abkhazia, which has a population of only 300,000,⁸ and this had a significant impact on the Abkhazian government’s decision-making process.⁹ These NGOs are quite competent at submitting attractive proposals to Western foundations and winning grants, whereas the Russian government has only recently become interested in offering the NGOs financial assistance.

The second reason for the transnational character of the politics in and around the unrecognized states is that a significant portion of their populations have external national (or confessional) homelands outside the states’ boundaries: mainland Armenia for the Karabakh Armenians; North Ossetia for the South Ossetians; western Georgia for the Mingrelians in Abkhazia; Moldova, Russia, Ukraine, Turkey, and Bulgaria for the Moldovans, Russians, Ukrainians, Gagauz, and Bulgarians in Transnistria; and Poland for the Catholic Poles in northern Transnistria. As a rule, the homeland population cannot be indifferent to the difficult living conditions of their coethnics and cobelievers in the unrecognized states—conditions caused by war, economic blockade, and international isolation.¹⁰

Third, despite the military tension, domestic politics in the unrecognized states has been competitive, while the elites in the surrounding countries have been deeply split along the issue of conflict regulation and future reconciliation. The harsh political competition in Karabakh in 1998–2000 and 2003–5,¹¹ Abkhazia in 2004,¹² and Transnistria after 2005,¹³ is

well known. There are overtly pro-Moldovan forces in Transnistria (e.g., the Social Democratic Party of Transnistria, led by Aleksandr Radchenko) and pro-Transnistrian forces in Moldova (e.g., the newspaper *Moldavskiyе vedomosti*). Lyudvig Chibirov, the first South Ossetian president, was famous for his pro-Georgian position (which almost allowed him to achieve legal normalization of relations between Georgia and South Ossetia in 1997–98), whereas his successor, Edvard Kokoity, suffered from a lack of authority until 2004 after he won the 2001 presidential election by an insignificant margin.¹⁴ Many Ossetian observers, including Kokoity's allies, believe that he would not have been reelected in 2006 had it not been for the military conflict in 2004, and that it was Saakashvili who made Kokoity a national hero by virtue of the fact that Kokoity has behaved well in most critical military situations¹⁵—without chewing his necktie, as Saakashvili did. Nevertheless, even after August 2008, there remains serious opposition to Kokoity in North Ossetia that is targeting him in the 2011 presidential election.¹⁶ The Ukrainian elite community has been split between pro-Transnistrian and pro-Moldovan positions, as well as pro-Abkhazian (Ossetian) and pro-Georgian positions. All the actors listed above, harshly competing with each other domestically, coalesce with foreign actors with common goals.

The fourth reason for the transnational character of the politics around the unrecognized states derives from the third reason, namely the absence of a unified national opinion on this issue in the apparent protector countries—Russia and Armenia. As a result, relations between them and the unrecognized states have been far from harmonious. During the 1990s, Karabakh's tough position on conflict regulation was a source of tension for Armenia. Likewise, the South Ossetians, enraged by the repeated war and the world's indifference to the civilian victims in the republic, will surely become a problem for North Ossetia. Until the colored revolutions of 2003–4, the Russian government, not because of strategic calculation but because of domestic disagreement, continued a “no winner, no loser” approach and was even ready to sacrifice the unrecognized states when it enjoyed amicable relations with Eduard Shevardnadze and Vladimir Voronin. Even after those revolutions, there were strong pro-Georgian lobbies in the Russian government: Yevgeny Primakov (the Russian foreign minister, 1996–98, and prime minister, 1998–99), Igor Ivanov (Russian foreign minister, 1998–2004, and secretary of the Security Council of Russia, 2004–7; he helped Saakashvili reunify Ajara), and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a whole.¹⁷ Russian citizens and intellectuals regarded the exceptional, ardent supporters of the unrecognized states, such as Sergey Baburin, Konstantin Zatulin, and Andranik Migranyan, as right-wing ideologues, and were amused by their “eccentric” appearances on television.

Overall, despite its appearance as a topic of classic interstate relations, the politics around the unrecognized states has been transnational by nature. In particular, the two decades of conflict regulation generated transborder communities of “experts.” As relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan indicate, if hostilities have been extremely harsh, this community fails to become relevant. The opposite was the case for Moldova-Transnistria relations: after experiencing a relatively modest level of violence, these countries generated a coherent expert community. However, under the aegis of the JCC, the Georgian-Ossetian expert community has developed even more than the Moldovan-Transnistrian expert community. The JCC was a mechanism for conflict regulation; it was introduced by the Dagomys (Sochi) Agreement on June 22, 1992. The JCC was in charge of giving missions to the joint peacekeeping force—composed of troops provided by the four parties in conflict (Russia, Georgia, North Ossetia, and South Ossetia)—to disarm the neutral zone between the ter-

ritories controlled by South Ossetia and Georgia.¹⁸ Before Saakashvili came to power, the JCC system had earned a reputation as a successful method of conflict regulation, and the South Ossetian conflict was regarded as close to a solution.¹⁹ The experts and militaries of the four parties, together with representatives of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, held repeated meetings in various cities in the former Soviet Union and Europe, often accompanied by endless toasts.

The Georgian and Ossetian experts followed one another's writings closely and, as a result, a transnational political semiotic space emerged; that space is the focus of this article. The following factors promoted the emergence of this semiospace:

1. The institutional framework provided by the JCC.
2. The lack of a language barrier. The Georgian and Ossetian experts share a command of Russian. The South Ossetian experts (who often have partly Georgian ethnic origins) speak and read Georgian almost fluently. The North Ossetian experts at least read Georgian.
3. Communication devices. Georgian television programs can be viewed in Tskhinval. Moreover, the transnational semiospace analyzed here is a product of the Internet era. Even after the Five-Day War, Georgian Web sites such as *Civil.Ge*²⁰ continued to be a valuable source of information for Ossetian experts and policymakers.
4. Mutual interest in domestic politics. Although Ruslan Bagaev, vice minister of foreign affairs of South Ossetia, says that his ministry has significantly lost interest in Georgian domestic politics after the Five-Day War and has concentrated its endeavors on developing cooperation with Russia since then,²¹ South Ossetia's official newspaper, *Yuzhnaya Osetiya*, continues to cover events in Georgian domestic politics carefully, overtly expressing sympathy for the Georgian opposition.
5. Symmetry of issue perception. Despite differing opinions, the actors prioritize issues in similar ways, commonly regarding certain issues as important, and others as unimportant.
6. Transnational coalitions and confrontations of actors. Cleavages of opinion do not coincide with state borders. For example, the Georgian opposition and Ossetian intellectuals share the view that Saakashvili started the war, but they diverge on the issue of a future unified state of Georgia and South Ossetia. The Georgian opposition does not think it too late to reconcile with the South Ossetians to achieve territorial integrity. However, when bitter memories of the war drive the South Ossetians toward excessive anti-Georgianism, the North Ossetians try to distance themselves from South Ossetians. Likewise, the Russian Orthodox Church recognizes South Ossetia as a canonic (i.e., legitimate) territory of the Orthodox Church of Georgia and criticizes the self-proclaimed Alanian Eparchy of South Ossetia.

Who Started the War?

Based upon the theoretical propositions provided above, let us analyze the narratives and stories around the issues perceived as important by various actors in Georgia and Ossetia. The first issue is the problem of who started the war. The Georgian Army started the massive shelling of Tskhinval at 11:35 p.m. on August 7, 2008. An hour later, at 12:30 a.m. on August 8, the commander of the peacekeeping operation of the United Headquarters of the Military Forces of Georgia, General Mamuka Kurashvili, gave a televised interview to make clear that the president of Georgia had ordered him to start "a special operation

to recover constitutional order in the Tskhinvali region.”²² After the beginning of the assault on Tskhinval, the Russian leadership hesitated for sixteen hours before deciding to intervene in the war. At 3:00 p.m. on August 8, Russian president Dmitry Medvedev gave a speech that Russia would “punish the culprits,” and, at almost the same time, the Fifty-Eighth Army passed through the Roki Tunnel that connects Russia to South Ossetia. Strangely enough, even after the Russian leadership decided to intervene, the Fifty-Eighth Army (advertised as the best of the Russian army) advanced slowly toward Tskhinval, like the army of Fabius Maximus, not achieving first contact with the Georgian troops around Tskhinval until 11:30 a.m. on August 9—more than twenty hours after it had entered into South Ossetia. The surprising slowness of Russia’s military operation left vast room for various speculations, discussed later in this article.

