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The Enemy Within

Causes of Fragmentation in Separatist Movements

Master Thesis

Name: Feike Fliervoet
Student number: S1159704
Programme: Master in International Relations and Diplomacy

Supervisor: Dr. L.J.M. Seymour
Second reader: Dr. F. Ragazzi

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Abstract

Why is it that some separatist movements remain united while others fragment into competing factions? While one would expect supporters of a separatist movement to be united in the struggle against their common enemy, the state, recent literature has shown that they often spend valuable time and resources on internal rivalries – yet little research has been done to explain this phenomenon. Based on a comparison of the cases of the Armenians in Azerbaijan, the Chechens in Russia, and the Abkhaz in their struggle with Georgia, this thesis shows that the ability of the separatist movement to establish institutions capable of providing effective governance is essential in understanding processes of cohesion and fragmentation. It further illustrates that the strength of the incumbent state as well as the amount of external support a separatist movement receives play into these processes in important ways. Future research will have to show whether these variables hold the same explanatory power in other contexts.

Keywords: fragmentation, governance, institutions, separatism

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1 Introduction

Ignoring that ethnic identities are fluid and malleable, researchers of civil war tend to treat ethnic groups as unitary actors that possess a single set of preferences and act accordingly (Kalyvas, 2008). Due to this conflation of different individuals and organizations into a single actor, the dynamics internal to ethnic groups have long been overlooked – but a variety of scholars recently demonstrated the importance of studying these comparative dynamics (e.g. Asal *et al.*, 2012; Bakke *et al.,* 2012). The number and heterogeneity of actors in ethnic groups namely affect strategies as well as outcomes in civil wars, for example through their impact on (1) the group's ability to bargain with the central government (Cunningham, 2011); (2) the group's likelihood to use violence and the targets of this violence (Cunningham *et al.*, 2012); (3) rebel leaders' ability to develop effective governance systems (Mampilly, 2011); (4) peace negotiations and the likelihood of their success (Pearlman, 2009); and (5) the effects of resource flows (Staniland, 2012).

The internal divisions of ethnic groups are thus central to understanding civil war processes, and to answering key questions in Comparative Politics and International Relations. The aim of this thesis is to answer one of these questions, namely: why does fragmentation in separatist movements occur? Answering this question is first of all important in theoretical terms, because filling this knowledge gap would improve our understanding of separatist movements as actors as well as of (pre-)civil war dynamics. But more importantly, discovering the roots of separatist movements' internal divisions is important because it could allow the actors involved to make targeted changes to the ways or conditions under which a separatist movement operates. As such, the process of fragmentation can either be stimulated or countered, depending on whether the aim is to decrease or increase its effectiveness.

While the internal variation of any ethnic group produces an interesting process of interaction, the dynamics of cohesion and fragmentation in secessionist movements[1] are particularly puzzling. One would expect supporters of a separatist movement to be united in the struggle against their common enemy, the state – but instead, they often spend valuable time and resources on internal rivalries (Fjelde and Nilsson, 2012). Although fragmentation is present in most secessionist movements, some movements are more fragmented than others. Why is it that some movements remain united while

[1] Throughout this thesis, I use the terms secessionist movement, separatist movement, and self-determination movement interchangeably.

others fragment into competing factions? Based on a comparison of the cases of the Armenians in Azerbaijan, the Chechens in Russia, and the Abkhaz in their struggle with Georgia, I will argue that the ability of the separatist movement to establish institutions capable of providing effective governance is essential in understanding processes of cohesion and fragmentation. In addition, the strength of the incumbent state as well as the amount of external support a separatist movement receives play into these processes in important ways.

In the next chapter, I will continue with a review of the relevant literature. Consequently, chapter 3 will give an overview of my theoretical framework, followed by the research design in chapter 4. In Chapter 5, I will provide an in-depth analysis and discussion of different separatist movements in Azerbaijan, Russia, and Georgia, followed up with my conclusions and recommendations in chapter 6.

2 Literature review

Because scholarly interest in the concept of fragmentation has emerged only recently, there is very little literature available to explain variation in movement fragmentation. I will therefore first review several articles that address the importance of cleavages in general, and then move on to a discussion of the related processes of infighting, ethnic defection, and organizational splintering.

2.1 Alternative explanations

Internal cleavages have long been neglected in civil war literature. Traditionally, both the state and the group that challenges it namely tend to be perceived as unitary actors, therefore treating the struggle they are involved in as a binary conflict that should be analyzed on the macro level. While this used to be the 'standard' way of analyzing violent conflicts, Stathis Kalyvas' 2003 article *The Ontology of "Political Violence": Action and Identity in Civil Wars* generated a turn to micropolitics, bringing to the attention that local-level cleavages internal to the warring parties are key to understanding civil war dynamics. Part of the violence in civil war contexts is namely unrelated to the central conflict *between* the two actors, as violent interaction also takes place *within* them. Indeed, "[a]ctions 'on the ground' often turn out to be related to local and private conflicts rather than the war's driving (or 'master') cleavage" (Kalyvas, 2003: 475). This implies that the dominant discourse of the war is manipulated to legitimize the settlement of private scores, or the achievement of private gains. As such, the multiple agendas of participants in secessionist movements create a complex interplay between collective and private motives, with interesting effects on the pattern of fragmentation in separatist movements.

Self-determination movements' internal cleavages thus leave an important mark on the conflicts these movements are engaged in, adding a second layer of contestation. As formulated by Kristin Bakke and her colleagues, "fragmentation will have consequences for any movement that acts in the pursuit of a collective interest on behalf of a particular group, as each organization within the overarching movement finds itself in a 'dual contest': a contest in the pursuit of the common good for the group as a whole and a contest over private advantages with other factions in the movement" (Bakke *et al.*, 2012: 266). In other words, different organizations within a self-determination movement are embroiled simultaneously in a struggle for independence with the state, and in a battle over political relevance with each other. While the first is concerned with the public good of self-determination that potentially benefits the group as a whole, the second is about

private goods such as power and material gains that benefit faction leaders and supporters and are not shared between different factions (Cunningham *et al.*, 2012).

Indeed, Fjelde and Nilsson (2012) make a related argument concerning rebels' motives for infighting. They namely argue that infighting is "a means to secure material resources and political leverage that can help the group prevail in the conflict with the government" (Fjelde and Nilsson, 2012: 604). More specifically, Christia (2008) argues that economic motives can generate willingness among people to fight their coethnics if there are local elites that can ensure the survival of their constituents as well as provide them access to high economic payoffs. These articles, like the previous ones, thus recognize the fact that rebels tend to be motivated not only by ideology or common good, but also make rational calculations in order to ensure their survival and maximize profit. In particular, it is the pursuit of private motives that explains interrebel violence. Although infighting is a process that takes place only after fragmentation has already occurred, private motives could potentially be a cause of movement fragmentation as well. More specifically, it could be argued inductively that fragmentation takes place because of certain benefits associated with faction leadership – in other words, new organizations are established by greedy or politically ambitious individuals.

A second process related to fragmentation is ethnic defection. Ethnic defection is defined by Kalyvas (2008) as "a process whereby individuals join organizations explicitly opposed to the national aspirations of the ethnic group with which they identify and end up fighting against their coethnics" (Kalyvas, 2008: 1045). His subsequent argument is that ethnic defection is a demand-driven process, depending on the incumbent actors' resources and level of organization. Once the structures to facilitate defection are in place, the process tends to be spurred by dynamics endogenous to the war, particularly the expansion of territorial control and the logic of revenge. Hypothetically, it is possible that these factors in broader terms (i.e. demand and the endogenous processes of civil war) not only facilitate ethnic defection but also contribute to the emergence of multiple organizations representing the same separatist movement. Staniland (2012a) recognizes that existing explanations for defection identify state policy and ideology as key mechanisms, but argues instead that the main trigger for defection is fratricide of rivals. Applying the same logic to the process of fragmentation, it is possible that fratricide by a separatist organization also explains the establishment of oppositional organizations.

Regarding organizational splintering, then, Asal and his colleagues (2012) asked themselves why splits emerge in formal organizations that claim to represent ethnic groups. Testing different hypotheses on a dataset including 112 ethnopolitical organizations in the Middle East, they find that factional leadership and the use of violence have a positive and statistically significant impact on organizational splintering. Paul Staniland (2012b) in turn points out that previous research has shown on the one hand that resource flows can undermine organizational discipline and as such result in organizational fragmentation – but on the other hand, different scholars have argued that resources rather facilitate organization building. Resource wealth on its own thus does not determine whether an organization fragments or coheres. Instead, Staniland finds that it is the structure of the preexisting social networks upon which an organization is built that determines its integration or fragmentation, claiming that divided social bases create fragmented organizations. Even though both of these research projects provide interesting insights in organizational schism, the fact that their unit of analysis is the *organization* rather than the *movement* implies that the scope of their research is more limited than the fragmentation process this research paper addresses: it namely does not consider organizations that emerge independently from already existing ones.

Bakke, Cunningham and Seymour (2012), in addition to stating that organizational factors such as discipline and internal control are essential to the maintenance of organizational unity, do make several predictions about the potential factors that lead to the emergence of multiple organizations competing to represent the group:

> In addition to any divergence over interests and strategy, intragroup pluralism, particularly as a legacy of local political competition, ideological divides, or social and geographic cleavages, is a primary source of division—just as social structures may shape political party factionalism. […] Processes endogenous to conflict, such as leadership rivalries, counter-insurgency strategies aimed at divide-and-rule or leadership decapitation, and the shift from guerilla warfare waged by small, isolated groups to large-scale conventional warfare, can also be linked to changes in the number of organizations. Conversely, a process of factional amalgamation, the preferences of external patrons for unity, or solidarity in the face of repression from a common enemy can decrease the number of independent groups. (Bakke *et al.*, 2012: 269)

Their article focuses on defining fragmentation rather than identifying its causes, however, and therefore no evidence confirming these predictions is presented. As none of the research projects covered in the existing literature thus specifically addresses the causes of movement fragmentation, theory development on this topic is necessary.

2.2 The importance of institutions: examples from Dagestan

Why does fragmentation in separatist movements occur? As the above overview of alternative explanations shows, there are many different factors at play in separatist struggles, varying from greed to fratricide to social networks. It is very much possible that every single one of these factors contributes to the fragmentation of secessionist movements. As argued by Chapman and Roeder (2007), however, political institutions hold primacy over these factors, as they shape identities, motivations, means, and opportunities. Indeed, Roeder (2007) illustrates this primacy with his *segmental institutions thesis,* through which he shows that the success of nation-state projects ultimately depends on the institutions of the incumbent state and its challenger. Institutions come first in the causal chain and align the other factors. Therefore, the institutions established by self-determination movements will be the focal point of this thesis.

To illustrate how institutions indeed hold primacy over identities, opportunities, motivations, and means – categories that encompass all the different alternative explanations – I will provide some examples from the ethnonationalist movement in Dagestan, Russia, a movement that faced the same conditions as the cases discussed in this thesis. Due to its high degree of ethnic diversity, Dagestan can be considered a least likely case for group cohesion – but thanks to its effective institutions, it nonetheless maintained unity. Starting with identities, the case of Dagestan shows that institutions can prevent intragroup pluralism from developing into a fragmented society. People namely take on multiple, nonexclusive identities, and institutions have the potential to prioritize one common identity over multiple competing ones. In Dagestan, a region home to 30 different national groups, institutions were shaped around a system of ethnic power sharing that was intended specifically to accommodate different preferences, while simultaneously emphasizing common goals. These institutions facilitated the emergence of a multilayered identity that allowed for diverging ethnic ties on one level, while creating an overarching Dagestani identity on a higher level. As a result of this successful strategy, "most Dagestani identified first and foremost with being 'Dagestani' rather than as a member of an ethnic group" (Zürcher, 2007: 193).

