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Wounds that won’t heal: cartographic anxieties and the quest for territorial integrity in Georgia

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This paper examines the role of territorial integrity narratives in the Republic of Georgia, which currently features two separatist territories – Abkhazia and South Ossetia – which are de facto independent and have begun to receive limited international recognition. Political rhetoric is further buttressed by various government policies and practices that help transmit the message of territorial integrity to the Georgian public. Cartographic anxieties, or the preoccupation and fear of a country’s loss of territory, is a central feature of Georgian nationalist discourse. Referring to the loss of territory as amputation exemplifies the cartographic anxieties displayed in Georgia. Specifically, I will focus on the role of political discourse, maps, patriotic youth camps and billboards and other elements of the landscape, documenting how they help to reproduce the discourse of territorial integrity. It is precisely these discourses and practices that reproduce territorial integrity narratives and construct the entire Georgian territory (including Abkhazia and South Ossetia) as integral to Georgian national identity, enabling the separatist regions to be understood as wounds that won’t heal.

Keywords: Georgia; Abkhazia; South Ossetia; cartographic anxieties; territorial integrity; nationalism

As you approach the bridge over the Inghuri River, which is the border crossing between the Republic of Georgia and the de facto Republic of Abkhazia, a separatist region that most of the international community of national states considers a part of Georgia, the Georgian state offers a final message to those about to leave Georgian-controlled territory. A billboard, with Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili’s image and a map of Georgia with its two separatist regions contained within its borders, declares: ‘United and Democratic Georgia’ (Figure 1).

As this billboard illustrates, territorial integrity is a pervasive theme not only of Georgian political rhetoric, but also of government policies, and is imprinted into the landscape itself. President Saakashvili has repeatedly declared that one of his main goals is to restore Georgia’s territorial integrity (ICG 2004, Cheterian 2009, George 2009a, Mitchell 2009, Wheatley 2009), and is a central component of nationalism. Analysts have identified the corrosive nationalism that has once again become a prominent feature of post-Rose Revolution Georgian politics (Suny 2009). It is important to document these nationalist rhetorical devices and practices by illustrating the intricacies of how Saakashvili’s, and others’, nationalist discourses penetrated into Georgian society and thereby the Georgian public’s imagination. Similar to Paul Manning’s analysis of Georgia’s Rose Revolution, I too wish to highlight the ‘different aspects of the performative effects of political performances on their corresponding social imaginaries’ (Manning 2007, p. 207). This article will document and analyse the geopolitical practices that continue to reproduce the Georgian state within its Soviet borders. 1 These practices transmit nationalist
ideology and occur in many different areas of Georgian society, including visual imagery, popular music, youth camps, government policies and political speeches.

Because of the conflation of people and place, of the nation and its homeland, nationalist ideology territorializes identity. The territory of the nation, the homeland, is not simply the place where the nation resides, and not only the place where the nation belongs, but also an intricate and integral part of the nation itself. The preoccupation with state borders becomes common in a world of nationalism and nation-states. What this preoccupation with Georgian territorial integrity illustrates is the prevalence of cartographic anxieties. Cartographic anxiety, according to Sankaran Krishna (1994), is the uncertainty and fear surrounding nationality and territorial integrity. Furthermore, the fear that the cartographic outline of one’s national state (as depicted on maps) may be altered will impact national identity and generate anxiety.

Krishna’s conceptual insights have been applied in a number of other studies. Many have examined the concept of cartographic anxiety, with a particular emphasis on examining various aspects within Indian society (Dodds 2000, Ramaswamy 2002, Saroch 2003, Saroch 2005, Brosius 2005, Das 2008a, Das 2008b, Smith 2011). Others have pointed out important similarities and connections with the concept of cartographic anxieties, though without a sustained discussion of the concept (for example, Campbell 1999, Corbridge 1999, Peckham 2000, Weiss 2002, Korf 2006, Agnew 2010, Koch 2011).

While Krishna’s original argument focused solely on India, cartographic anxieties are an integral feature of the entire nation-state system. Thereby, any region or country can serve to illustrate these patterns. However, there has not been much exploration of cartographic anxieties outside the South Asia region. The few exceptions include analyses of Greece and Australia, with scholars explicitly making the connection between employing discourses of fear with concern over national borders (Agnew 2007, Chaturvedi and Doyle 2010a, Chaturvedi and Doyle 2010b; see also Painter 2008). By focusing on Georgia, this article serves to provide
another new place for a detailed case study of cartographic anxieties, highlighting the role of national maps as a critical element of territorial integrity discourses.