Another mystery is why the Georgian leadership so firmly believed that Russia would not intervene in the conflict on behalf of South Ossetia, as if Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov’s repeated warnings in the previous years²³ were merely a bluff. In September 2008, Saakashvili responded to the criticism of the opposition by introducing a parliamentary commission to investigate the reasons for the war. He began to argue that the artillery attack on Tskhinval took place at around midnight on August 7 and was a preemptive measure against the Russian army, which, he claimed, had passed through the Roki Tunnel during the early morning of August 7.²⁴ General Kurashvili, who had given the August 8 interview publicizing what he understood to be Saakashvili’s purpose for the attack, received a strict reprimand from the president at the end of October.²⁵ The Georgian leadership continues to argue that the Russian army had passed through the Roki Tunnel long before the Georgian army began to shell Tskhinval.

For example, Ambassador Alexander Rondeli, president of the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies, claims that Russia had been planning the war for a couple of years and started concrete military preparations at least in the spring of 2008.²⁶ Any Western military expert would confirm that it takes at least a few months to mobilize “about sixty thousand soldiers and two thousand automobile units,” including tanks and armored cars. According to Rondeli, Russia aimed to stop the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, to demonstrate the vulnerability of the energy pipelines bypassing Russia by linking Central Asia and the Black Sea, to gain a military port on the Black Sea Rim as substitutable for Sevastopol, from which Russia promises to remove its Black Sea fleet in 2017 (specifically, Ochamchire in Abkhazia), and to intimidate Azerbaijan.²⁷ Although Russia achieved all of these objectives, it failed to realize its ultimate goal of dividing Georgia to make Russia and Armenia (Russia’s only ally in the south Caucasus) contiguous and to overturn the Saakashvili government. Rondeli asserts that Georgian soldiers behaved decently and civilian victims in South Ossetia were minimal.²⁸

Despite Rondeli’s explanation, the Saakashvili administration has not provided evidence that the Russian armored corps began to pass through the Roki Tunnel in the early morning of August 7. If the Saakashvili administration were telling the truth, the U.S. government would have readily provided satellite photographs confirming the fact. Moreover, if the Russian army had passed through the tunnel before the shelling, Saakashvili would have surely delivered a speech announcing the act of aggression to the world and then would have considered military countermeasures. Third, if Georgia’s purpose was to halt the Russian army’s invasion, it would have concentrated its forces on seizing Java, where the Russian army was expected to pass, not Tskhinval. Last, a detailed chronicle published

in *Free Georgia* (a pro-Saakashvili newspaper published in Russian) on August 9, 2008,²⁹ and a chronicle composed mainly by North Ossetian analysts³⁰ are largely identical, which implies that the story of Russia's preemptive attack was added later.³¹

The Georgian opposition was convinced from the beginning that Saakashvili started the war. As early as August 8, a leader of the oppositionist Republican Party, Ivlian Khaindrava, responded in a newspaper:

Interviewer: A stably instable situation (but not a full-scale war) was apparently assumed in a certain strategic calculation, which should eventually have resulted in a solution to the question of withdrawal of Russian peacekeeping contingents from Georgia. This should have become a breakthrough in solving the conflict. Was this a strategic calculation of Georgia?

Khaindrava: I suppose our partners were thinking of it.

Interviewer: The Americans?

Khaindrava: The United States and the European Union, which have recently been active in the region. This was a strategic course, and a strategy needs time. But our authorities are infantile [*sic*] and impatient, as has been proven repeatedly. This time, too, it seems that someone lost self-control.³²

Was Saakashvili Trapped by Russia?

The Georgian opposition admits that Saakashvili started the war, but it adds that Russia induced him to do so. The argument that Saakashvili is to blame because he was easily trapped by Russia emerged in Georgia very soon after the conflict. At the beginning of September, an open letter, signed by over eighty members of the opposition in Georgia, questioned why Saakashvili, “despite the U.S. administration’s warnings, fell into the Russian trap.”³³ The belief in Russia’s trap is widely shared by the authentic, extraparliamentary opposition, such as the Republican Party, and those who shifted from Saakashvili’s camp to the opposition after falling out with him, such as Georgi Khaindrava, state minister for conflict regulation in 2004–6, Erosi Kitsmarishvili, Georgia’s ambassador in Moscow in 2008;³⁴ and Nino Burjanadze, speaker of the parliament in 2003–8.³⁵ Accordingly, the narrative of Russia’s trap has deep psychological roots in Georgian society.

Let me reconstruct the trap theory, based on my interviews with the Khaindrava brothers, Georgi and Ivlian,³⁶ and Paata Zakareishvili, a Republican Party member but influential as an independent expert on Georgia–Ossetia relations. First of all, they share the view that of the four conflicts around the unrecognized states in the former Soviet territories, the South Ossetian conflict was regulated most successfully. The population crossed the Georgian–South Ossetian border freely—the whole territory of South Ossetia essentially became a duty-free zone, with the Ergneti market and other bazaars emerging on its southern fringe. Georgian and South Ossetian joint companies thrived.³⁷ However, in May 2004, Saakashvili, intoxicated by his success in Ajara, closed the Ergneti market and began to use the Georgian enclave (valley) between Tskhinval and Java to close the Transcaucasian highway. Later, South Ossetia and Russia built a bypass road connecting Tskhinval to the Roki Tunnel, and Georgia did the same to connect Georgian enclaves in South Ossetia with mainland Georgia. Thus, communicational interdependence, which forced the South Ossetians and Georgians to cooperate, was lost. Immediately after the closure of the Ergneti market, military conflicts resumed,

ending a period of peace that had continued for twelve years. Then-Russian president Vladimir Putin, who had helped the newly elected Saakashvili administration reunify Ajara, was humiliated and enraged by this action, but, at the same time, he understood that Saakashvili, as a person, could be easily trapped. Thus, Georgia could be punished by a war that Georgia could start. Paata Zakareishvili concludes: "The Russian intelligence is much more qualified than its Georgian counterparts, and behaviorism is a whole discipline of science."³⁸

Georgi Khaindrava, state minister for conflict regulation in 2004-6, emphasizes the confrontation between the parties of war and nonmilitary reintegration within the Georgian government. The year 2006 was a fateful year for this struggle. Khaindrava remarks that the military conflicts in the summer of 2004 did not irreversibly discredit Georgia in the eyes of the South Ossetians, because Prime Minister Zarub Zhvaniya firmly stood by the principle of nonmilitary regulation of the conflict. Khaindrava himself stayed in the heavily shelled Tskhinval to prevent escalation. According to Khaindrava, Tskhinval could not but consider the existence of "strong figures" in the Georgian government who were struggling to reintegrate South Ossetia, avoiding military measures. This reconciliation process culminated in the so-called Brussels conference of donors in June 2006, in which "about forty donor countries participated and promised South Ossetia financial aid and investments in return for its active commitment to the reintegration process."³⁹ But the next month, Khaindrava was removed from the post, about which the North Ossetian representatives to the JCC expressed serious concern.⁴⁰ The Ossetians did so not because they loved Khaindrava, but because they feared the strengthening party of war. In fact, the military confrontation has been escalating since the second half of 2006 and Sanakoev's "alternative government" emerged in a city in the Georgian enclave, Kurta, in November 2006. Khaindrava called the emergence of Sanakoev's government "a typical provocation" that he would never have allowed had he continued in office.⁴¹ According to Zakareishvili, Russia intentionally escalated the conflict on the one hand; on the other hand, Russian diplomats and high officials, through personal conversations, made Saakashvili and those around him believe that Russia would not react to Georgia's attack on South Ossetia.

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than Russia expected. According to Zakareishvili, the seizure of Java would have made Russia's counteroffensive difficult, so the Russian leadership hastened to send troops beyond the tunnel.