Despite the presence of a common identity, ethnic diversity in Dagestan could still have provided an opportunity for fragmentation in the absence of institutions that limited the ability to mobilize people along these lines. As Zürcher explains, "Dagestan might still have fallen victim to intercommunal violence were it not for the interlocking of

institutions that, together, made ethnonational mobilization difficult. More specifically, the inherited Soviet practices of ethnic power sharing, a new constitution that provided elements of a consociational democracy, and a traditional societal organization based on territorially defined (rather than ethnically defined) communities made mobilization across ethnic lines difficult and thus enabled Dagestani society to preserve its ethnic balance" (Zürcher, 2007: 194). In other words, the Dagestani example shows that institutions can successfully eliminate opportunities for fragmentation by constraining the opportunities for mobilization.

Lastly, the case of Dagestan also illustrates how institutions shape motivations and means for cohesion and fragmentation, as they are better equipped to channel greed as well as grievance. In Dagestan, potential contenders were successfully incorporated into the quasi-state system because the institution had the means to buy them off (Zürcher, 2007). Indeed, institutions tend to be better endowed with resources as they are the most likely beneficiaries of support from diaspora, international organizations, and other states (Chapman and Roeder, 2007), and are therefore in the best position to coerce or offer private benefits to individuals and other parties. Since economic incentives ultimately determine whether an individual participates in one or another organization (Christia, 2008; Driscoll, 2012; Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008), these resources are essential in rallying institutional support. Institutions thus channel the means and motives for fragmentation, as well as shaping identities and opportunities. Without denying the potential relevance of other variables, I will therefore focus on the institutions established by separatist movements to explain processes of cohesion and fragmentation.

3 Theoretical framework

Hoping to avoid the emergence of challengers to its sovereignty, every government aims to establish both a position of domination and hegemony in society. Interestingly, when challengers do arise, they will often attempt to adopt the exact same positions: they will try to reach domination through the establishment of a coercive apparatus, and hegemony by gathering a degree of consent from the civilian population (Mampilly, 2011). In order to gain legitimacy and the support of the inhabitants of the territory they wish to control, insurgent organizations thus tend to replicate both the forms and the functions of the nation-state, which can be understood as an attempt at 'counterstate sovereignty' (*ibid*). To resemble the nation-state's form, separatist organizations have to create an institutional structure that resembles a national government; and to match its functions, they should establish a system of effective governance. As shown by Zachariah Mampilly in his book *Rebel Rulers* (2011), a system of effective governance as established by insurgent organizations encompasses different aspects. Most importantly, the organizations should provide three types of services: security, dispute resolution mechanisms, and other public goods like education and health care. An additional factor of major importance is the development of mechanisms that allow for feedback and participation of the population. Although Mampilly argues that civilian representation is no requirement for effective governance because it is not essential for the development of an effective capacity to provide public goods, I expect that it *is* essential for the maintenance of cohesion in a separatist movement. I therefore consider effective governance to consist of two parts: (1) service provision and (2) the institutionalization of representation.

Starting with the first part, different organizations engage in service provision with varying degrees of effectiveness. As argued by Mampilly, one of the factors contributing to the development of the capacities for service provision is within-group unity, as cohesive organizations are more capable of producing and executing cohesive policies. Other scholars have shown that the relationship between these factors will also work the other way around: service provision by insurgent organizations namely is instrumental to increasing popular support (Flanigan, 2008; Magouirk, 2008). In other words, the better a separatist government is at providing services in the territory under its control, the more likely it is to rally the support of its population and to be accepted as the legitimate representative of the movement. Service provision and cohesion are thus mutually

reinforcing. Indeed, Mampilly recognizes that "insurgent organizations with a secessionist or ethnonationalist agenda have a vested interest in proving their ability to serve as de facto governments in areas they come to control as their ability to garner support from a specific population will be directly shaped by their governance performance" (Mampilly, 2011: 76). If a separatist government is considered both effective and legitimate, there will be less motives for members of the movement to found or support oppositional factions. As such, effective service provision will lower the likelihood of fragmentation.

H1: The more effective a separatist organization's service provision, the lower the likelihood of fragmentation.

Whether a secessionist organization succeeds at the provision of services also depends on the organization's interactions with a variety of social and political actors, which emerge from three different levels: from below, from within, and from above. All of these actors have their own preferences regarding the governmental structures set up by the separatist government, which is why the institutionalization of representation, the second aspect of effective governance, is also important. From below, separatist governments face pressures from the inhabitants of the area under their control, as civilians try to shape the system of governance to meet their own needs. In order to ensure that their interests are not neglected, civilians tend to use their ability to express either support for or discontent with a specific rebel organization strategically (Mampilly, 2011). If their interests are not considered, civilians will encourage competing organizations to challenge the separatist government's rule through expressions of discontent. In other words, a lack of institutional mechanisms for popular representation will foster the emergence of oppositional organizations that claim to do a better job at representing the interests of the population, and as such spur a process of movement fragmentation. Conversely, when institutional structures do allow for civilian representation, consequent popular support for the separatist government will discourage the founding of other organizations because there is no demand for them within the target society. As such, cohesion is promoted. A separatist government should therefore aim at the establishment of an institutional structure in which civilian interests are represented, so as to promote the expression of support rather than discontent – and cohesion rather than fragmentation.

When popular expressions of opposition lead to the emergence of competing organizations, individuals suddenly are no longer the only stakeholders demanding representation. These challengers from within constitute the second type of interactions. As discussed earlier, separatist movements are not unitary, but rather consist of different individuals and groups with a variety of perspectives and preferences. Therefore, "full hierarchical control within any organization is never possible; some degree of tensions between internal factions is inevitable" (*ibid*: 79). But while organizations in some movements develop themselves as governments and establish institutional structures through which they subjugate competing factions or incorporate them into a single command, other movements remain divided by multiple rivals that vie for control. The implications of the relationship between internal competition and legitimate representation are twofold. Firstly, the greater the extent to which an insurgent organization manages to establish a unified command and limit rivalry within the movement, the greater the likelihood that the organization will develop a legitimate representational system. In the absence of opposition, an organization can namely devote more time and resources to the development of institutional structures as opposed to eliminating potential competitors. Secondly, if an organization fails to accommodate the preferences of different factions in the design of its system of legitimate representation, it is likely that ruptures will emerge. As argued by Pearlman (2009), a separatist government has to create an institutionalized system of legitimate representation in order to avoid the emergence of fractions within a separatist movement. When the legitimacy of such a system is established, all factions will accept the right of the organization to speak on behalf of the collective, and will be ensured that their needs are adequately met. This can neutralize potential motives for opposition. As such, an adequate structure of representation is instrumental to the maintenance of unity within a movement. If a separatist government succeeds at institutionalizing both popular and organizational demands for representation, it is less likely to face the emergence of opposition.

H2: The stronger the institutionalization of representation, the lower the likelihood of fragmentation.

The third type of interactions, then, which emerge from above, are the interactions between separatist organizations and transnational actors. By providing security and other public goods to the population, secessionist organizations can gain support (material as well as nonmaterial) and legitimacy from transnational actors such as international agencies, NGOs, and states. These resources will give them a comparative

advantage over potential rivals, providing separatist governments that promote effective governance the opportunity to outperform and consequently eliminate opposing factions. As such, transnational actors, too, play into the relationship between effective governance and movement fragmentation. If a separatist organization is able to attract large amounts of external support, this will enhance its capabilities to establish effective governance structures, and as a result less challengers will emerge. Organizations that receive little or no external support, on the other hand, will have much more difficulty with the establishment of an elaborate system of governance, since this can be a costly task. In the absence of binding institutional structures, oppositional organizations have more motives and better chances of challenging the separatist government.

H3: The more external support, the lower the likelihood of fragmentation.

But before any of these factors related to the establishment of an effective governance system are relevant, there needs to be a window of opportunity that allows for the creation of cohesive separatist institutions. This window of opportunity is present only in the case of state weakness. Generally, insurgents tend to face a political environment that is dominated by counterinsurgency efforts of the nation-state's government, and that is therefore infertile ground for secessionist institution building. Indeed, any properly functioning incumbent state will actively attempt to disrupt the formation of a 'counterstate sovereign,' and so remain "the premier competitor and threat to any non-state-produced political and social order" (Mampilly, 2011: 37). The stronger the state, the more likely it is that counterinsurgency attempts succeed. This relates to the argument of Kalyvas (2008), who claims that strong states are generally more likely to facilitate ethnic defection compared to weaker actors, because stronger states tend to be endowed with more resources (e.g. military resources and territorial control) that can enable this process. In other words, stronger states are better able to engender collaboration with the state – and thus fragmentation of the separatist movement. Their resources allow them to spoil the establishment of effective governance systems.

But while strong states can spoil attempts at separatism by (a) using divide-and-rule tactics, (b) violent repression, and (c) the initiation of civil war, weak or failed states do not have the means to spoil the state-building process of internal contesters and therefore provide more viable conditions for insurgent organizations to create an effective governance system. Alternatively, states that are strong in terms of material capabilities can nonetheless be weakened by internal political rivalries. If incumbent

politicians face challengers to their rule, their priority will shift from eliminating counterstate challengers to eliminating internal challengers, as they will attach most importance to ensuring their (actual or political) survival. Both distracting and weakening the state apparatus, the internal struggle for political dominance thus opens up a window of opportunity that is essential to the success of separatist governance systems. As such, political *fragmentation* of the incumbent state facilitates the establishment of *cohesion* in separatist institutions. In short, the strength of the institutions of the incumbent state is expected to affect the cohesion of separatist institutions through its impact on the success of the secessionist government in establishing effective governance systems.

H4: The weaker the state, the lower the likelihood of fragmentation.

4 Research design

4.1 Methodology

Although the quantitative method of large-n statistical analysis is useful to discover links between independent and dependent variables, it can "say little about the links between cause and effect" (Mampilly, 2011: 18). I will therefore focus instead on qualitative methods, and use process tracing to look into the emergence of divisions in different separatist movements and to examine how these divisions create positive pluralism in some cases but become toxic in others. More specifically, I want to use process oriented analysis to identify the causal mechanisms that link the significant independent variables (i.e. effective governance, institutionalization of representation, and state strength) to the dependent variable (i.e. movement fragmentation). In order to find evidence of these links, the dependent and independent variables are operationalized as follows:

Dependent variable:

Fragmentation. Entails at the most basic level that a secessionist movement encompasses a number of competing factions that all claim to represent the interests of the group in its quest for independence (Cunningham *et al.*, 2012). As argued by Bakke *et al.* (2012), however, the distribution of power among these factions is also important: only those organizations with sufficient power to challenge both the other factions and the state are relevant. I therefore consider fragmentation to mean the existence of multiple factions of comparable power. The more factions of comparable power a movement contains, the more fragmented the movement is considered to be. If there is only one relevant faction, the movement is cohesive.

Independent variables:

Service provision. Mampilly argues that in order for the provision of services to be effective, the insurgent organization has to demonstrate the following three capacities: "First, it must be able to develop a force capable of policing the population, providing a degree of stability that makes the production of other governance functions possible. Second, the organization should develop a dispute resolution mechanism, either through a formal judicial structure or through an ad hoc system. […] Third, the organization should develop a capacity to provide other public goods beyond security" (Mampilly, 2011: 17). I will use this definition to determine whether an organization representing a separatist movement provides services effectively. If a separatist organization

demonstates all three of the aforementioned capacities it is effective in providing services; if it is able to provide security but no other public goods it is considered to be partially effective; and if none of the above capacities are demonstrated, then there is noneffective provision of services.