According to Thongchai Winichakul (1997), the geobody of the nation is the naturalized territorial outline, or shape of the state, which becomes easily recognizable and conflated with the national group. Any alteration to the borders that result in losing territory is akin to losing a part of the nation itself. The degree to which national subjectivity is deeply conflated with the geobody is exemplified through invoking territorial ‘body’ metaphors. The abstraction of the imagined community of the nation is territorially embodied in the place of the nation, its homeland. To have a separatist region gain independence becomes ‘amputation’, leaving ‘wounds’ and ‘scars’. The potential changed borders that will accompany lost territories are wounds that won’t heal for the Georgian geobody.

Since 1993, Georgia has had limited control over parts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the complete loss of practical sovereignty was consolidated after their defeat in the August 2008 war with Russia. Losing Abkhazia and South Ossetia are not simply political, economic or geo-strategic losses for the Georgian state, but also severely diminish and weaken the Georgian nation. The powerful emotions of anger and sadness expressed by many Georgians over the loss of the two territories reveals that it is a loss of part of their identity. The nation is irreparably harmed because the territory is the nation. Within the logic of nationalism, these painful expressions and agonizing over territorial integrity are understandable. However, national identities are constructed, and national identification with the homeland and imprinting the shape of the nation-state as expressed in national maps must be taught, reinforced and reproduced through various state practices (Radcliffe 2009).

While several scholars have explored the utilization of demographic data and historical geographic discourses to lay claim to space and provide justification for regaining control over ‘lost’ territories (Gachechiladze 1997), attention to the role of cartographic representations as another dimension in reinforcing territorial integrity narratives in Georgia has been overlooked. It is important to examine maps, as they are a central component of the spatialization of national identity.

The Georgian preoccupation with territorial integrity is a rampant feature of daily life and political discourse. This understanding of Georgia, with Abkhazia and South Ossetia as integral components, is socially constructed through a variety of government policies and discourses. I will specifically focus on the role of political discourse, maps, patriotic youth camps, billboards and other elements of the landscape, and document how they help to reproduce the discourse of territorial integrity.

My analysis is drawn from a wide range of sources. I utilize journalistic accounts, international organization reports, documentary films, academic studies and cartographic representations. I analyse political discourse by examining quotations and speeches made by politicians, and scrutinize government policy by looking at laws and programmes instituted. Identification and exploration of visual texts, maps and elements of the landscape are based on my own direct fieldwork observations, as well as from exploring official Georgian government websites and material generated by private individuals, such as that found on blogs and YouTube videos. Lastly, 15 interviews with residents of Tbilisi were conducted in August and September of 2010, in which they were asked to discuss their feelings about Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and relations with Russia.

In this paper, I will illustrate the cartographic anxieties involved in losing the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia for Georgians, focusing primarily on the Saakashvili era (2004–11). The Georgian government has responded with a wide array of discourses that reinforce Georgia’s territorial integrity and infuse and bombard its citizens with repetitious narratives about how integral Abkhazia and South Ossetia are for the Georgian national state. So what
government policies and programmes are employed to construct and reproduce feelings of longing for Abkhazia and reinforce the doctrine of territorial integrity?

First, I will examine Georgian political discourse that focuses on territorial integrity, as exemplified through speeches made by the President and the Minister of Defence, and through government policies and programmes enacted that altered the landscape, focusing on patriotic youth camps. Next, I examine the role national maps play in reinforcing the territorial outline of the state into the nationalist imagination, further instilling territorial integrity as a central component of Georgian national identity. Then I will interrogate the idea of the nation through the regularly invoked metaphors of the body and amputation, which further illustrates the geobody concept, through a close examination of a scene from Salome Jashi’s 2010 documentary, *The Leader is Always Right*, as well as analysing cartographic images. Finally, I will offer some remarks on the ramifications of, and alternatives to, territorial integrity discourses. I now turn to the examination of several government policies and programmes that highlight the vast significance of Georgian territorial integrity and show how crucial Abkhazia and South Ossetia are for the Georgian nation.