Kosta Kochiev, the advisor to the South Ossetian president on international affairs, denies that Russia induced Saakashvili to go to war. According to Kochiev, the Russian leadership really feared a war, which would damage Russia's international reputation. In fact, Russia could not match Georgia in the information war after August 2008. Saakashvili counted on Western pressure to prevent Russia from launching a quick counteroffensive. A successful blitzkrieg would present the world with a *fait accompli* and it would become possible to start negotiations for peace, for example, with "alternative president" Sana-koev. Kochiev supposes that, however oppositionist Georgians are, their "pride does not allow them to recognize that their president can be mistaken even without Russia's evil intrigues."⁴²

I tend to accept Kochiev's interpretation. First, if Russia was ready for the war but expected more persistent resistance by the South Ossetians, Medvedev would have delivered his speech much earlier, not at 3:00 p.m. on August 8. Second, Zakareishvili's assertion does not explain why Tskhinval was so defenseless at the initial stage of war. What happened during the night of August 7–8 was not a war, but a massacre. The headquarters of the South Ossetian self-defense forces, located in the underground shelter beneath the parliament building, soon collapsed because this building readily burnt down. An uneven war started only on August 8, when volunteers from the north Caucasus began to arrive and Russian peacekeepers began to distribute light weapons, such as machine guns, to the Tskhinval population (which would have been a serious violation of the JCC's regulations in ordinary circumstances).⁴³

The Georgian opposition and Ossetian analysts both believe that between 2004 and 2006, the Georgian government oscillated between two strategies for the reintegration of South Ossetia: social psychological pressure and force. A natural question deriving from this interpretation is whether the former strategy was actually achievable. Some North Ossetian analysts, such as Artur Tsutsiev and Igor Dulaev, insist that this strategy was viable for a period. Even after the victory of the more hawkish party in 2006, Tsutsiev continued to assert to journalists and experts that Saakashvili would not resort to a military solution when the combination of social psychological, economic, and military (but not war) pressures on South Ossetia were so effective that the region was expected to seriously depopulate within several years.⁴⁴ In contrast, Kochiev argues in discussion with me that it would have taken twenty to thirty years for Khaindava's strategy to be realized, a strategy confirmed by the Brussels conference. The social and demographic collapse of South Ossetia (even without the military attack) is a scenario embraced by "certain North Ossetian intellectuals, who tend somewhat to underestimate South Ossetia," notes Kochiev. However, there was serious disagreement among the South Ossetian experts on this issue. Kosta Dzugaev, a professor at South Ossetian University and an advisor to the president of South Ossetia on relations with social organizations, remarks that Kochiev's opinion is "unjustifiably optimistic." In Dzugaev's view, had the Five-Day War not occurred, South Ossetia would have been doomed to "a systematic crisis of lifeline structures with a threat of the collapse of the state and society within six to eight (a maximum of ten) years. The demographic situation was coming closer to catastrophe."⁴⁵

Why Did the Russian Army Arrive So Late?

The Russian army's delayed arrival in Tskhinval on August 8 filled the area with rumors about "Russia's betrayal." Inal Pliev, the head of the Information Bureau of the South Ossetian part of the JCC at that time, was convinced that "the Russians will never come, once they did not decide to become involved immediately. All of us are doomed to die."⁴⁶ On the morning of August 8, a number of Tskhinval citizens mistook Georgian tanks for the Russian army's arrival, leaving their basements only to be killed. Half a year after the war, Dzugaev wrote that "Russia's life-saving help in August 2008 is not idealized [in South Ossetia]. Before the Fifty-Eighth Army arrived, the South Ossetian coercive structures were compelled to conduct painful battles with an enemy ten times superior for two days and nights, which resulted in huge sacrifices."⁴⁷

Georgian expert Zakareishvili attributes the Russian army's delayed arrival to Russia's desire to earn time to show the world the significant number of casualties and atrocities taking place in South Ossetia. A number of South Ossetian experts share this view, arguing that Russia waited for many people to die to justify its intervention. North Ossetian experts like Tsutsiev have a more balanced judgment, believing the Russian government waited for the sanction of the UN Security Council to avoid the accusation of unilateral action.

My own interpretation is that, even in August 2008, the Russian government was deeply split around the issue of South Ossetia; although it had much less of a strategic value than Abkhazia, intervention in South Ossetia would nonetheless cause a no less negative world reaction. On one hand, Foreign Minister Lavrov had warned Georgia that Russia would intervene if Georgia's military attacked South Ossetia, and part of the Russian military and security services had obviously prepared for a large-scale military operation in the region before August 2008. On the other hand, there was influential opposition within the Russian government, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Federal Council. If a number of Russian diplomats and high-ranking officials assured Georgian leaders, in personal conversations, that Russia would not go to war for Tskhinval, they were not trying to deceive Saakashvili but rather conveying their sincere personal conviction when there was no coordinated Ossetian policy within the Russian government. Dzugaev supports this possibility, since he noticed a number of signs indicating a serious "battle between scenarios" within the Russian "military-political leadership." Even though they generally agreed that preparing for a military phase of the South Ossetian conflict would serve Russian national interest, "Russian military-political administrators neither calculated in the same manner, nor were they single-minded at all."⁴⁸

Understandably, the South Ossetians try not to raise the issue of Russia's delayed arrival, but when their interests contradict Russia's intentions, they recall the resultant sacrifices. For example, in November 2008, Metropolitan Kirill (the cleric Gundyayev, who would later become patriarch but was then in charge of interchurch relations of the Russian Orthodox Church) repeated the church's official position that South Ossetia belongs to the canonic territory of the Orthodox Church of Georgia. Kirill criticized the Greek Old Calendarist Church under Cyprian (named the Holy Synod in Resistance), to which the so-called Alanian Eparchy (South Ossetian Church) belongs, as uncanonic and added that "on the one hand, Russian soldiers shed blood for the Ossetian people in order to defend South Ossetia, but on the other, the spiritual leaders of this country belong to the jurisdiction of a schismatic church, whose main purpose is to destroy the unity of the Russian Orthodox Church. It is impossible, however, to behave this way."⁴⁹ This arrogant comment,

quite unusual for an experienced diplomat like Kirill, provoked furious protest in South Ossetia. Alanian bishop Georgi (Pukhate) responded that during the first three days (in actuality, it was two days), “our boys and girls” defended Tskhinval with empty hands. Only after that did the Russian army arrive and show its might to wipe out the Georgian troops, but it was the Ossetians who did not allow Georgia to seize the city.⁵⁰ Thus, the story of Russia’s delayed arrival lies deep in the South Ossetian mind and reappears whenever Russia offends them.

Was the Sanakoev Government a Viable Means of Conflict Resolution?

The Sanakoev administration functioned in the Georgian-controlled territory of South Ossetia after the “alternative presidential election” in November 2006⁵¹ until the Five-Day War. South Ossetia’s territorial integrity was lost as early as December 11, 1990, when the Georgian Supreme Soviet abolished South Ossetian autonomy as punishment for its unilateral decision to raise its status to a union republic. The autonomy’s structures were liquidated and the Ossetian districts that had composed South Ossetia were also divided by or incorporated into the surrounding Georgian districts.⁵² This situation continued after the ceasefire realized by the Dagomys Agreement in 1992, which left about one-third of South Ossetia’s territory under Georgian control. The Leningor (Akhlagori) district of eastern South Ossetia belonged to the Mtskheta region, whereas the three Georgian enclaves surrounding Tskhinval were incorporated into the Shida Kartli region, which has its capital in Gori. The Sanakoev administration integrated these territories into a single unit under his leadership.

The former leaders of South Ossetia initiated the movement for this parallel government. Dmitry Sanakoev, who became the leader of the parallel government, was born in 1969. As a student, he fought well in the first Ossetian war in 1991–92. After serving as minister of defense for South Ossetia from 1996 to 1998, he became vice prime minister and later prime minister under President Chibirov in 2001. After Chibirov was defeated by Kokoity in the 2001 South Ossetian presidential election, Sanakoev emigrated to North Ossetia and became involved in business.⁵³ Another key figure in the Sanakoev administration, Jemal Karkusov, had been minister of internal affairs and later secretary of the Security Council of South Ossetia. In 2004–5, Karkusov confronted Kokoity, and Karkushov was arrested in April 2005 for allegedly illegally carrying arms. With the help of the Georgian intelligence services, Karkusov escaped from prison in November 2005 and entered the protection of Georgia’s Ministry of Internal Affairs.⁵⁴ As already described, 2005 was the year when some Georgian leaders, such as Georgi Khaindrava, were trying to repair relations with South Ossetia, which had been damaged by the 2004 military conflict. However, the Ministry of Internal Affairs pursued its own agenda.