Institutionalization of representation. With regard to the gathering or maintaining of popular support and legitimacy, the institutionalization of representation entails the development of feedback mechanisms that foster civilian participation in governmental issues. In order to also ensure organizational support, the movement has to adopt an institutionalized system of legitimate representation through which a variety of preferences can be accommodated. Thus, when an organization representing a separatist movement has developed feedback mechanisms as well as legitimate representation, the conditions for the institutionalization of representation are met. If it developed only one of the two, it has partially institutionalized representation; and if it developed neither one, it has not institutionalized representation.

External support. External actors such as international organizations, NGOs, diaspora groups, and states can provide material as well as nonmaterial support to separatist movements, including financial and military resources, training, and legitimacy. Anecdotal evidence of the external contribution of these different kinds of resources will serve as a measure for external support. The more resources a separatist organization receives from external actors, the higher it scores on external support.

State strength. Understood as the ability of a government to exercise control over its territory. Although there are many different measures that can be thought of as indicating different aspects of state strength, only those relating to the state's ability to spoil the state-building attempts of a separatist movement are relevant here. First and foremost, this depends on the degree of cohesion in the state leadership, as it affects the ability to take swift decisions about the actions taken concerning the separatist movement and the prioritization of eliminating counterstate challengers. The next relevant indicator is military strength, as military capabilities will relate to the ability of the government to crack down on nonstate challengers through violent repression or the initiation of civil war. Another indicator is the financial assets available to a government, as it relates to its ability to provide material incentives to certain elements within the separatist movement as part of divide-and-rule tactics. A last factor is the presence of a

functioning infrastructural system, as it ensures the accessibility of separatist regions and therefore the government's ability to exercise territorial control.

4.2 Case selection

This study will consist of three case studies that vary on the dependent variable (i.e., that project different degrees of fragmentation), and that allow for the adoption of different analytical strategies. First of all, the case of the Chechens in Russia allows for longitudinal analysis of variation, as the Chechen separatist movement became increasingly fragmented over time. Second, the case of the Armenians in Azerbaijan will be studied as a straightforward example of a separatist movement in which hardly any fragmentation occurred. Thirdly, newly independent Georgia provides examples of both cohesion and fragmentation, as the incumbent state fragmented while the Abkhaz maintained unity – creating an interesting opportunity for comparative analysis. As the different actors in these three cases also vary in their effectiveness in service provision, the institutionalization of representation, the amount of external support, and the strength of the state institutions they face, they will allow for testing all four aforementioned hypotheses. In addition, all cases emerged in the aftermath of the break-up of the Soviet Union and thus face a similar institutional and temporal context; and as they are all located in the Caucasus, they also have similar geographical conditions. By keeping these contextual variables constant, I can control for some of the alternative intervening variables and more clearly identify the causal relationship between the dependent and independent variables under investigation.

4.3 Data collection

As the above listed indicators show, all variables are examined through qualitative data. The collection of these data took place in several steps. First, I looked at Minorities At Risk (MAR) group profiles, [2] Uppsala Conflict Database conflict profiles, [3] and International Crisis Group reports[4] for more general overviews of the separatist conflicts studied and the actors involved in them. I then searched more specifically for journal articles and books providing a historical overview of the movement and the organizations that are part of it. Subsequently, I accessed the websites of the relevant organizations to get an impression of their degree of fragmentation, service provision, institutionalization of representation, and external support. Newspaper articles will be

[2] http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar/data.asp#qualitativemar
[3] http://www.pcr.uu.se/gpdatabase/search.php
[4] http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/europe.aspx

used as an additional, primary source that can give a more fine-grained picture of these variables.

4.4 Advantages and limitations of the research design

Heuristic case studies are a good method for the task of theory development, as they serve to "inductively identify new variables, hypotheses, causal mechanisms, and causal paths" (George and Bennett, 2004: 75). According to George and Bennett, the best method of using case studies for theory development is analyzing and comparing multiple cases: "The strongest means of drawing inferences from case studies is the use of a combination of within-case analysis and cross-case comparisons within a single study or research program" (George and Bennett, 2005: 18). Following this comparative case study design, this research project has the potential to contribute in important ways to our understanding of processes of cohesion and fragmentation and the role of institutions in explaining these. Nonetheless, it can only provide tentative insights and no firm conclusions. Since only three cases are studied that are all positioned in the post-Soviet context, any conclusions drawn may only be applicable to a limited part of the world and a short period of time: the institutional legacy of Soviet ethnofederalism highly affected its successor countries, and resulted in a unique pattern of state weakness that is not readily found elsewhere. Due to constraints in time and resources, I further did not have the opportunity to do fieldwork or conduct interviews on any of the cases, and thus had to work with sources that are not specifically fit for the question I am trying to answer. This made the identification of causal linkages much more difficult. Another important limitation was that I can only read English-language literature, and therefore could not access any native-language sources – and the English-language literature might provide an incomplete or even biased picture of the cases studied. These problems would have to be addressed in future research.

5 Analysis and discussion

As mentioned in the previous section, comparing and analyzing multiple cases is the best way of drawing inferences from case studies. The cases chosen for this purpose are Chechnya, Nagorno Karabakh, and Abkhazia in its struggle with Georgia. All of these regions are part of former-Soviet states, and declared independence after the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Zürcher, 2007). But while the governments of Nagorno Karabakh and Abkhazia managed to unite their population and create an effective governance system, the Chechen separatist movement fell prey to infighting, splintering authority among the different factions into 'thousands of little pieces' (Akhmadov and Lanskoy, 2010: 94). The Georgian government, in turn, was highly fragmented due to an internal struggle for political dominance. As a result, Georgia has not been able to fully regain control over its separatist regions to this day, with Abkhazia still existing as a *de facto* independent state – just like Nagorno Karabakh in Azerbaijan. The Chechen separatists, on the other hand, remain to be discarded as 'a bunch of terrorists' (Agence France Presse, 2002). As summarized in table 1, these diverging patterns of fragmentation and cohesion can largely be explained on the basis of my hypotheses.

Table 1: Predictions and reality in the different cases. An asterisk (*) indicates a correct prediction.

Case	H1: Service Provision	H2: Repre-sentation	H3: State Strength	H4: External Support	Outcome
Chechnya					
1991-1994	Partial	Partial	Weak*	None	Cohesion
1994-1996	Partial	Yes*	Weak*	None	Cohesion
1996-1999	No*	Partial	Average	None*	Fragmentation
1999-2002	No*	No*	Strong*	None*	Fragmentation
Nagorno Karabakh	Yes*	Yes*	Weak*	Much*	Cohesion
Abkhazia	Yes*	Yes*	Weak*	Much*	Cohesion
Georgia	No*	Partial	Weak	None*	Fragmentation

In the next section, I will provide a brief overview of the institutional context of the Soviet Union. All separatist movements discussed in this thesis inherited similar institutions from the Soviet system, but made very different use of them – resulting in greatly diverging patterns of cohesion and fragmentation.

5.1 The institutional legacy of the Soviet Union

From 1922 to 1924, the Soviet Union introduced ethnofederalism as the foundation to its institutional structure. A new political map was introduced that was based on the territorialization of ethnicity, in which different levels of administrative units were strictly embedded in the hierarchy of a highly centralized bureaucratic structure. The union republics were at the top of this hierarchy; the second position was taken by the autonomous republics; below them came the autonomous oblasts; and the autonomous okrugs occupied the lowest tier. All had different degrees of autonomy. The union republics were described in the constitution as sovereign states, with their own borders, governments, constitutions, legislatures, judiciaries, and militaries – they even had the formal right to secede. The autonomous republics and oblasts also had attributes and institutions of sovereignty, but far fewer than the union republics to which they remained subject. They did not have a right to secession, either from the Soviet Union or their union republic. Autonomous okrugs had no privileges apart from the right to cultural autonomy (Zürcher, 2007).

Importantly, the new borders of the different administrative units were drawn specifically to prevent the crystallization of nationalism and control the most threatening nation-state projects within the Soviet territory. Submerging some groups while dividing others, the Soviet leadership "fostered isolation and even nourished old jealousies and rivalries, thus facilitating its control over the peoples of the area" (Rorlich in Roeder, 2007: 63). This divide-and-rule tactic too defined the Caucasus region. While the Armenians, Azerbaijani, and Georgians received their own union republic, its territories did not match their titular groups. Not only did every ethnoterritorial unit encompass a range of ethnic groups, multiple ethnic groups were also spread out over different units, with, for example, a substantial part of the Armenian population residing in Azerbaijan and the Ossets being split between Russia and Georgia (Zürcher, 2007). It were exactly these divisions that developed into secessionist tensions when all union republics by default became independent states after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. As such, the Soviet Union is a prime example of how both institutional design and state strength are instrumental to the maintenance of cohesion within society.

The fall of the Soviet Union was associated with a period of instability and regime change. "All states in the [Caucasus] region experienced political instability at the center, embarked on a rapid change from autocracy to democracy, and turned into weak

transitional regimes en route" (Zürcher, 2007: 49). Struggles over political dominance between the Soviet leadership and its union republics inhibited decision making, leading to a general condition of state weakness that functioned as a window of opportunity for the realization of secessionist aspirations. In particular, "Local elites in Abkhazia, Ossetia, Karabakh, and Chechnya wanted to seize the political opportunity that the weakening of the central state offered and opted for secession" (*ibid*: 50). Those ethnic groups that had been disadvantaged by Soviet ethnofederalism – but that were vested with at least some political institutions – now declared independence. Although they had all inherited a similar institutional structure from the Soviet Union, the movements all made very different use of their institutional legacy. While one would expect that those movements that had a higher institutional status in the Soviet system would have stronger institutions, the following case studies show different. Indeed, now independent Georgia used to be a union republic under the Soviet system and thus had the highest institutional status, yet turned out to be more fragmented than the separatist regions in its territory. Autonomous oblast Nagorno Karabakh in turn made very effective use of the existing institutional system, while the higher ranked autonomous republic Chechnya completely abolished all Soviet institutions. As a result, Chechnya without doubt was the least successful in providing effective governance and creating a cohesive separatist movement.

5.2 Chechnya: smashing the window of opportunity

5.2.1 Historical background

As a result of the divide-and-rule tactics of Soviet ethnofederalism, Chechnya shared an autonomous republic with the much smaller Ingushetia since 1936 (Hughes, 2001). But after allegations of collaboration with Germany in the Second World War, the Checheno-Ingushetia Autonomous Republic was dissolved and its population deported to central Asia in 1944 (Brauer, 2002). When the Autonomous Republic was restored and its population allowed to return thirteen years later, the Chechen people had suffered incredible losses: estimates of the number of deaths vary from roughly a third to almost half of the Chechen population (Vatchagaev, 2007). Until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Chechnya continued to be one of the most disadvantaged and underdeveloped regions of the union republic of Russia. These destructive policies resulted not only in widespread distrust of the state, but also in a strong national identity.