Territorial integrity as embedded in governmental discourses and the Georgian landscape

The emphasis on Georgia’s territorial integrity and the regaining of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are very central and consistent themes of Georgian political discourse. One of President Saakashvili’s major campaign promises was to recapture Georgia’s lost territories. He made it one of his major priorities, declaring that ‘Georgia’s territorial integrity is the goal of my life’ (ICG 2006, p. 2). At his inauguration in January 2004, he stated that he hoped that Abkhazia would be reintegrated by 2009. Irakli Okruashvili, the Defence Minister, made similar comments, stating that ‘we must reunite the country, and I don’t care that sceptics in Europe are concerned’ (ICG 2006, p. 21). More recently, in the aftermath of the August 2008 war, in response to the Russian recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Saakashvili reiterated that Georgia will regain its lost territories: ‘Georgia will accomplish all of its goals, including restoration of territorial integrity’ (Civil Georgia 2008). While campaigning for his re-election, Saakashvili suggested that he would regain both territories quickly. He promised ‘a ticket on a train . . . to Sukhumi’ and that the current administration of South Ossetia would be removed in a few months, at the latest (de Waal 2010, p. 208).

Several commentators have acknowledged that the Georgian government has sent Abkhazia and South Ossetia mixed signals by emphasizing peaceful negotiations on the one hand, and drastically increasing defence spending and offering combative discourses on the other (George 2009b, de Waal 2010). Georgian military build-up is another example of state practices designed to regain territorial integrity – by force if necessary. From 2003 to 2007, defence spending rose from 0.7% of Georgia’s gross domestic product (GDP), to 8.8% (Wheatley 2009). Officials and residents in Abkhazia and South Ossetia saw this as a signal of the threat Georgia posed to them. Furthermore, various members of the Georgian government have revealed that there was a desire to resort to military force to retake Abkhazia and South Ossetia, with specific plans drawn up (Wheatley 2009, p. 129, de Waal 2010, p. 219).

After regaining control of the semi-autonomous Aslan Abashidzhe-led Adjara, as well as getting a foothold in Abkhazia by breaking up the militias operating in the isolated Kodori Gorge and bringing that area under Georgian control in 2006, many Georgians were optimistic and pleased at the reassertion of Georgian sovereignty over previously problematic regions. Immediately, Saakashvili installed the Abkhazian government-in-exile in the Kodori Gorge.
This was done, in part, for symbolic and psychological reasons. The move was fairly impractical, as internally displaced persons (IDPs) wanting to visit the offices could not reach the Kodori Gorge, government-in-exile officials would be disconnected from Tbilisi, and the area was cut off for parts of the winter due to its location in the mountains (ICG 2006). Pragmatically speaking, Saakashvili wanted a part of the government to be physically operating on territory within Abkhazia’s borders, as well as to be a mere 50 kilometres from Sukhumi, thus providing more legitimacy for the government-in exile and gaining a new advantage for the negotiation process. Within the Georgian Parliament, a Temporary Commission on Territorial Integrity Issues was created as well.

There were other changes to the landscape that reproduced territorial integrity discourses. Two slogans appeared on several billboards throughout Tbilisi, ‘Remember Abkhazia’ and ‘Abkhazia is our pain’, set upon a backdrop of an image of Sukhumi. Street signs remained showing the number of kilometres left to Sukhumi, even though no Georgian could drive there. The highway that was to be built that would once again connect Tbilisi to Tskhinvali and Sukhumi was a medium through which Saakashvili promised to regain control of the two regions:

During the first term of our presidency, my presidency, I am planning to complete Tbilisi-Tskhinvali Highway and during the second term finally to complete the Tbilisi-Sukhumi motorway. So, now I declare the construction of the Tbilisi-Tskhinvali-Sukhumi motorway opened. Today is 15 March 2006. In 2008, we will travel to Tskhinvali by this road and in 2010, or at the beginning of 2011 at the latest, this road will take us to Sukhumi, although I expect to arrive in Sukhumi much earlier than that. (Cheterian 2009, p. 158)

The official memorialized landscape also reinforces this discourse. There is a monument located in Heroes Square in the centre of Tbilisi for the soldiers who died in the fight for the unity of Georgia. It states simply, ‘for United Georgia’. The worthiness of the cause to fight, and die, as a soldier for Georgia to keep the country intact is justified by a quote from Shota Rustaveli, the Georgian national poet, which is inscribed on one of the monuments there: ‘It’s better to die in glory then to live in vain.’ A new monument (48 metres tall), the Monument to Heroes, was also erected in Heroes Square to honour those who died defending Georgia (Georgian Times 2010).