After Sanakoev was elected the “alternative president” of South Ossetia in November 2006,⁵⁵ he explained his comeback to politics by saying that he wished to prevent the militarization of South Ossetia, which he saw as a response to Russia’s strategy.⁵⁶ After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the Caucasus has become a focal point of world politics. As the United States and the European Union began to pay greater attention to this region, Russia promised, under the Istanbul Agreement of 1999, to remove all military bases from mainland Georgia. Putin thought that this agreement was unacceptable and proposed that Georgia begin negotiations for its revision. According to Sanakoev, the Shevardnadze administration’s rejection of this proposal caused Putin to begin militarizing

South Ossetia, the first step of which was repairing the transcaucasian highway in 2002. In 2006, Sanakoev created a party, People of South Ossetia, which set forth the peaceful regulation of Georgian and South Ossetian relations as its primary goal.⁵⁷ However, Sanakoev notes in an interview with me that it was already dangerous to resist Kokoity's policy, so he decided to move to the Georgian-controlled territory and create a parallel government, conscious that he would only be able to represent the ethnic Georgian population of the regions that formerly comprised South Ossetia. Shida Kartli Vice-Governor Zurab Chinchilakashvili says that the existence of Sanakoev's administration made the Georgian population of South Ossetia feel safer.⁵⁸

In May 2007, Saakashvili appointed Sanakoev as head of the South Ossetian provisional administrative entity. At the same time, a state commission on the definition of the status of the former South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast started to work in Tbilisi. Unsurprisingly, Sanakoev represented South Ossetia in this commission. The provisional entity's capital was provocatively placed in Kurta, practically neighboring Tskhinval. The Georgian government adopted a special program for the development of pro-Georgian South Ossetia. This entity was liquidated as a result of the Five-Day War.

Since the Georgian parliament did not try to cancel the December 11, 1990 decision of the Georgian Supreme Soviet, which had abolished the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast, Sanakoev's government did not have a solid legal basis. Nevertheless, Saakashvili ordered the Akhalkgori district from the Mtskheta region and the Georgian enclaves from the Shida Kartli region to form the new administrative unit. Both regional leaderships understood that the creation of a pro-Georgian South Ossetian autonomy was a step in the right direction, and therefore they readily passed part of their jurisdiction to the new administrative unit.⁵⁹ When I asked Sanakoev why he preferred to recreate "autonomy" without a solid legal basis, he answered that the Georgian constitution as a whole is unitary. To make South Ossetia autonomous, he thought, "We should neither hurry nor politicize the issue; we need to work out a comprehensive constitutional reform."⁶⁰

The Ossetians and the Georgian opposition share the view that the emergence of a parallel government was a provocation to Tskhinval and that Kurta in fact became a center of various anti-South Ossetian activities. Sanakoev argues that the ethnic Georgian population of the former South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast did not have any administrative unit or institution to express their will before 2006. They did not participate in the elections and referendums that Tskhinval organized. By creating the new administrative unit, it became possible to show that Tskhinval was not the sole voice of South Ossetia. Sanakoev believes that this pluralism delayed the war, at least for half a year.

After the Five-Day War, the South Ossetian intelligence services confiscated a huge number of documents of the "Sanakoev government" and claimed that they had found evidence of the existence of a special "center" of Georgia's intelligence, in charge of organizing terror in South Ossetia, in the government building.⁶¹ I asked Sanakoev about this matter. He swore by God that it was not true.⁶²

Have We Passed the Point of No Return?

How do the Georgian and South Ossetian experts perceive the possibility of future reconciliation of the two countries? The opposition movement in Georgia culminated in the April 9, 2009 protest march (the twentieth anniversary of the 1989 Tbilisi incident) but did not end with it. The opposition made two proposals on the Abkhazian and South

Ossetian issues: First, the Georgian government should reprioritize its policies; the top priority should be building trust with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, whereas the recovery of Georgia's territorial integrity should be treated only as a future, final goal. Previously, only the Republican Party proposed this; the Georgian public, still dreaming of revenge against the Abkhazians and Ossetians, barely supported it.⁶³ The Five-Day War demonstrated that resorting to force cannot resolve the Abkhazian and South Ossetian problems and that placing top priority on recovering territorial integrity inevitably generates military inclinations. Second, the opposition thinks that Georgia's domestic political regime, based on a winner-take-all spirit, is responsible for the incompetence in negotiating with Abkhazia and South Ossetia.⁶⁴ The opposition requests that the constitution be changed to make Georgia a parliamentary republic, which, the opposition expects, would be conducive to compromise solutions in relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

An example of the rethinking of policy priority is a new movement by refugees from Abkhazia. During the past nineteen years, the Abkhazian parliament and government-in-exile, elected in 1990, represented the refugees. Receiving high salaries, these bodies mainly played political roles to legitimize the Georgian authorities, as is shown by the fact that they moved to Kodor Canyon after the success of Georgia's 2006 military operation against local clans. However, these émigré bodies barely cared for the social problems of the refugees, who compose the poorest stratum of Georgia, which is already a poor country. Recently, a number of refugees began to request new elections for the Abkhazian parliament and government-in-exile and confronted the Saakashvili administration that supports these pocket bodies. After the Five-Day War, the refugees became convinced that if the Saakashvili administration and similar successors continue, they will never be able to return to Abkhazia. There, a massive influx of Russian capital after the Five-Day War has begun to threaten the Abkhazians' business interests. The public space for the Abkhazian language is progressively narrowing. The leaders of the new refugee movement converse by telephone with their former neighbors in Abkhazia almost every day, and the refugee leaders remark that the Abkhazians ask them to come back to save them, deploring the fact that "without you, we will be absorbed by the Russians." The refugees founded their party, Our Abkhazia, in November 2008. To protest against Russia's economic expansion, some Abkhazians intend to hold a large meeting in Sukhum, in close connection with the new refugee movement in Georgia.⁶⁵

On March 14, 2009, I attended a meeting of about 1,500 refugees in the Basketball Palace of Tbilisi. Speakers described the serious difficulties they faced: poverty, police harassment, the impossibility of registering their former properties in their homeland, the impossibility of starting a small business for lack of a mortgage, and the Saakashvili administration's ending of special television and radio programs for refugees. The speakers criticized the administration's corruption and the misappropriation of huge sums of financial aid intended to go to refugees from foreign countries, which is often used for personal enrichment or the decoration of the city of Tbilisi. One speaker requested that international negotiations concerning the refugees be held in Zgdidi or Gali, not in Brussels or Frankfurt. Another criticized Saakashvili's uncompromising attitude towards Abkhazia, saying, "Those who look for friends will find them, and those who look for enemies will find them."

Roland Nizharadze, the leader of Our Abkhazia and an ethnic Svanian, told me that relations between the Georgians and Abkhazians in Abkhazia had always been friendly. "Even now, young Abkhazian men look for their brides in Gali [meaning that it continues

to be prestigious for Abkhazians to marry Mingrelian women], while mixed Abkhazian and Armenian families are rare cases.”⁶⁶ According to Nizharadze, the Georgian government was to blame for the 1992–93 civil war, but “Abkhazian separatists were a little (*chut'-chut'*) guilty, too.” To legitimize the power he gained in his coup d'état, Shevardnadze needed to hold a parliamentary election, but the Zviadists (Zavid Gamsakhurdia's supporters) continued to control western Georgia and the Georgian population of Abkhazia. This is why Shevardnadze started the war. As for the perspective of their return to Abkhazia, Nizharadze says: “Of course, everything depends on what Vanya [Russia] says, but it is possible to agree with the Russians, too.”

Despite the positive tendencies I have described, it is difficult to measure to what extent critical rethinking of the Abkhazian and Ossetian policy has become dominant among the Georgian opposition. Many speakers I witnessed at protest meetings in March 2009 did not identify whether they were criticizing Saakashvili because he started the reckless war and used heavy weapons against the civilian population, or only because he lost the war.⁶⁷

Opposition leaders expect that if they oust Saakashvili, change the constitution to prevent reemergence of dictators, recognize Georgia's injustices against the Abkhazians and South Ossetians of the past, and propose building an asymmetrical federation, South Ossetia will respond to this initiative positively. In discussion with me, Ivlian Khaindrava, a Republican leader, argues that reintegration with Georgia is the most natural choice for South Ossetia, because it is very important that this agrarian region be closely connected to the large consumer city of Tbilisi; its only connection with the Russian city of Vladikavkaz is the Roki Tunnel, which closes in the winter. Moreover, Khaindrava observes, Russia would not be very happy to have another heavily subsidized region in the Caucasus. The opposition expects that the South Ossetians will begin to forget their anger in the relatively near future, after perhaps ten years, as they did during the 1990s. “It is even amazing how much they forgave us,” said Zakareishvili.