Nonetheless, the Chechen separatist movement was never very cohesive (see Figure 1). Already when the Chechen National Congress was founded in 1990, there were strong rivalries between distinct local factions. Three of the most notable factions were represented at the Congress, namely a communist faction guided by Doku Zavgayev, a 'centrist' faction headed by Salambek Khadziev, and an Islamic faction that included Zemlikhan Yandarbiyev, Beslan Gantemirov, and Yaragi Mamodayev. All of them were advocating full sovereignty for Chechnya-Ingushetia[5] (Dunlop, 1998), but they had different principles they wanted to be at the foundation of this 'sovereign state in the making'. Dzhokhar Dudayev, a Soviet Air Force general, was chosen as the leader of the Congress specifically because he was an outsider and therefore not caught up in any of these rivalries (Zürcher, 2007). Still, he was unable to bring the different factions together. Under his leadership the Congress rather turned into an anti-communist coalition that quickly alienated those factions that envisioned a different future for Chechnya. In addition, he delegitimized and dismantled the existing institutions of the Supreme Soviet that until then had served as the foundations for effective governance. Dudayev turned out to be unable to fill this institutional vacuum, and service provision was virtually absent from the outset. With these policies, that characterized the crucial first years of Chechnya's self-declared independence, Dudayev smashed the only window of opportunity the Chechens would be offered to create a cohesive institutional apparatus. As a result, the initial years of the Dudayev regime "will go down in Chechen history as a time of lost opportunities: in these three years, [Dudayev] did not manage to secure a basis for economic reforms or for a functioning statehood. Instead, he got caught up in a struggle for power between rival elites" (Zürcher, 2007: 80).

By early 1994, the lack of effective governance had generated widespread dissent among Chechen factions as well as the Chechen population. The Russian government further spurred this opposition by offering private benefits to oppositional leaders, of which greedy warlords made good use. The Russian military made an important miscalculation, however, that prevented this opposition from materializing. Expecting that the large-scale opposition against president Dudayev would translate into an opposition supporting Russia (Sultan, 2003), the Russian military invaded Chechnya in December 1994. Instead, Chechen society united in the face of external threat. The decision-making mechanisms embedded in age-old Chechen tradition "ensured that the opposition buried

[5] The regions Chechnya and Ingushetia at this point existed as a single autonomous republic, but would become separate republics in September 1991.

its disagreements with [Dudayev] and accepted him as wartime leader, though stating clearly that once peace had returned, their erstwhile disagreements would re-emerge" (*ibid*: 442-3). And so it happened. The Chechen movement became more cohesive as both the Chechen population and factions supported Dudayev, accepting him for once as their legitimate representative – but it was never more than a shallow reunification, both tactical and temporary. Despite rallying around the President over the course of the First Chechen War, the different opposition groups returned to being Dudayev's biggest enemies as soon as the war had been decided. Even his replacement could not return the different factions to the presidential ranks.

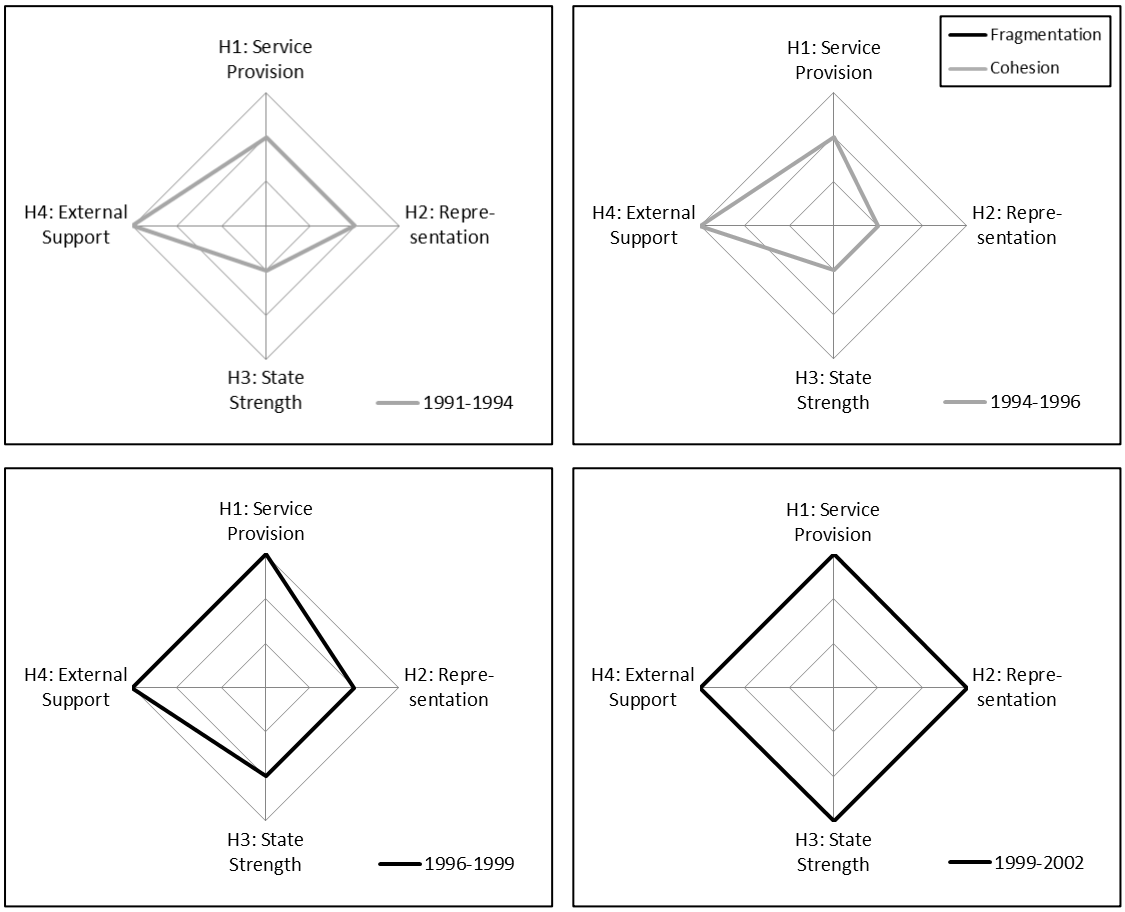

Figure 1: Fragmentation of the Chechen separatist movement over time.
The more outward the scores on the independent variables, the less favorable they are in terms of cohesion (i.e., an outward mark on service provision, representation, or external support indicates their complete absence, whereas it means a high score on state strength).

After Dudayev was slain by a Russian guided missile in April 1996, presidential elections took place in January 1997 that were won by former commander-in-Chief Aslan Maskhadov. The new President found the fragmentation of the Chechen secessionist movement too far advanced to be reversed, as he was "insufficiently corrupt and

ruthless" to pursue the kind of authoritarian regime that would have been required to keep the different factions in check (Derluguian, 2005: 258). Many key figures in the movement privately benefited from the anarchic state of Chechnya, and did everything they could to maintain it – with fatal results. In the words of Christoph Zürcher,

> "The establishment of statehood in Chechnya went awry because the successful field commanders were more interested in perpetuation of the market of violence than in restoration of the state. In the permanent struggle for power between the "rump state" and the violent entrepreneurs, the remaining state institutions were dismantled, institutions capable of containing conflicts were devalued, and the rump state was deprived of the resources required to crack down on the private organization of violence. As a consequence, Chechnya sank into anomie and internal conflict, which, among other factors, provoked the second Russian invasion in 1999." (Zürcher, 2007: 61)

In response to a military offensive in the neighboring republic of Dagestan by several Chechen commanders, the Russian army invaded Chechnya with no less than 100,000 men in October 1999 (Zürcher, 2007). The already severely fragmented Chechen movement was not capable again of reuniting in the face of this overwhelming show of force. As explained by his Foreign Minister Ilyas Akhmadov, the ideas of Maskhadov and his commanders were simply too different, and these contradicting opinions were openly expressed. This did not just ruin the Chechen movement's chances of being considered "anything other than radicals and terrorists" (Akhmadov and Lanskoy, 2010: 184), but also created insurmountable tensions internally. The Chechen movement had reached the point of no return, only sliding further down into anarchy and conflict.

5.2.2 Institutionalization of representation

The institutionalization of representation is the first variable that clearly affected the pattern of cohesion and fragmentation in the Chechen self-determination movement, as it had serious shortcomings already in the movement's earliest days. When the Soviet Union started to disintegrate in 1990, it came as no surprise that number of leading representatives of the Chechen intelligentsia organized the Chechen National Congress and became one of the many Russian regions that issued a declaration of sovereignty (Dunlop, 1998). A revolution soon broke out that radically changed the Chechen institutional landscape. "The Chechen revolution dismantled all Soviet political institutions more quickly and more thoroughly than did all other national independence movements of the Soviet Union, in part because the institutions of Soviet power had only superficially penetrated Chechen society" (*ibid:* 78). In addition, the discrimination

suffered by the Chechens was much more severe than most other Soviet nationalities, as a result of which they wished for a more clean break with Soviet history. The Chechen National Congress thus overthrew the Moscow-backed leadership of the Supreme Soviet and replaced it with the National Congress of the Chechen People, to be headed by general Dzhokhar Dudayev. This move was backed by many national-radical movements[6] (Dunlop, 1998), and Dudayev received broad support from the Chechen population. Indeed, he was "a charismatic and determined leader with high popularity among Chechens", and was elected President in 1991 with 90 percent of the vote (Zürcher, 2007: 79). Initially, Dudayev thus did represent the general public.

The institutionalization of representation was only partial, however, as there was no room for the views of different factions within the radicalizing National Congress of the Chechen People. The abolition of the Supreme Soviet was worrisome to part of the organizers of the first Congress, a large group of intellectuals and moderates whom did not agree with breaking all ties with Russia (Akhmadov and Lanskoy, 2010; Gall and de Waal, 1997). As the Congress leadership did not allow for the representation of these factions within the institution, the first divisions in Chechen politics soon started to emerge. Already in 1991, Lecha Umkhayev founded one of the first parties in opposition to the National Congress: *Daymokhk* ('Fatherland'). It was soon joined by another party named *Marsho* ('Freedom'), led by Umar Avturkhanov, and these two united with four other, smaller parties to form the Round Table in 1992 (Akhmadov and Lanskoy, 2010). The fact that this group of organizations did not strive for independence made that they had little popular support, however. Due to their policy of arguing for a form of autonomy while remaining part of the Russian Federation, most Chechens regarded them to be "Russian puppets, close to the former Communist power structure, who bring shame to Chechnya" (Erlanger, 1995). The power of these organizations was therefore not comparable to that of the Chechen government, and a unipolar balance of power was sustained within the Chechen separatist movement.

The popular disapproval of organizations with links to Russia became even stronger after the Russian invasion of Chechnya at the end of 1994. The start of the First Chechen War turned Russia into a common enemy, which ensured that, for over the course of the war at least, President Dudayev was accepted as the legitimate representative of both the

[6] The Vainakh Democratic Party, the Islamic Path, the Green Movement, the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus, the Chechen-Ingush Popular Front, the Movement for Democratic Reform, and others (Dunlop, 1998; Henze, 1995; Ruff, 2009).

Chechen population and the various opposition groups. He did not manage to consolidate this occasional institutionalization of representation, however. Dudayev continued to make little effort to create an effective system of governance, and as he refrained from filling the institutional vacuum left by the abolition of the Supreme Soviet, he also failed to consolidate the new Chechen state. The National Congress of the Chechen people consisted of no more than some ad hoc political bodies that had little procedural legitimacy, and it became impossible to strengthen these organs even when Dudayev was replaced. The 1997 presidential elections were deemed free and fair by international observers, and having received almost 60 percent of the votes, former commander-in-chief Aslan Maskhadov was installed as the new President of Chechnya (Akhmadov and Lanskoy, 2010). With the support of the general public, Maskhadov earnestly attempted to revive the system of service provision and reestablish professional military discipline and civil legal order (Derluguian, 2005). But lacking both the necessary resources, international recognition, and factional support, Maskhadov could offer neither jobs nor security to its civilians. This inability was due in large part to the fact that Dudayev had neglected the system of service provision since the beginning of his rule.

5.2.3 Service provision

Instead of investing in general service provision, Dudayev bought support by granting various smuggling monopolies to its strongmen and allied warlords (Derluguian, 2005). While this ensured the security of the population and the survival of the Dudayev regime in the short run, in the long run it led to the downfall of the Chechen separatist movement. Dudayev had namely deprived the Chechen Government of the economic resources needed to maintain the system of social service provision. By the beginning of 1994, this lack of investment in social services had already created considerable popular dissatisfaction. Indeed, a Chechen imam estimated that only one-third of the Chechen population continued to support the president while two-thirds were against him. "He listed a long catalogue of grievances about what Dudayev had done or failed to do. 'He has done nothing for the republic,' he said. 'He hasn't built a single school or hospital'" (Gall and de Waal, 1997: 104). Large part of Chechnya thus came to oppose Dudayev because he failed to tackle the country's economic and social problems and create a viable state (German, 2003). Not only did this erode his power base, it also created the demand necessary for oppositional organizations to challenge the separatist government's rule.

Although the war delayed the consolidation of popular opposition to the separatist government at first, it ultimately generated many more grievances because the war shattered all that was left of the Soviet system of service provision. The Chechens elected Aslan Maskhadov as Dudayev's successor in the hope that he could restore peace and order in Chechnya, and Maskhadov indeed was genuinely dedicated to the task of service provision (Derluguian, 2005). Nonetheless, he was unable to offer the jobs and security the population so desperately needed – for which he in turn blamed Moscow. Indeed, the Russian state contributed to the impossibility of establishing an effective system of governance through various spoiling tactics. It started these spoils in the winter of 1994, after fighting an internal leadership struggle.

5.2.4 State strength

The Chechen declaration of independence in 1991 initially received little attention of the leadership in Moscow, as "a power struggle raged between Yeltsin and the Duma, which held the political attention and the resources of the new political elite" (Zürcher, 2007: 80). Between December 1991 and the autumn of 1994, this leadership struggle continued to dominate Russian politics. For Chechnya, this meant that its separatist movement was left alone and had free reign to secede and reshape the region's institutions. As long as the Russian leadership was too preoccupied with its own power struggle to pay attention to Chechnya, relative unity was maintained within the Chechen separatist movement. Once Russia started to regain its power, however, it increasingly fed into the process of fragmentation through different spoiling tactics. First of all, Russia offered material and financial support to different oppositional organizations within Chechnya's separatist movement at a time that the power of the regime had started to decline (Dunlop, 1998; Gall and de Waal, 1997). This meant that being an opposition leader became much more profitable than supporting the Chechen government, while creating private incentives that kept the different warlords from creating a united opposition front (German, 2003). Apart from the fact that they were motivated by personal ambition and rivalry, the different opposition leaders namely had "virtually nothing in common except a desire to get rid of the existing regime" (Gall and de Waal, 1997: 139). This was reflected in the multiple alliances and institutional arrangements the different parties engaged in, created along practical rather than ideological lines (German, 2003). None of them was upheld for a long period of time, as parties easily jumped the bandwagon to collaborate with more beneficial partners. This illustrates not only the interplay between collective and private motives as discussed by Kalyvas (2003) and Bakke *et al.* (2012), but also that the

Russian state functioned as a spoiler in the Chechen separatist struggle once it started to regain its strength. By supporting some opposition groups but not others and repeatedly changing between beneficiaries, the Russian government created a private motive for infighting that served to further undermine Chechen unity.

Another way in which Russia drifted apart different factions was through civil war – even though this initially seemed a source of unification rather than fragmentation. In the face of Russian invasion in 1994, "Even those Chechens who had never supported Dudayev now rallied around the President, seeking to defend their homes and families against the perceived 'imperial threat'" (German, 2003: 135). Aslan Maskhadov, at the time the Chechen Army's commander-in-chief, managed to coordinate the activities of the different armed groups, turning them into a proper army that even managed to defeat Russia in the first Chechen War (Gall and de Waal, 1997). Unfortunately, however, this turned out to be yet another ad hoc institutional body unable to withstand the test of time. The military structure Maskhadov set up, in which almost every village had its appointed commander (*ibid*), eventually came to be the origin of even more profound fragmentation of the Chechen separatist movement. While the loyalty of the different commanders, at least initially, did lie with Dudayev and his commander-in-chief, they became increasingly autonomous; as such, many of them during or after the first war started to function independently from the Army, and would later turn against the Chechen government as they were "unwilling to relinquish their powers and independence" (Gammer, 2006: 212). The most notable among them were Shamil Basayev, Khamzat (Ruslan) Gelayev, and Salman Raduyev; other members were Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, Vakha Arsanov, Aslanbek Ismailov, Abu Movsaev, Khunkharpasha Israpilov, and Aslanbek Abdulkhadzhiev (Akhmadov and Lanskoy, 2010; German, 2003; Minorities At Risk Project, 2010). What this shows is how the waging of war can also be an effective spoiling tactic: its legacy, the presence of a large number of armed fighters that functioned under a decentralized command structure, left behind a splintered movement made up of countless small groups trying to maintain their influence. Fractionalization on the Chechen side coincided with the reestablishment of cohesion within the Russian government, which ultimately decided the second Chechen War in Russia's favor and left Chechnya in scrambles. For the Chechen separatist movement, the reconsolidation of cohesion within the Russian leadership in the absence of effective separatist institutions thus proved to be fatal.

5.2.5 External support

Another factor that contributed to Chechnya's troubled history was the fact that it received hardly any external support. As Russia prevented the international recognition of Chechnya as an independent state, the Chechen government remained isolated. "Thus no foreign aid, loans, or investment could be obtained to finance Dudayev's regime. For the same reason neither totalitarianism nor democracy could emerge, since both, in their own ways, are difficult things to build and maintain in the absence of functioning bureaucratic institutions" (Derluguian, 2005: 254). In other words, the absence of a system of effective governance was also partly attributable to the lack of external support.

The one occasion that the Chechens did receive outside help was after Dudayev had been eliminated by the Russians in April 1996. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) had already established a presence in Grozny a year earlier, and monitored the peace talks between Russia and Chechnya. When presidential and parliamentary elections were scheduled for January 1997, this provided a new opportunity to strengthen Chechnya's institutions that the OSCE was eager to support. "The OSCE afforded organizational and financial help and dispatched election observers […] the international community represented by the OSCE had just made it clear that it supported Chechnya's consolidation" (Zürcher, 2007: 86-7). Unfortunately, however, this support was insufficient to reestablish the institutional structure that was needed to reunite an already profoundly fragmented movement.

5.2.6 Additional factors

Without undermining the importance of the variables derived from my hypotheses, the Chechen case demonstrates the importance of one other factor that we will not see in any of the other cases: culture. While Chechnya's age-old traditions ensured that all Chechens rallied around the president in the face of external threat, they also inhibited true reconciliation and reunification. Blood feud namely is a very important aspect of Chechen culture (Gall and de Waal, 1997), and created an obligation for revenge that was not easily forgotten. Indeed, "for a Chechen, to be a man is to remember the names of seven generations of paternal ancestors… and not only their names, but the circumstances of their deaths and the places of their tombstones" (Arutiunov in Dunlop, 1998 : 211). This meant that the deaths resulting from infighting between the multiple Chechen factions developed into a repetitive cycle, and as such became not only a self-reinforcing process of fragmentation, but also a road to self-destruction.

5.3 Nagorno Karabakh: a success story

5.3.1 Historical background

Ever since the late 1910s, the enclave Nagorno Karabakh has been fought over by Armenia and Azerbaijan (Panossian, 2001). While the overwhelming majority – i.e. 95 percent – of the population of Karabakh in the early 1920s was Armenian (*ibid*), the Soviet leadership in July 1923 decided to assign the region to Azerbaijan – another example of Stalin's "tendency to divide the Caucasian peoples to prevent unified resistance" (Cornell, 2001: 60). The Armenians remained continuously dissatisfied with this arrangement, not least because of a long history of repression and intercommunal violence that had cumulated into a collective trauma of existential threat. Indeed, the national identity of the Armenian people has largely evolved around memories of genocide. In 1915, the Ottoman Armenians suffered terrible losses in systematic massacres carried out by the Turks, while many Russian Armenians fell victim to "murderous clashes with their Muslim neighbors who were later known as Azeris" during the revolutions of 1905 and 1917-1920 (Derluguian, 2005: 187).

Importantly, the collective trauma of the Armenians has always been instrumental to the maintenance of unity within the ethnic group. Already in the 1920s, the Karabakh Armenians formed an underground organization aiming at the unification of their region with Soviet Armenia. The organization's position on the Karabakh issue was unanimous with the Soviet Armenian officials, and the two collaborated closely on expressing their dissatisfaction in Moscow (Cheterian, 2008). Collective demands for the transfer of Karabakh to the Armenian Republic were made in 1929, 1935, 1963, 1966, 1977, and 1987 (Panossian, 2001), but repeatedly turned down by the Soviet leadership. From early 1988, mass demonstrations ensued in Stepanakert, the capital of Karabakh, as well as in the Armenian capital Yerevan. Many violent clashes took place, but eventually, it was a pogrom against Armenians in the Azeri town Sumgait in the last three days of February that triggered the escalation of tensions and led to the start of the Nagorno Karabakh War. "In fact, mutual hatred escalated to such a degree that any spark would have been capable of initiating the conflict; and the spark which was to make the escalation of the ethnic conflict irreversible, was indeed the Sumgait pogrom. After Sumgait, there seemed to be no way to diminish the conflict, and in any case this was made impossible by the hesitant approach of the Soviet authorities" (Cornell, 2001: 70).

Convinced that the relations between the Armenians and the Azeri were irreparably damaged and increasingly frustrated with the lack of action from the Soviet institutions, the formation of opposition groups in Armenia and Karabakh accelerated. In Armenia this led to the merger of different political forces into the *Hayots Hamazgayin Sharjum*, or Armenian National Movement, that was soon to assume power in the Republic (Cornell, 2001). Within Nagorno Karabakh, political organizations challenging the Soviet institutions were initially thwarted by the Soviet authorities. The first organization that was founded in the spring of 1988, named *Krunk*[7], was banned within a month; its alternative, a Council of Factory Directors, was dissolved equally quickly (Zürcher, 2007). In the meantime, the Soviet leadership installed a 'special government administration' from 12 January 1989 in an attempt to bring the situation back under its control. The Administration subsequently suspended all political institutions, including the Karabakh Soviet.

Realizing that they had nothing to win from dealing with Moscow, the Karabakh Armenians decided to take matters into their own hands and started to create their own political structures. A Congress of Authorized Representatives of the Population of the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast was elected in the summer of 1989, with logistic support from the Armenian National Movement. The Congress subsequently elected a National Council on 24 August 1989, and its Presidium became the de facto government of Karabakh (Zürcher, 2007). Benefitting from the weakness of both the Soviet and the Azerbaijani state and from extensive Armenian support, this separatist government managed to consolidate its leadership and establish a system of effective governance. As a result it has never faced any oppositional organizations, and managed to maintain cohesion in the Karabakh Armenian self-determination movement.