South Ossetians do not agree with this optimistic assessment. If the positive changes previously listed occur in Georgia, and Georgia becomes a democratic country, it will be possible to build benevolent relations with its neighbors, “like Germany and Poland.” Exactly as the Germany-Poland reconciliation did not mean that the Poles would agree to live in the German state again, nor would the South Ossetians agree to live in the Georgian state (Inal Pliev, see n46). Nana Tadeeva, a leader of Unity, the ruling party of South Ossetia, remarks that the 1990s as a period of reconciliation despite the dark memories of the civil war is an idealization of the era. In fact, kidnappings continued during this relatively peaceful period. Forgetfulness is not a virtue but a weakness of the Ossetians, Tadeeva cautions. The South Ossetians forgot genocide twice (after 1920 and 1991–92) and for this “virtue,” the same neighbor conducted a third genocide. Such oblivion should not be repeated again.⁶⁸ My own four-day stay in South Ossetia convinced me that the slightest suggestion of integration into Georgia arouses an almost physiological disgust among the South Ossetians. The reactions of Inal Pliev and Tadeeva, quoted here, are the most polite and reasonable ones; in most cases, the South Ossetians lose control and begin to scream.

Completely excluding the possibility of unifying with Georgia, the South Ossetian leadership views the country as having two options. Kochiev, an advisor to the South Ossetian president, says that it would be good if Western countries recognized South Ossetia's independence, but if they continue to pressure South Ossetia to integrate into Georgia by giving money and selling weapons to Georgia, South Ossetia will have no alternative but

to lobby Moscow to incorporate South Ossetia into the Russian Federation. According to Kochiev, recognizing South Ossetia's independence would not be a bad option for the West, which would stand to benefit by having a buffer state between Russia and Georgia. Kochiev adds that South Ossetia does not need to compete with Kosovo in the number of countries that recognize it. The lack of official trade relations with, for example, Finland or Australia does not damage South Ossetia, because it can resolve most problems in international relations and trade through Russia. "Kosovo needs to be recognized by many countries, because it does not have [a big neighbor like] Russia," said Kochiev.⁶⁹

To What Extent Are the Georgian People to Blame?

The dominant discourse in postwar South Ossetia describes the Georgians as if they were evil by nature. The Soviet authorities (and, to some extent, people) often boasted of the high percentage of mixed marriages between the Georgians and Ossetians as a proof of the friendship between the two nations, but the same fact has become referred to as something negative in present South Ossetia. During my stay in South Ossetia, I encountered many times such expressions as, "I am quarter Georgian, so I understand their psychology very well," and "my grandmother was Georgian and she told us to never trust Georgians."

After the 1991–92 war, the South Ossetian authorities carefully counted the number of victims. South Ossetians proudly recall that fewer than 100 Ossetian troops (according to the first supreme commander of the South Ossetian Army, Oleg Teziev, there had been ninety-one⁷⁰) died and about 800 Ossetian civilians were killed during the war, "while the Georgian side reveals the opposite proportion of victims: about 1,000 troops and fewer than 100 civilians."⁷¹ These alleged numbers are important for the Ossetians in contrasting them with not only the Georgians but also the Abkhazians, who eventually responded to Georgian violence in 1992–93 with the logic of an eye for an eye. This time, however, the South Ossetians left the hostilities without grace comparable to the aftermath of the 1991–92 war; Georgia also recorded a significant number of civilian victims because of the Russian air raid. This is possibly why the South Ossetian authorities ceased to count the number of victims of the Five-Day War and decided to close this matter.

After the Georgian troops began to retreat, Ossetian and north Caucasian paramilitaries completely destroyed the Georgian enclaves and mainland Georgia's villages contiguous with South Ossetia, sites that had been used to shell Tskhinval.⁷² Until recently, the South Ossetian media widely reported the slightest symptoms of local Georgians' discontent with Saakashvili and their recognition of South Ossetian statehood. The Five-Day War changed this policy. North Ossetian intellectuals do not hesitate to call the unselective destruction of the Georgian enclaves a "shame" (*pozor*), but I did not hear any criticism of this violence during my stay in South Ossetia. I asked Alan Kharebov, one of the young officials working in the Ossetian presidential administration, to what extent the local Georgian population was guilty of the provocation and shelling that Georgia conducted from the enclaves. Kharebov himself has had the bitter experience of being held hostage and tortured in one of the enclaves on the eve of the military conflict in 2004, receiving neither help nor compassion from the local population, although he was a nineteen-year-old boy at the time.⁷³

At a conference held in Tskhinval on March 7–8, 2009, historian K. Pukhaev presented a paper entitled "Contemporary Georgians: 'Bad Nationality' or 'Bad People'?" As this title indicates, Pukhaev challenges the popularized axiom of the Soviet nationality policy: "There is no bad nationality [*narod*]; there can be only bad people [*lyudi*]." According to

him, this axiom was used to prevent the sufferers of racial discrimination and violence from seeking the collective responsibility of the aggressors and to distract potential victims of ethnic cleansing from analyzing the “massive psychosis” of the possible aggressors to work out a necessary defense system.⁷⁴ Unfortunately, Pukhaev’s concept of “collective responsibility” can easily be used to justify the unselective destruction of the Georgian enclaves.

The South Ossetians began to export their ethnic hatred to the other side of the Caucasian Mountains. There have been cases of South Ossetian immigrants physically attacking ethnic Georgians in North Ossetia. Usually, North Ossetians step between the two groups to defend the Georgians, but immigrants from South Ossetia have become so numerous that the North Ossetians cannot always prevent the attacks.⁷⁵ When I was spending time reviewing my interviews before my flight from Beslan Airport at a café in the Vladikavkaz bus terminal, a transportation policeman from South Ossetia recognized me and introduced me to a taxi driver also from South Ossetia, who wanted me to ride in his car. To attract my interest, he promised “to explain the situation of South Ossetia,” while constantly cursing the Georgians. After he left, the bartender, the cook (both female), and a male customer began to criticize his statements. I came to know that the bartender was an ethnic Georgian. The two women argued that “criminals, but not nationalities, start wars.” The male customer said, “We Digors [North Ossetian men] look for brides among [ethnic] Georgian girls,” indicating that it continues to be prestigious for the North Ossetians to marry Georgians. Thus, the women reversed Pukhaev’s thesis and the man reiterated what Nizharadze, leader of the refugees from Abkhazia, said.⁷⁶

Conclusion

Let me summarize my long journey from Ergneti to Gori, Tbilisi, Vladikavkaz, Java, and Tskhinval. Table 1 demonstrates the existence of a continuous transnational political semiospace between Georgia and Ossetia even after the Five-Day War. First, there is symmetry of issue perception, except that three of the questions do not make sense to the Georgian authorities because they argue that Russia started the war. Second, the cleavages of opinion do not coincide with state boundaries at all. As a whole, Saakashvili’s alienation from the other three groups is obvious, which gives us hope for Georgia and South Ossetia reconciling after Saakashvili is gone, although it does not seem that this reconciliation will result in a unified state. Remarkably, the Georgian opposition and North Ossetian experts have the same interpretation of six questions, making their responses more similar than the North and South Ossetians, who responded the same way 5.5 times. (There was a split opinion among South Ossetians regarding if reintegration into Georgia would have been possible had the war not occurred.) The agreement between the Georgian opposition and the North Ossetian experts reveals that these two actors are the most realist and reasonable. They both think that (1) the arrangement of the South Ossetian problem in the late Shevardnadze period was more or less acceptable, (2) that Saakashvili started the war when it was possible to reintegrate South Ossetia using nonmilitary means, (3) that the Sanakoev administration was a risky provocation, (4) that South Ossetia belongs to the canonic territory of the Orthodox Church of Georgia, and (5) that the massive destruction of the Georgian enclaves by South Ossetian paramilitaries was barbarous behavior. The North Ossetians disagree with the South Ossetians’ excessive nationalism, their anti-Georgianism and their beliefs that they were capable of

TABLE 1. Differing Opinions and Transnational Coalitions among the Georgian and Ossetian Experts

Questions	Responses			
	Georgian authorities	Georgian opposition	North Ossetians	South Ossetians
Did Saakashvili start the war?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Did Russia induce him to do so?	n.a.	Yes	No	No
Was the arrangement of the South Ossetian issue in the late Shevardnadze period more or less acceptable?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Was it possible for Georgia to reintegrate South Ossetia without the war?	No	Yes	Yes	Split
Was Russia waiting for a large number of Ossetian casualties before intervening in the war?	n.a.	Yes	No	Yes
Was the Sanakoev government a provocation?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Will it become possible for Georgia to reintegrate South Ossetia in the future if Georgia changes its policy?	n.a.	Yes	No	No
Does South Ossetia belong to the canonic territory of the Orthodox Church of Georgia?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Was the massive destruction of the Georgian enclaves necessary?	No	No	No	Yes

maintaining their statehood even under the persistent pressure of Georgia, that Russia intentionally inflicted additional casualties on them with its slow military reaction, that South Ossetia has resumed its historical eparchy of Alania, and that the destruction of the Georgian enclaves is justifiable.