5.3.2 Institutionalization of representation

The first reason for the Karabakh Armenians' unity is the fact that its government was legitimated by a very high degree of acceptance (Zürcher, 2007), which it owed to the successful institutionalization of representation. Indeed, the Karabakh representative body consulted its citizens from day one, starting with one of its most momentous decisions: the declaration of the independence of Nagorno Karabakh. In response to the implosion of the Soviet Union, the National Council proclaimed the independence of the

[7] "*Krunk* means 'stork.' The stork is a symbol of the Armenians' longing for their homeland." (Zürcher, 2007: 240)

region on 2 September 1991, but it did not commence with the establishment of permanent institutions until this decision was underlined in a popular referendum. On 10 December 1991, an overwhelming majority of 99 percent of the population affirmed the declaration of independence, thus supporting the establishment of independent institutions for Nagorno Karabakh (Panossian, 2001). The political elites chose to create a parliamentary republic, to be governed by the Supreme Council of the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh. Elections to this Council were held on 28 December, allowing for civilian as well as factional representation. The parliament in turn elected a president and a prime minister. As the dissolution of the Soviet Union had also triggered the outbreak of full scale war, they ruled through a quasi-military body called the State Defense Committee until after a ceasefire was signed in May 1994.

Only after the formal ceasefire and the dissolution of the State Defense Committee in December 1994 could the authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh truly set about building an independent state (Lynch, 2004). The Committee was replaced with a civilian government, and Karabakh transformed from a parliamentary to a presidential republic. Elections for both the parliament and the position of 'President of the Republic' are still held regularly and generate a high turnout, illustrating the determination of the population of Nagorno Karabakh to establish democratic rule and "giving its rulers a strong semblance of democratic legitimacy" (Panossian, 2001: 149). Although factional divisions have emerged since the return of peace, differences are expressed only within the existing institutional structures of the separatist government (*ibid*). Indeed, the emergence of alternative organizations has been prevented thanks to the successful institutionalization of representation. In Karabakh, a democratic state-building process is well under way.

5.3.3 Service provision

Although severely hampered by an economic blockade from Azerbaijan, the separatist government of Nagorno Karabakh has also been relatively successful at the provision of services – a success that it owes largely to the support of Armenia. As usual, the first service the government wanted to ensure was security. Although there was no state-organized army in Karabakh before 1992, the government nonetheless had a large pool of fighters at its disposal, due to the all-encompassing mobilization of Karabakh society as well as the influx of volunteers from Armenia. Initially, these fighters were organized as paramilitary groups and self-defense units with loose coordination, but a National

Defense Council was installed by the end of 1992 in order to coordinate military efforts (Zürcher, 2007). This successfully "put an end to the volunteer brigade system inherited from the guerilla phase of the conflict, and created a centralized control and command" (Cheterian, 2008: 138).

The Karabakh Armenians benefited from this improvement in coordination particularly because the Azerbaijani army failed to do the same. As power struggles within the fractured political elite undermined its military efforts, Azerbaijan got stuck in a vicious circle of dysfunction: "Cleavages between incumbent and oppositional elites hindered an efficient execution of the war and led to military defeats; in turn, every big defeat led to a change of government" (Zürcher, 2007: 182-3). The Karabakh Armenians benefited from each occasion of internal strife with military victory. Eventually, they managed to bring under their control not only all of the territory of Nagorno Karabakh, but also the surrounding areas that they consequently emptied of their Azeri population (Cornell, 2001). As such, the Armenians created a buffer zone that the Azeri were unable to penetrate, finally forcing the Azerbaijani government to recognize its defeat and sign a ceasefire in June 1994.

Now the government of Karabakh guaranteed the security of its civilians at the most basic level, it had to prove that it could also meet the other needs of its civilians. This started with the expansion of its security services with police agencies, border troops, and customs representatives (Lynch, 2004). Next, it took up the revival of other services in the devastated region, and restored the provision of social services and the educational system – it is even operating a university (Panossian, 2001). The Karabakh government has thus put much effort in establishing an effective governance system, fulfilling all the basic government functions. Indeed, "a sense of state presence is palpable: the streets are lit at night, most of the buildings in the capital town have been rebuilt […] and there is no feeling of lawlessness" (Lynch, 2004: 45). As a result, the population considers the government of Karabakh legitimate and has no reason to explore alternative options.

The absence of international recognition – including by Armenia – remains a serious impediment to the recovery of Nagorno Karabakh, however. In the absence of international trade or foreign assistance and under an economic blockade from Azerbaijan, Karabakh is wholly dependent on Armenia economically. "Every year the separatist authorities draw up a budget, of which they can fund only 20 to 25 percent of expenditure. Armenia then provides an annual 'interstate loan' to Nargorno-Karabakh

that covers the remainder of its needs" (Lynch, 2004: 82). In addition, Karabakh relies on Armenia for its telecommunications, transport, and the issuance of passports for those who need to travel abroad; Yerevan even pays the salaries of certain civil servants (Panossian, 2001). The ability of the separatist government to provide services is thus reliant on the external support of Armenia, an important factor that will be discussed more elaborately later in this chapter. Interestingly, however, it also shows how the economic near-isolation of Karabakh also has its advantages for the separatist government. The economic blockade can namely be used as a justification for the weakness of the economy, explaining away the shortcomings of the separatist government as a consequence of the hostile policies of the incumbent state (Lynch, 2004). Limiting the expectations the population has of the separatist government while further antagonizing the government of Azerbaijan, the economic blockade has thus only served to strengthen the position of the separatist government. As the next section shows, this is only one example of the counterproductive effects Azeri politics has had on the separatist movement in Nagorno Karabakh.

5.3.4 State strength

The Karabakh separatist movement greatly benefited from the structural weakness of the state institutions of both the Soviet Union and Azerbaijan. Relating to the first, the conflict over the Karabakh region was the first in the Soviet sphere to escalate, and it painfully brought to light the managerial weakness of the decaying Soviet Union. Indeed, "Karabakh displayed not only that the Soviet Union had no institutionalized mechanisms to deal with ethnonational conflicts but also the extent to which the Soviet center was quickly losing its coercive capacities. Hence, neither institutions nor policies were available to prevent the region from devolving into war" (Zürcher, 2007: 181). With the Soviet leadership unable to contain the conflict, a delicate situation emerged that was interpreted as both a serious security threat and a window of opportunity by the Karabakh Armenians (*ibid*). The window of opportunity was, as in the Chechen case, created by the ethnofederal legacy of the Soviet Union, which ensured that the power vacuum resulting from the weakening of Soviet rule could only be filled by political institutions deriving their legitimacy from nationalism (Cheterian, 2008). The security threat, on the other hand, was caused by the lack of credible guarantees offered by the Azeri state to the protection of its Armenian minority.

From the outset, the separatist conflict over Karabakh was largely the result of a commitment problem on the side of Azerbaijan. Rather than providing assurances of protection, the government of Azerbaijan engaged in identity politics that strongly repressed any expression of ethnicity by the Armenian population, while simultaneously shifting the demographic balance slowly but deliberately in favor of the Azeri (Cheterian, 2008; Panossian, 2001). In light of their historic losses, the Armenians interpreted these policies as a threat to the very survival of the Armenian people. "For the Armenians, the question of [Karabakh] encapsulated all their historical sorrows and became the symbolic substitute for the much larger trauma of the 1915 genocide and the loss of historically Armenian lands that remained under Turkey's control" (Derluguian, 2005: 189). Not surprisingly, the Armenians in both Karabakh and Armenia therefore continued to protest against what they considered an infringement on their nationality, while the Azeri, who saw Karabakh as part of their historic homeland, regarded themselves the victim of Armenian nationalism (Laitin and Suny, 1999).

The Karabakh question led to intensified mobilization on both sides, resulting in frequent clashes and increasing tensions between the Armenians and the Azeri. But while the Karabakh question created cohesion on the part of the Armenians, it had no uniting force in Azerbaijan. Instead, an intense power struggle broke out within its divided political elite that undermined the government's ability to control the already weak armed forces and left the front line without the necessary support (Cheterian, 2008; Cornell, 2001). The Karabakh conflict thus became a political playing field "on which ever more irreconcilable divergences manifested themselves between the Moscow-oriented Communists on the one hand and the national-democratic opposition on the other. This domestic political fragmentation hindered the organization of state-run military violence and explains, to a large extent, the defeat of Azerbaijan on the battlefield" (Zürcher, 2007: 156-7). State weakness thus translated into military weakness, creating opportunities that the Armenians were quick to exploit. As pointed out by Cheterian (2008), the majority of the Armenian military victories coincided with internal strife within Azerbaijan, and each of these victories tightened the Armenian grip on the territory of Nagorno Karabakh. This territorial control was at the foundation of the establishment of a system of effective governance, and as such to the maintenance of a cohesive separatist movement.

5.3.5 External support

As already mentioned earlier, the Karabakh Armenians received massive external support from the Armenian state during as well as after the war. Armenian volunteers, paramilitary troops, and even entire Armenian army units fought in the war between 1991 and 1994, and the Armenian government additionally provided weapons and funding (Cornell, 2001; Lynch, 2004; Zürcher, 2007). This support was key to their military victory, and Armenia's powerful armed forces as well as its strategic alliance with Russia remain "key shields protecting the Karabakh state" (Lynch, 2004: 81). In addition, the Armenian state still fulfills a central role in the ability of the Karabakh separatist government to provide effective governance. It has enabled the institutionalization of representation by funding the construction of state institutions as well as sponsoring elections (Zürcher, 2007), and it allowed for service provision by securing the majority of the separatist government's budget as well as direct investment in the region's infrastructure (Lynch, 2004; Panossian, 2001). Although there are no formal diplomatic relations between the two entities, Nagorno Karabakh is practically an informal region of Armenia, unified with its legal, economic, and security space (*ibid*).

Armenia further channels into the region large amounts of support from the Armenian diaspora, that remains to stand firmly behind the Karabakh cause. As explained by Lynch, "Nagorno-Karabakh has pride of place in the minds and hearts of the diaspora and has been the focus of intensive assistance. As a separatist area, it has been terra incognita for most international organizations. Several large diaspora organizations, such as the Fund for Armenian Relief, and in particular the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund, stepped into the vacuum to provide humanitarian assistance to the fledging state" (Lynch, 2004: 82). It was from these funds that most medical facilities and schools have been rebuilt, which means that the diaspora support, too, has played a central role in the provision of services by the separatist government in Nagorno Karabakh. Enabling the establishment of an effective governance system, external support has thus been key to the legitimacy of the Karabakh separatist government, in turn preventing the emergence of challengers to its rule and maintaining unity within the movement.

5.4 Abkhazia and Georgia: Separatist cohesion, state fragmentation

5.4.1 Historical background

At the start of the Soviet era, Abkhazia was not part of Georgia; it had rather been proclaimed a Soviet Socialist Republic on 4 March 1921, and thus a signatory to the Soviet Union in its own right. Although it entered into a 'treaty relationship' with Georgia already in late 1921, the Abkhaz continued to regard their legal position as a separate entity as the formal basis for their independence from Georgia. Accordingly, Abkhazia considered its incorporation into the Georgian Republic in 1931 as an Autonomous Republic an illegal act that it could not get to terms with (Cornell, 2001). Compared to the Chechens and the Karabakh Armenians, however, the Abkhaz suffered little from the policies of the host state, having been spared the deportations and genocide that decimated these other groups. "Georgians have gone so far as to claim that Abkhazia's falling under Georgian and not Russian jurisdiction in fact saved Abkhaz culture from annihilation" (Cornell, 2002: 176). Indeed, the Abkhaz were compensated for their subjection to Georgian rule with quite a beneficial treatment, receiving "disproportionate access to resources and to key political positions" in the representative bodies of their region (Zürcher, 2007: 120). Abkhazia further was one of the wealthiest regions of the Soviet Union, enjoying a standard of living far higher than the rest of Georgia (*ibid*).