If one assumes that North Ossetia's position is almost identical to that of the Russian government, this table provides further evidence against the stereotype of South Ossetia being Russia's puppet. There is potential tension between South Ossetia and Russia, which becomes manifest when Russia raises the issue of the "uncanonic" Orthodox church in South Ossetia and when South Ossetia recalls that the Russian army marched to Tskhinval unnaturally slowly.

Another reason for the transnational characteristics of this semiospace is its relative autonomy. The debates summarized in table 1 have almost nothing to do with the apparently global competition between transatlantic democracy and Russia's Eurasianism. This implies that the transatlantic alliance should "localize geopolitics"⁷⁷ by paying more attention to local narratives without prejudice. The absence of this endeavor caused the United States to make a humiliating diplomatic failure, whereas Russian policymakers are well versed in the Georgian opposition's strategies and the nuanced relations between the North and South Ossetians.

NOTES

1. I presented the results of this study in Kimitaka Matsuzato, "The Rise and Fall of the Joint Control Commission System in the Conflict Regulation of South Ossetia" (paper, The South Ossetian Conflict and Secessionist States Seminar, Osaka University, Osaka, Japan, March 9, 2009).

2. When historical figures or intellectuals shared interests but failed to know or refer to each other because of linguistic, political, or other barriers, historiographers not only compare their views, but also often contrast them closely as if they were having a dialogue. This was a method widely used during the Cold War to bridge Western and Soviet historiographies. See, for example, Theodore K. Rabb, "Whither History? Reflections on the Comparison between Historians and Scientists," *Developments in Modern Historiography*, ed. Henry Kozicki, 63–78 (Houndmills, England: Macmillan, 1993).

3. Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, Jr., eds., *Transnational Relations and World Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972).

4. Thomas Risse-Kappen, ed., *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In: Non-State Actors, Domestic Structures and International Institutions* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

5. On the second wave of transnationalism that followed Risse-Kappen's collection, see Mitchell A. Orenstein and Hans Peter Schmitz, "The New Transnationalism and Comparative Politics," *Comparative Politics* 38, no. 4 (2006): 479–500.

6. Kimitaka Matsuzato, "Inter-Orthodox Relations and Transborder Nationalities in and around Unrecognized Abkhazia and Transnistria," *Religion, State & Society* 37, no. 3, 2009 (forthcoming).

7. Gerard Toal, "Localizing Geopolitics: Reflections upon Research on Ethnic Cleansing and Population Returns in Bosnia-Herzegovina," *The Annals of the Association of American Geographers* (forthcoming).

8. Sokrat Dzhinadzholiya (director, Caucasus Institute for Peace and Democracy), in discussion with the author, Sukhum, Abkhazia, August 17, 2006.

9. Liana Kvarcheliya and Arda Inal-Ipa (leaders, Center for Humanitarian Programs), in discussion with the author, Sukhum, Abkhazia, August 17, 2006.

10. Roger Brubaker's thesis that triangular relations between national minorities, nationalizing states, and external national homelands lead to "reciprocal inter-field monitoring" and "representational struggles among actors" can be adopted here, after some modification. See Brubaker, "National Minorities, Nationalizing States, and External National Homelands in the New Europe," *Daedalus* 124, no. 2 (1995): 118.

11. In 1998–2000, the civilian government under President Arkadiy Gukasian struggled against the "military dictatorship" of the former field commanders led by Samvel Babayan, which ended up with the attempted assassination of Gukasian and the imprisonment of Babayan for four and one-half years. In 2003–5, the left-centrist opposition block of Movement 88 and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (the Dashnak Party) challenged Gukasian's ruling party and even won the mayoral election of Stepanakert in 2004. See Kimitaka Matsuzato, "From Belligerent to Multi-ethnic Democracy: Domestic Politics in Unrecognized States after the Ceasefires," *Eurasian Review* 1 (2008): 101–6.

12. In the presidential election of 2004, Sergey Bagapsh, the opposition leader, challenged Raul Khadzhimba, who was the successor to the first Abkhazian president Vladislav Ardzinba, and who was supported by Putin. Bagapsh eventually won. See Alexander Skakov, "Abkhazia at a Crossroads: On the Domestic Political Situation in the Republic of Abkhazia," *Iran and the Caucasus* 9, no. 1 (2005): 159–85; and Kimitaka Matsuzato, "Patronnoe prezidentstvo i politika v sfere identichnosti v nepriznannoy Abkhazii," *Acta Eurasica* 4 (2006): 137–45.

13. As a result of the 2005 parliamentary elections, Evgeny Shevchuk, the leader of the opposition party Innovation (Obnovlenie), became the speaker of parliament and began to compete with President Igor Smirnov. See Matsuzato, "From Belligerent to Multi-ethnic Democracy," 113–14.

14. Kokoity gained only 53.3 percent of the vote when he needed 50 percent to be elected. "V Yuzhnoy Osetii—Novyy prezident," *Severnaya Osetiya*, December 8, 2001.

15. The Georgian media and the Ossetian opposition often refer to the fact that Kokoity evacuated the heavily shelled Tskhinval on the first night of the war and commanded the military operation

from Java (a northerly district of South Ossetia, located between Tskhinval and the Roki Tunnel, South Ossetia's only connection with Russia), suggesting that he is not a hero but a coward. However, Ruslan Bagaev, who, with Kokoity, organized the Ossetians' resistance from the South Ossetian self-defense forces headquarters, located in the underground shelter beneath the parliament building, at midnight on August 7 told me that Kokoity did not want to leave Tskhinval, but the Ossetian leaders that were there persuaded him to do so. Russian leaders also requested (by telephone) that Kokoity evacuate Tskhinval. Ruslan Bagaev, in discussion with the author, Tskhinval, South Ossetia, March 25, 2009. Bagaev is vice foreign minister of South Ossetia.

16. For example, see the criticism of Kokoity by Oleg Teziev in "Kokoity's Opposition is Peeping Out from Vladikavkaz," *Georgia Times*, May 14, 2009, (<http://www.georgiatimes.info/en/articles/12351.html>, (accessed May 17, 2009)). Teziev was the supreme commander of the Ossetian armed forces and prime minister of South Ossetia during the first Ossetian war (1991–2), and is now running the Civil Initiative Public Organization of North Ossetia, an NGO helping Ossetian refugees from Georgia. Teziev even called Kokoity the "disgrace" of Ossetia in discussion with the author, Vladikavkaz, Russia, January 21, 2009.

17. The question of how Georgia under Saakashvili could waste this overwhelming diplomatic preponderance so quickly is a topic for another study.

18. For the text of the Dagomys Agreement, see Moskovsky gosudarstvennyy institut mezhdunarodnykh otnosheniy MID Rossii, Tsentr Kavkazskikh issledovaniy (hereafter, MGIMO), *Konflikty v Abkhazii i Yuzhnoy Osetii: Dokumenty 1989-2006 gg.* (Moscow: Russkaya panorama, 2008), 252–53.

19. Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud, "Living with Non-recognition: State- and Nation-building in South Caucasian Quasi-states," *Europe-Asia Studies* 60, no. 3 (2008): 492.

20. For the newspaper *Civil Georgia*, see <http://www.civil.ge/eng/> (accessed June 3, 2009).

21. Ruslan Bagaev, in the aforementioned discussion with the author, Tskhinval, South Ossetia, March 25, 2009.

22. David Hearst, "Dangerous Proxy War Gains an International Dimension," *Guardian*, August 9, 2008 (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/aug/09/georgia.russia1>, accessed on July 30, 2009).