The Abkhaz nonetheless felt to be victim of a forcible policy of 'Georgianization', and their status as a minority in their own region resulted in sustained fears of extermination. "As Georgian nationalism flourished in the late 1980s, the Abkhaz population, and especially a section of the local elites, became increasingly restive, fearing their possible cultural and ethnic disappearance within Georgia" (Lynch, 2004: 27). In response, a popular forum named *Aydgylara* ('Unity') was established in November 1988, which organized a mass demonstration in the village Lykhny in March 1989. Some 20,000 of its participants, including Abkhaz members of the Communist elite, signed the Lykhny Declaration that called for the reestablishment of Abkhazia as a Soviet Socialist Republic (Zürcher, 2007). In Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, the Georgians responded with one of the biggest protests in the capital's history, in which anti-Abkhaz and anti-Communist sentiments came together. Its violent crackdown on the 9th of April instantly destroyed whatever legitimacy the Communist regime had left, resulting in the radicalization of the

Georgian national movement and absorbing all room for compromise with the state authorities (*ibid*).

Moscow responded by replacing the leadership of the Georgian Communist Party, but this only had counterproductive effects: the new leadership namely decided to adopt the main positions of the nationalist opposition and effectuated a declaration of sovereignty by the Georgian Supreme Soviet in March 1990. This led to a deterioration of Georgia's relationship with Moscow as well as the Abkhaz, who feared that their autonomous position within an independent Georgia would be compromised. "In reaction to these unmistakable steps toward Georgian independence from the Soviet Union, the Abkhaz took unmistakable steps toward independence from Georgia. Significantly, the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet unilaterally proclaimed Abkhazia to be a sovereign union republic and petitioned Moscow to be incorporated into the Soviet Union as a union republic. These steps were declared invalid by the Georgian Supreme Soviet" (Zürcher, 2007: 123-4). Although the mutual declarations of independence generated increasing tensions between Georgia and Abkhazia, the conflict long remained confined to the political realm, and the Georgian and Abkhaz leaderships managed to keep a working relationship until March 1992 (Cornell, 2002).

In March 1992, a change of Georgia's President that coincided with the dissolution of the Soviet Union brought the previously latent conflict into the military realm. Expecting to restore Georgia's territorial integrity quickly, Georgian forces entered Abkhazia in August 1992 and managed to take control over the Abkhaz capital Sukhumi within days. With help from Russia and volunteers from the North Caucasus, the Abkhaz initiated a counteroffensive the next year that eventually expelled all Georgian forces from the region (Lynch, 2004). Importantly, however, "The Russian intervention was not the major cause of the Georgian defeat—or the Abkhaz victory! It was the incredible disorganization on the Georgian side which contrasted with a much more disciplined and determined fighting force on the Abkhaz side" (Cheterian, 2008: 3). As in Azerbaijan, political fragmentation within the Georgian state had translated into military weakness, from which the Abkhaz – with sufficient external support – could benefit. Once they had secured territorial control over their region, the Abkhaz, like the Karabakh Armenians, "set out to develop all the institutions of statehood, despite nonrecognition and international isolation" (Lynch, 2004: 30).

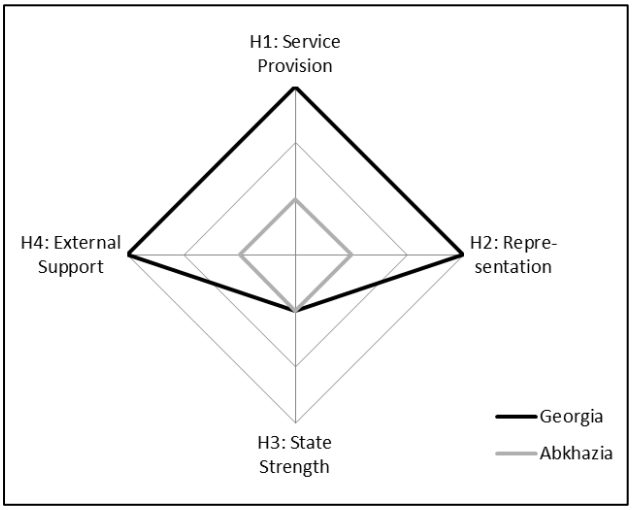

Figure 2: Fragmentation and cohesion in Georgia and Abkhazia, respectively.

Even more so than in the case of Nagorno Karabakh, Georgia's struggle with Abkhazia thus shows how the political fragmentation of the incumbent government is a destructive symptom of state weakness, creating a window of opportunity for a separatist state-building project around which the secessionist movement can cohere.

5.4.2 Institutionalization of representation

The process of cohesion of the Abkhaz has been shaped strongly by the institutional structure of the Soviet ethnofederal system – indeed, "The significance of the state institutions of the Abkhaz ASSR[8] for the purposes of Abkhaz ethnic mobilization can hardly be overstated" (Cornell, 2002: 184). More so than either the Chechens or the Karabakh Armenians, the Abkhaz made use of the political institutions that their autonomous status had granted them, as their self-determination movement emerged in congruence with – rather than in opposition to – the regional Soviet institutions. As compensation for the rejection of their requests for transferal to Russian rule, the Abkhaz received disproportionate representation in the region's representative bodies. Although they only constituted 17 percent of the population, as much as 67 percent of the region's government ministers were Abkhazian – "hence the ease with which the Abkhaz could later use the state apparatus of their ASSR for their secessionist aims" (Cornell, 2001: 145). Indeed, this position of secure control over the local administration and economy enabled the Abkhaz elites to put the state and party bureaucracies at the service of the national cause (Zürcher, 2007).

This control over the institutions of the republic further created career opportunities for the Abkhaz political elite that ensured its continuing support and kept it from founding oppositional organizations (Cornell, 2002). In addition, Abkhazia's autonomous structures provided it with "an excellent and ready-made power base that included decision-making bodies, links to outside support and to financial resources, as well as to

[8] ASSR: Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic

media outlets for propagating the message to the people" that served as a solid basis for popular support (*ibid*: 186). Any expressions of discontent that did emerge since have been confined to the political realm. After the veterans' association *Amtsakhara* criticized the lack of leadership from the incumbent president, for example, its collaboration with various civil-society organizations, businessmen and disgruntled former government ministers resulted in the victory of the oppositional candidate in the 2004 presidential elections (Caspersen, 2008).

In the Georgian self-determination movement, institutional development took an entirely different course. The first expressions of opposition to the Supreme Soviet stemmed from the early 1970s, when a small but vocal group of dissidents emerged in Tbilisi. The most famous among them were Merab Kostava, Valentina Pailodze, and Zviad Gamsakhurdia. They regarded Soviet rule in Georgia as illegal and the state institutions illegitimate, a received much popular support in their struggle to defend the Georgian culture and language (Cheterian, 2008). After Gorbachev's policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* had opened new political possibilities in Georgia, the first nationalist organizations started to appear. First there was the Ilia Chavchavadze Society that fought against Russification, created by a group of Georgian intellectuals in 1987. In 1988, it was joined by new organizations including the Society of Saint Ilia the Righteous, which was led by Gamsakhurdia, and the National Democratic Party under the leadership of Georgi Chanturia. "Those two groups were considered as 'radical', because of their views considering the Soviet rule illegitimate, and their demand for Georgian independence, but also because of their uncompromising political positions, whereby any cooperation with the existing political order was regarded as morally unacceptable. Both groups would play a key role in later events" (*ibid*: 162).

By the end of 1989, Zviad Gamsakhurdia was the undisputed leader of the Georgian nationalist movement. He shared personal animosities with a large number of the leaders of other nationalist organizations, however, which divided the Georgian national movement into two main fronts (Cheterian, 2008). Interestingly, their main point of contention was the institutional structure that should be at the foundation of Georgian independence. While some 6,200 representatives of 150 political groups and organizations formed the National Congress to negotiate Georgia's secession, Gamsakhurdia set up the Free Georgia Round Table with which he competed in the Supreme Soviet parliamentary elections in October 1990. The Round Table recorded a

sweeping victory and came to dominate the parliament of the Supreme Soviet, occupying 155 out of 250 seats (*ibid*). Receiving strong public support, Gamsakhurdia also won the presidential elections in May 1991 – but after just a few months in office, he had become an unpopular and politically isolated leader. Soon, neither the population nor the other factions within the Georgian separatist movement considered him their legitimate representative. He was overthrown in January 1992, after which the Military Council claimed power, recalled itself the State Council, and invited Eduard Shevardnadze, the former Soviet leader of Georgia, to return to power. Shevardnadze suffered from a severe legitimacy problem, however, and Georgia continued to be divided between pro- and contra-Gamsakhurdia activists. Although it had the form of a state, Georgia lacked the legitimate institutions to provide for its substance. Making things worse, "chaotic political management led to the tragedy of war in Abkhazia, and the defeat of the Georgian forces with tragic human consequences" (*ibid*: 185).

5.4.3 Service provision

By the time of the Georgian invasion, Abkhazia was led by Vladislav Ardzinba, a former historian who had been elected chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia in December 1990. He soon moved to assert control over Soviet military units in Abkhazia, and further created a National Guard that was mono-ethnically Abkhaz (Cornell, 2002). In the war with Georgia, the Abkhaz forces "fought with determination and unity" (Derluguian, 2005), which translated into cohesion outside the battlefield. Military success under Ardzinba ensured the maintenance of unity within the separatist government's institutional apparatus, and generated the popular support necessary for its expansion. The Abkhaz government first established the other necessary organs to ensure security within the region, such as police and a court system; later, it also built the capacities to provide some basic public services, including education and health care (Caspersen, 2008). This system of service provision still stands. As recognized by the International Crisis Group (2006: 3), the Abkhaz now "profess a proven ability to maintain a functioning government with a democratically elected president; a system based on the rule of law that protects the rights of minorities; an army that can defend its territory; and a growing economy that will assure the entity's sustainability."

The service-related tasks of the Ardzinba government were facilitated much by Abkhazia's existing socio-economic structure. The Abkhaz land is extremely fertile, ensuring its self-sufficiency in terms of food; in addition, it is endowed with several

hydroelectric plants that account for its energy security. As recognized by Cornell (2001: 162), "These factors have helped the isolated Ardzinba regime to stay in power without much opposition." Meanwhile, it is very dependent on external support to sustain the daily running of legislative, executive, and judicial institutions. Indeed, "The United Nations and international nongovernmental organizations, such as Acción Contra la Hambre, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Médecins Sans Frontières, have become the pillars of social security in Abkhazia" (Lynch, 2004: 44). The Abkhaz further rely on Russia to provide them with passports and pay local pensions (Caspersen, 2008). Although the separatist institutions in Abkhazia are considerably weaker than those in Nagorno Karabakh, they have managed to keep up a façade of effective governance that is sufficient to prevent the emergence of challengers.

Interestingly, the opposite was true in Georgia. With more than seventy political parties competing for power in 1990, the Georgian political sphere was characterized by internal bickering among different nationalist groups whose radical positions became increasingly incompatible (Cornell, 2002; Derluguian, 2005). As none of them felt responsible for the sustenance of the institutions and functions of the state, politics in Georgia became more and more deinstitutionalized (Zürcher, 2007). As explained by Derluguian (2005: 201), "Many Georgian officials themselves did not appear to behave like the organizers of economic production or providers of public goods – if anybody's concern at all, things like the provision of electricity, roads, and schools were considered Moscow's responsibility. Georgian officials often behaved more like old-fashioned gentry than managers and bureaucrats. The result was a particularly brittle state that would collapse instantaneously once its power stopped flowing from the central government and the population lost the last vestiges of fear or trust in the authorities." With Moscow providing services to the Georgian population, there was no vacuum for the Georgian nationalist movement to exploit, and thus no room for a Georgian state-building project that the different nationalist factions could cohere around. This resulted in sustained internal fragmentation of the Georgian movement.