23. For example, after his talk with Catholicos-Patriarch of the Orthodox Church of Georgia Ilia II on January 20, 2008, Lavrov warned that Russia would do everything within its reach to prevent "any slightest provocation or adventurism." See "Sergey Lavrov: Rossiya iskrenne zainteresovana v uregulirovanii konfliktov v Abkhazii i Yuzhnoy Osetii (Russia is really interested in the regulation of conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia)," *OsInform*, January 20, 2008, http://osinform.ru/4173-sergej_lavrov_rossija_iskrenne_zainteresovana_v_uregulirovanii_konfliktov_v_abkhazii_i_juzhnoj_osetii.html.

24. Mikheil Saakashvili, "Rossiya nastol'ko uyazvima! Russkie vse splanirovali zaranee," *Svobodnaya Gruzija*, September 27, 2008.

25. "Gruzinskii general poluchil vygovor za 'navedenie konstitutsionnogo poryadka v Yuzhnoy Osetii,'" *Lenta.ru*, October 27, 2008, <http://lenta.ru/news/2008/10/27/kurashvili/> (accessed May 18, 2009).

26. Until January 2008, Rondeli's deputy was a famous politician, Temuri Yakobashvili. Saakashvili appreciated the contribution which Rondeli's institute made during the presidential election in January 2008, and appointed Yakobashvili to the post of state minister for reintegration after January 2008. Georgia would fight the Five-Day War under the leadership of Yakobashvili.

27. Alexander Rondeli, in discussion with the author, Tbilisi, Georgia, March 13, 2009.

28. Ibid. Rondeli also criticizes South Ossetian president Eduard Kokoity for his pro-Russian position and laments that Lyudvig Chibirov, president of South Ossetia until 2001, would not have chosen such a reckless position.

29. "Vooruzhenny konflikt. Khonika sobytiy, 8 avgusta," *Svobodnaya Gruzija*, August 9, 2008.

30. "Khronologiya 'pyatidnevnoy voiny' v Yuzhnoy Osetii. Sobytiya i zavavleniya, Chast 2, 'Voina v Yuzhnoy Osetii: khronologiya,'" *Charta Caucasica*, January 30, 2009, <http://www.caucasica.org/analytics/detail.php?ID=1434> (accessed May 18, 2009).

31. Gerard Toal carefully analyzed Saakashvili's story, tracing the changes between August 8 and 11, 2008. See Toal, "Russia's Kosovo: A Critical Geopolitics of the August 2008 War over South Ossetia," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 49, no. 6 (2008): 690–93.

32. Translated into Russian from the Georgian newspaper *Mteli Kvira*, August 8, 2008, and in "Khronologiya 'pyatidnevnoi voiny.'"

33. "Time for Tough Question [sic.] Has Come," *EuroKaukAsia*, September 4, 2008, http://eurokaukasia.de/php/aktuelles/news/news_det_20080915105210.htm (accessed July 30, 2009).

34. Erosi Kitsmarishvili founded an independent television company, *Rustavi-2*, in 1996 but was forced to sell it after the Rose Revolution. Toward the 2008 presidential election, he reconciled his differences with Saakashvili and became his campaign adviser. In February 2008, Saakashvili appointed Kitsmarishvili as ambassador to Russia. See Cory Welt, 196; and Erosi Kitsmarishvili, "Esl'i vmeste so mnoi drugie tozhe skazhut pravdu, strana ne proigraet," *Svobodnaya Gruzija*, November 29, 2008. After Kitsmarishvili's shocking exposure of the political process on the eve of the war at the parliamentary commission for investigation, journalists asked him the following: "If you knew who Saakashvili was, and what his power was, why did you agree to become the ambassador (to Russia)?" Kitsmarishvili answered: "I knew there was a huge danger of war, not only from the Russian side, but also from the Georgian side. Both Russia and Georgia wanted war. I agreed to become ambassador in order to convince both parties that we could coexist without war" (*Svobodnaya Gruzija*, November 29, 2008, 4).

35. Her renowned essay, "43 War Questions," reveals that she also believes that Saakashvili was trapped. See Nino Burjanadze, "Burjanadze's 43 War Questions," *Civil Georgia*, October 2, 2008, http://www.civil.ge/eng/_print.php?id=19650 (accessed May 16, 2009).

36. Ivlian is the elder; he is a consistent member of the Republican Party.

37. The idea that the arrangement of the Ossetian issue in the late Shevardnadze period was more or less acceptable is shared by the North and South Ossetians, as well as some specialists in the West. See, for example, Kolstø and Blakkisrud, "Living with Non-recognition."

38. Paata Zakareishvili (independent researcher on conflict regulation between Georgia and South Ossetia), in discussion with the author, Tbilisi, Georgia, March 13, 2009.

39. Giorgi Khaindrava, in discussion with the author, Tbilisi, Georgia, March 12, 2009. Russia did not list itself among the donors, but preferred to give money to South Ossetia separately.

40. "V Severnoy Osetii obespokoeny otstavkoy Khaindrava," *IA Regnum*, July 21, 2006, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/677676.html> (accessed April 1, 2009).

41. Khaindrava, in discussion with the author. There is a rumor that Khaindrava was removed because of his conflict with Defense Minister Irakli Okruashvili, a representative of the "party of war," who delivered a bombshell in May 2006 when he announced that he would greet the New Year of 2007 in Tskhinval. Khaindrava denied this theory.

42. Kosta Kochiev, in discussion with the author, Tskhinval, South Ossetia, March 24, 2009.

43. In other words, Tskhinval citizens proved through their own lives that the Georgian government's repeated assertion that the South Ossetian authorities were illegally distributing weapons among the population was unlikely. However unexpected it was for the international community, it turned out that South Ossetia kept the Dagomys Agreement and other peacekeeping regulations relatively sincerely. According to these regulations, only the Joint Peacekeeping Force, which was subordinated to the JCC, had the right to be armed in the neutral zone.

44. Artur Tsutsiev (head of political analysis and forecasting of the Department of Internal Politics of the North Ossetian presidential administration), in discussion with the author, Vladikavkaz, Russia, January 21, 2009. Tsutsiev recognizes his responsibility in underestimating Saakashvili's "irrationalism." Saakashvili argues against the opinion that he is irrational, which he understands to have spread not only in Russia but in the West after the Five-Day War, in an interesting manner: "I'm just a hot-tempered man! We are South Europeans and have our own temperament and customs. This does not mean that we are irrational." (Saakashvili, "Russiya nastol'ko uyazvima!").

45. Kosta Dzugaev, e-mail to the author, May 26, 2009. Dzugaev sent this after his reading of the first draft of this article.

46. Inal Pliev, in discussion with the author, Tskhinval, South Ossetia, March 24, 2009.

47. Kosta Dzugaev, "Ideologicheskoe obespechenie protsessa priznaniya Respubliki Yuzhnaya Osetiya mezhdunarodnym soobshchestvom" (paper, "Ideological Securing of the Process of Recognition of the Republic of South Ossetia by the International Community," presented at the First International Academic-Practical Conference, entitled "The Republic of South Ossetia: Recognition and Perspectives." Tskhinval, South Ossetia, March 7–8, 2009).

48. Dzugaev, e-mail to the author.

49. "Mitropolit Kirill, chtodalshe?" *OSinform*, November 10, 2008 <http://osinform.ru/news/10173-mitropolit-kirill-gruzinskijj-lobbist.html> (accessed June 4, 2009). Kirill criticized Cyprian because Cyprian allied with Bishop Agafangel (Pashkovsky), who separated from the former Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, criticizing its reconciliation policy with the Russian Orthodox Church. See Alexej Klutschewsky, "Orthodoxes Christentum in Südossetien," *Österreichisches Archiv für Recht und Religion* 2007, no. 3 (2008): 435. I will analyze the politics of the South Ossetia Orthodoxy in another article.

50. "Dukhovnaya zhizn nesmotrya na vse bedstviya, kotorye preterpela Alanskaya Eparkhiya, prodolzhaetsya—Intervyu s Episkopom Georgiem Alanskim," *Yuzhnaya Osetiya*, January 31, 2009.

51. This was the alternative to South Ossetia's presidential election and referendum, which confirmed South Ossetia's policy goal of independence and possible integration into Russia.