5.4.4 State strength

Despite the fact that the Soviet Union was in decay, its continued exercise of state functions implied that the Georgian nationalist movement lacked a window of opportunity for the establishment of a system of effective governance. The common cause of Georgian independence alone proved insufficient to unite the different

Georgian nationalist groups, as they "were [too] internally divided personally and ideologically to form a cohesive movement" (Cornell, 2002: 155). Indeed, rather than cohering around a single project, the different Georgian factions – that had formed around charismatic leaders and personal ties rather than a program – remained isolated, small groupings with only rudimentary internal organizational capacities (Zürcher, 2007). The resulting power struggle between them effectively led to a disastrous breakdown of law and order in Georgia. While there was no Georgian state army, paramilitary forces that to a large degree consisted of simple criminals prone to looting and pillaging were omnipresent (Cornell, 2002). Too preoccupied with its radical battle for political dominance, the Georgian national movement utterly failed to create a functioning, independent and democratic state (Cornell, 2002). Georgia's fatal state weakness was the direct consequence "of a transition that could not be managed because the new ruling elites could not rule" (Zürcher, 2007: 147).

Like in Azerbaijan, Georgia's state weakness translated into military weakness; and like the Karabakh Armenians, the Abkhaz benefited directly from the resulting window of opportunity. The main struggle for political dominance was between Georgian president Eduard Shevardnadze and his predecessor, Zviad Gamsakhurdia. When the latter returned from exile to Georgia, "over a third of the Georgian forces deserted to support him, and the Abkhaz took this opportunity to resume their offensive" (Cornell, 2002: 169). While the supporters of Gamzakhurdia took control of Georgian weapons and challenged Shevardnadze's government militarily, launching a rebellion that threatened to plunge Georgia into complete chaos, the front in Abkhazia collapsed, allowing the Abkhaz forces to regain control over their territory (*ibid*). A Russian-brokered ceasefire entered into force in late October 1993, and it was followed up with an interim peace agreement in April 1994 (Cornell, 2001). In the absence of a functioning incumbent state, the Abkhaz have since consolidated their de facto independence .

5.4.5 External support

While there were no external actors supporting the nationalist cause of Georgia, the Abkhaz separatist movement has thrived on external support ever since the invasion of Georgia in the region. the ranks of Abkhazia's armed forces were first of all swelled by volunteer units from the North Caucasus, primarily composed of Chechens and Circassians (Lynch, 2004; Cornell, 2002). In addition, Russian forces that were deployed in Abkhazia with the official purpose of mediating the cessation of hostilities offered

direct support to the separatists, providing both human and material assistance (Cornell, 2002). "Officially, Russia was endeavoring to find a peaceful settlement in Abkhazia and denied any involvement in the war. But its policy of divide and rule included military support to both sides in the conflict, which, over the course of the conflict, increasingly favored the Abkhazians" (Zürcher, 2007: 141). Russia's military presence thus served to offset the weakness of the numerically disadvantaged Abkhazians, while exacerbating the weakness of the fragmented Georgian forces. As such, the balance of power on the battleground was "clearly strengthened in favor of the separatists" (Lynch, 2004: 78).

After the war had been decided in the favor of the Abkhaz, Russia stationed peacekeepers in the area that have continued to secure the Abkhaz government's territorial control and prevented Georgia from engaging in attempts at violent reincorporation of Abkhazia. As the Abkhaz foreign minister bluntly put it, "The CIS[9] peacekeeping forces have de facto established a state border" (Lynch, 2004: 62). As mentioned earlier, the Abkhaz government further relies on the support of the United Nations and international humanitarian organizations to provide substance to its system of social service provision. Their financial and material assistance has served to strengthen the status quo (Lynch, 2004), providing legitimacy to the Abkhaz government and as such securing its representational monopoly.

5.5 Cross-case comparison

In the preceding sections, I presented three different cases to illustrate the variation on the independent variables under research in this thesis: service provision, the institutionalization of representation, external support, and state strength. The case studies of Chechnya, Nagorno Karabakh, and Abkhazia and Georgia provide observable support for all of the stated hypotheses, which I will illustrate with a brief cross-case comparison focusing on the causal mechanisms related to each individual hypothesis.

H1: The more effective a separatist organization's service provision, the lower the likelihood of fragmentation.

As becomes clear from the different cases, the mechanism that translates service provision into cohesion is popular satisfaction. The separatist governments of Nagorno Karabakh and Abkhazia paid much attention to the needs of their population, and

[9] CIS: Commonwealth of Independent States

satisfied the most basic requirement of security as well as other public goods. As a result, the Karabakh Armenians and the Abkhaz were very satisfied with the services provided by their relative separatist governments, and subsequently did not explore any alternatives. The Georgian government, on the other hand, felt no responsibility for service provision as this was a function fulfilled by Moscow. With only a common cause but no common responsibility, the Georgian nationalist movement remained severely fragmented. The Chechen government, too, largely neglected the provision of services from the outset. While it initially did provide security to its population, the Dudayev regime made no investments in other public goods, and over time the Chechens became increasingly unhappy with the absence of educational and health care facilities. In response, the Chechen population came to support the emergence of various oppositional organizations and encouraged them to challenge Dudayev's rule. The lack of service provision by the Chechen government thus translated into a fragmented separatist movement, where the successful service provision by the Karabakh and Abkhaz governments resulted in cohesion.

H2: The stronger the institutionalization of representation, the lower the likelihood of fragmentation.

Relating to the institutionalization of representation, a similar pattern can be observed. The causal mechanism at work here is the acceptance by the population as well as different factions within the movement of the separatist government as their legitimate representative. In Nagorno Karbakh as well as in Abkhazia, the separatist authorities set up democratic institutions through which both popular and factional preferences could be taken into account (Caspersen, 2008). Because any differences could be expressed within these institutional structures, the population and factions within both countries accepted the legitimate representation of the government and had no reason to create alternative organizations. In Chechnya, on the other hand, the general acceptance of the separatist government as the representative of the Chechen people had more to do with the presence of an external threat than with the legitimacy of its governmental structures. The institutions and cohesion of the movement were therefore equally superficial and temporary. The Georgian government in turn represented neither the population nor the different factions within the movement. As its lack of legitimacy and sustained factional opposition continued to reinforce one another, it utterly failed to institutionalize representation and remained severely fragmented.

H3: The more external support, the lower the likelihood of fragmentation.

The relevance of external support, then, results from it being an instrumental factor in the establishment of effective governance systems by separatists. As the evidence for the previous hypotheses shows, the successful establishment of such a system in turn tends to result in a cohesive movement. The Karabakh Armenians received the most extensive external support, from the Armenian state as well as its diaspora and international nongovernmental organizations. The Karabakh movement could therefore maintain the most elaborate system of government, and was also the most cohesive. The Abkhaz were also very cohesive, thanks to the effective system of governance it sustained with the support from external actors like the Russian government and international humanitarian organizations. The Chechens and Georgians received the least (if any) external support, and therefore did not manage to maintain a system of effective governance. These movements were also severely fragmented.

H4: The weaker the state, the lower the likelihood of fragmentation.

Lastly, the causal process that translates state weakness into separatist cohesion is the absence of a spoiler to the movement's attempts at establishing an effective system of governance, which in turn facilitates cohesion. In both Russia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, the implosion of the Soviet Union by default brought to power a government that was riven by an internal struggle for political dominance. This incumbent fragmentation created a window of opportunity for each of the separatist movements to establish a system of effective governance, but only the Karabakh Armenians and the Abkhaz took full advantage of this possibility and were subsequently able to maintain unity within their movements. The ineffective Chechen leadership instead deprived the movement of the means to set up such an effective governance system, and when the window of opportunity had closed, the strengthening Russian state could successfully spoil the cohesion of the Chechen separatist movement. The Georgian government in turn did not profit from the decay of the Soviet Union because its weakness did not create a vacuum in terms of effective governance. In the absence of a common responsibility, the Georgians failed to unite.

6 Conclusion

Existing literature on movement fragmentation has generally focused on its effects, showing that internal cleavages affect strategies as well as outcomes in civil wars. These effects are only the final link in a longer causal chain, however, and are rooted in the character and causes of fragmentation. Thus far, scholars have largely neglected these earlier steps in the causal process. This thesis makes tentative steps towards filling this knowledge gap. I have presented an original framework that identifies the causes of fragmentation in separatist movements, hypothesizing that effective governance by the separatist government is key to the maintenance of unity within a movement. If a separatist government can provide both services and an institutional basis for representation, the population as well as the different factions in the separatist region will benefit more from association with the incumbent leadership of the movement than from founding or supporting oppositional organizations, thus resulting in the maintenance of cohesion within the movement. External actors such as other states, non-governmental organizations, and diaspora groups can facilitate the establishment of a system of effective governance by providing material and economic support. State weakness – particularly stemming from political fragmentation within the incumbent government – rather provides a window of opportunity for effective governance, as it tends to result in the absence of attempts at spoiling the secessionist state-building process.

The omnipresence of state weakness in the cases under examination further implicated that the systems of effective governance established by those separatists with outside support turned out to be more satisfactory than the governance of the incumbent state. This result raises some important questions, however. Is it at all possible for a separatist movement in a strong state to remain cohesive? And can a separatist movement in any kind of state establish a system of effective governance without the help from external actors? Indeed, Mampilly (2011) has made a compelling argument for the acknowledgement of insurgent groups' governance capacities, showing that they too can provide political and economic order. Nonetheless, non-recognition seems to remain a serious impediment to the consolidation of separatist institutions, and as such a tough challenge to the prevention of fragmentation within a separatist movement. On the other hand, once such institutional structures are in place, they prove hard to be torn apart. This has important policy implications for the incumbent state in its attempts to restore

its territorial integrity. While spoiling tactics are very effective at preventing the emergence of a system of governance, they tend to be counterproductive when such a system is already present, as the separatist government only enhances its legitimacy by portraying its flaws as a direct result of the incumbent state's hostile policies.

Lastly, this thesis has shed light on the ways in which the institutional legacy of the Soviet Union greatly affected the success of the separatist state-building projects within its territory, as well as the processes of cohesion and fragmentation within the movements executing them. This is an important addition to the existing literature on ethnofederalism, showing that it can generate not only interethnic tension, but also intragroup cohesion. Upon the Soviet Union's decay, its ethnofederalist institutional structures created a unique pattern of double state weakness that set the window of opportunity wide open for different ethnic groups within its territory to pursue independence. With both the Soviet Union and its successor states unable to perform key state functions, particularly those ethnic groups that had autonomy and were equipped with their own political institutions were in the perfect position to benefit from the emerging power vacuum, and establish a governance system capable of filling the void. The uniqueness of the Soviet institutional legacy also implies that all findings may only be applicable to a limited part of the world and a short period of time, however. The case studies of Chechnya, Nagorno Karabakh, and Abkhazia in its struggle with Georgia indeed provide compelling evidence showing that effective separatist institutions result in cohesive movements, but no firm conclusions can be drawn based on just three cases that are all positioned in the same post-Soviet context. Future research on the causes of fragmentation in separatist movements therefore has to examine a broader universe of cases to see if these findings also hold under different conditions, preferably making use of a more encompassing set of resources including native language texts and primary sources.

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