52. MGIMO, *Konflikty v Abkhazii i Yuzhnoy Osetii*, 56–57 (see n18).

53. The South Ossetians remark that Sanakoev was not pro-Georgian at all when he was prime minister, but after resigning from the post, he became a gambling addict and owed a huge sum of money, which Georgia's budget liquidated.

54. "Georgian Minister Says Tbilisi behind Tskhinvali Jailbreak," *Civil Georgia*, November 20, 2005, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=11179&search=jemal%20karkusov> (accessed May 21, 2009).

55. Because several officers of the U.S. Department of State ardently supported Sanakoev's parallel government, many Ossetians and Georgians perceived it as a U.S. project. Khaindrava supposes that the real creator was Minister of Internal Affairs Vano Merabishvili of Georgia, who organized Karkusov's jailbreak. Sanakoev denies both theories and says that he was inspired by Saakashvili's speeches and ideas promoting the steady federalization of Georgia.

56. Dmitry Sanakoev (head of the South Ossetian provisional administrative entity-in-exile), in discussion with the author, Tbilisi, Georgia, March 16, 2009. The Georgian right wing would not have agreed had Saakashvili made a proposal to reintroduce the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast. After the Five-Day War, the right-wing opposition criticized Saakashvili for having presented Sanakoev with the Akhgori district as a gift, which caused Georgia to lose another territory. "Ot imeni Dvizheniya Soprotivleniya: Bakhtadze D., Berianidze T., Giorgadze M., Dundua R., Zardalishvili O., Kakulia A., Koguashvili P., Koridze T., Natadze N.—23.X.2008," *Svobodnaya Gruzija*, November 1, 2008, 6. The same can be said for Kodori Canyon, which was seized by Georgia in the summer of 2006. If local clans had continued to rule there, it would have been more difficult for the Abkhazian authorities to find the legitimacy to annex it in August 2008.

57. Dmitry Sanakoev, *Ostayus optimistom—ya osetinskii patriot!* (Tbilisi, Georgia, 2008), 103.

58. Zurab Chinchilakashvili (vice governor of the Shida Kartli region), in discussion with the author, Gori, Georgia, March 17, 2009.

59. Ibid.

60. Dmitry Sanakoev, in discussion with the author, Tbilisi, Georgia, March 16, 2009.

61. "Nikto ne ostanetsya beznakazannym: Sensatsionnye podrobnosti operatsii, provodimykh gruzinskimi spetssluzhbnami na territorii Yuzhnoy Osetii," *Yuzhnaya Osetiya*, September 10, 2008.

62. Sanakoev, in discussion with the author.

63. Ivlian Khaindrava (leader of the Republican Party of Georgia), in discussion with the author, Tbilisi, Georgia, March 13, 2009.

64. Gia Jorjoliani emphasizes the domestic origin of the Five-Day War in his "Voina i demokratiya" (paper, presented at the International Conference, "The South Ossetian Conflict and Trans-border Politics in the Black Sea Rim Symposium," Hokkaido University, Sapporo, Japan, March 5-6, 2009). In fact, under superpresidentialism, the president tends to uphold his popularity by conducting a "small victorious war." Saakashvili resorted to this method twice. In July 2006, he recovered his

falling popularity (caused by the mysterious death of Prime Minister Zurab Zhvaniya, numerous political arrests, and “special operations” by police that resulted in the deaths of Sandro Girgvliani and other innocent citizens) with a military operation in Kodor Canyon. When the government used force against a popular demonstration in November 2007, a new political crisis began, which Saakashvili tried to overcome with the blitzkrieg of South Ossetia in August 2008. Jorjoliani argues that the improvised presidential and parliamentary elections in 2008 did not grant Saakashvili the legitimacy that he needed and that this is why he pursued military adventurism. Irakli Alasania, resigning from the post of ambassador to the United Nations and shifting to the opposition in December 2008, also remarked that the domestic problems of Georgia—namely the “unilateral, chaotic, non-institutional process of decision-making on vital issues and absence of a transparent system of governance”—caused the military conflicts. See Alasania, “Irakli Alasania’s Statement,” *Civil Georgia*, December 24, 2008, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=20191> (accessed May 24, 2009); and Welt, 196.

65. Roland Nizharadze (leader of Our Abkhazia), in discussion with the author, Tbilisi, Georgia, March 15, 2009. The economic competition between Russian and Abkhazian business circles must be acknowledged. In May 2009, for example, the opposition leaders of Abkhazia sent Russian President Medvedev an open letter protesting Abkhazian president Bagapsh’s alleged intention to sell Abkhazia’s “strategic objects,” such as the railway and Sukhum Airport, to Russian enterprises. See “Abkhazskaya oppositsiya napisala otkrytoe pismo prezidentu Medvedevu,” *Regnum IA*, May 23, 2009, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1167147.html> (accessed May 24, 2009). One may find here a contrast between South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Tskhinval businessmen, if they exist at all, are not rivals of their Russian colleagues. Moreover, the South Ossetians successfully preserved their native language and do not fear cultural assimilation, whereas Abkhazian is a dying language, which makes the Abkhazians more skeptical of Russia’s expansion.

66. Nizharadze, in discussion with the author. Armenians compose the third-largest ethnic group in Abkhazia. I could not find statistics on the contemporary situation of interethnic marriages in Abkhazia. For example, a volume of the renowned “Peoples and Cultures” series dedicated to the Abkhazians and published by the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Russian Academy of Sciences, does not provide any analysis of the interethnic marriages of Abkhazians. See Yu. D. Anchabadze and Yu. G. Argun, eds., *Abkhazy* (Moscow: Nauka, 2007). There is a survey result demonstrating that an overwhelming majority of Abkhazians marry Abkhazians, as Armenians in Abkhazia have done. See “Osobennosti sotsialno-ekonomicheskogo polozheniya sovremennoy Abkhazii,” *Abkhaz-Info*, <http://www.abxaz.ru/page/?step=&path=21,89,92&lang=> (accessed May 21, 2009). I am aware of the risk of quoting ethnic stereotypes in an academic paper, but because this article aims to analyze how nationalities are perceived, not how objectively they are perceived, I regard Nizharadze’s comment as acceptable.

67. Moreover, revanchism seems to have strengthened in the regions that sustained heavy damage in the Five-Day War, such as Shida Kartli. More than half of the civilian Georgian casualties during the war took place in this region. The Russian air force even bombed a school and kindergarten (fortunately, August 9 was a Saturday and there were no children there). Having experienced this, “how people can be otherwise than anti-Russian?” (My research trip from Gori to Ergneti, guided by Zurab Chinchilakashvili (quoted here), vice governor of the Shida Kartli region, on March 17, 2009).

68. Nana Tedeeva (head of the General Affairs Department of the party Unity), in discussion with the author, Tskhinval, South Ossetia, March 23, 2009.

69. Kochiev, discussion. Kochiev listed Syria, Jordan, and Iran as nations that will possibly recognize South Ossetia in the near future.

70. Oleg Teziev, in discussion with the author, January 21, 2009.

71. *Ibid.*; and Kosta Dzugavaev, in discussion with the author, January 23, 2009. I reiterate that the main task of this article is to analyze how actors perceive and describe facts, rather than to verify the facts themselves.

72. In contrast, the South Ossetian authorities called on the Georgian majority in the Akhagori (Leningor) district (located in the eastern part of South Ossetia and controlled by Georgia until the Five-Day War) not to leave the territory, whereas the Georgian government has built more houses than necessary for the refugees from the destroyed enclaves and is trying to induce the Akhagori

population to leave their homeland for mainland Georgia.

73. Alan Kharebov (vice advisor to the president of South Ossetia on relations with social organizations), in discussion with the author, Tskhinval, South Ossetia, March 23, 2009.

74. K. Pukhaev, "Sovremennye gruziny: 'plokhoi narod' ili 'plokhie lyudi?'" (O probleme lichnoi i kollektivnoi otvetstvennosti v gruzino-osetinskom konflikte)" (paper, Pervoi mezhdunarodnoi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii, "Respublika Yuzhnaya Osetiya: priznanie i perspektivy," Tskhinval, South Ossetia, March 7–8, 2009).

75. Igor Dulaev, professor at North Ossetian University, kindly provided me with this information in a professional conversation, which is too sensitive to be covered by the media.

76. Interview with bartender, cook, and customer, Vladikavkaz, Russia, March 26, 2009.

77. Gerard Toal, "Localizing Geopolitics" (see n7).