During 2005, a new programme that would create new features in the landscape throughout Georgia was announced. Patriotic youth camps became a popular initiative of the Georgian government to instil nationalism and bolster Georgian claims over Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Dubbed a ‘Presidential Program’, Saakashvili and other government officials were frequent visitors to the camps designed to offer young Georgians something to do in the summer and turn them into young patriots. On 11 September 2005, over 10,000 camp participants attended the ‘Patriots are Coming’ rally in Tbilisi, broadcast live on television. Regaining the lost territories was an explicit theme of the event. Saakashvili declared that ‘our Promised Land is a united Georgia’ with ‘its old borders’ (Civil Georgia 2005). Another speech was made by Okruashvili, who ominously said that ‘the time will come soon, time when we return Abkhazia’ and that ‘we have no right not to unite Georgia’ (Civil Georgia 2005).

On 26 May 2007, Saakashvili opened a patriotic camp in the village of Ganmukhuri, located along the Black Sea and less than a kilometre away from Abkhazia. Placing the camp right along the border with Abkhazia, overlooking the ‘lost’ territory, and in close proximity to Russian soldiers was a provocative move. Both opposition leaders and international organizations criticized the location of the camp as unnecessarily dangerous (Civil Georgia 2007a, ICG 2008, p. 20), and Saakashvili also reacted angrily to United Nations (UN) calls to have the camp removed from near the conflict zone (Civil Georgia 2007b). It did spark new conflict as well (Civil Georgia 2007c). The camp was destroyed during the Russian incursion into Georgia in August 2008, and subsequently rebuilt.
Impacts on and perspectives of the Georgian population

In 2006, Okruashvili declared ‘If we fail to celebrate New Year in Tskhinvali on January 1, 2007 I will no longer be the defense minister of Georgia’ (de Waal 2010, p. 204). In 2011, Saakashvili stated that he would ‘celebrate the next New Year in Sukhumi’ (Ria Novosti 2011).

Yet discussion of territorial integrity is not limited to politicians, but pervades people’s lives. IDPs, when saying goodbye, often use the phrase, ‘May the next time we meet be in Abkhazia’ (Kabachnik et al. 2010), and one of the supervisors of a patriotic camp repeatedly told the attendees: ‘I believe we will meet each other in a patriotic camp in Sukhumi’ (Jashi 2010). As Levan states, ‘most Georgians are still fixated on territorial integrity,’ and feels that if left up to a referendum the majority of people would vote for a ‘policy to regain the territories rather than moving towards Europe and the EU’ (R 3: M, 52).

Nino says, referring to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, that: ‘Of course they are part of the history of Georgia and the consciousness of the people’ (R 6: F, 30). She adds that: ‘Most people think that without these territories Georgia is not Georgia’ (R 6: F, 30). For Georgia to qualify as Georgia, it must remain territorially intact. And without any part of the Georgian geobody, as captured in the territorial outline of Georgia within its internationally recognized boundaries, she feels ‘that we’ve lost something’ integral to Georgian identity (R 6: F, 30). Alu also argues that Abkhazia and South Ossetia are vital to the Georgian nation: ‘For us it’s impossible to survive unless we are able to regain these lost territories’ (R 7: M, 37).

The influence of Saakashvili’s policies on the Georgian population and the emphasis on territorial integrity is evidenced in opinion polls. In surveys taken in 2006 and 2007, more than half the respondents (60.1% and 52.5%) named the conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia as the most important problems in Georgia (Sumbadze 2006, Sumbadze 2007). Saakashvili’s supporters were more likely to prioritize territorial integrity as a significant problem for Georgia than people who were undecided or backing the opposition (Sumbadze 2007). After the August 2008 war, only 42.3% of Saakashvili supporters agreed that war could have been avoided, in contrast to 62.8% of those unaligned and 83.3% of the opposition (Sumbadze 2009, p. 7). It took the Georgian defeat against Russia during the August 2008 war to show a marked decline in the notion that the separatist territories should be reclaimed by force, with the figure dropping between 2007 and 2008 from 37% to 16.5% for Abkhazia, and 27.6% to 16.3% for South Ossetia (Sumbadze 2009, p. 8). However, the fact that over one-third of those polled in 2007 felt that Abkhazia should be retaken by force is an indication of the success of government policy and discourse that made it a national goal.

The government discourses and policies that prioritized territorial integrity, coupled with Saakashvili’s early successes in Adjara and Kodori Gorge, raised public expectations for a quick solution and regaining control of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This demonstrates how state policies and discourses have an important, tangible effect on public perception. Furthermore, not only are public perceptions shaped by political rhetoric and government programmes, but those expectations can then have an impact on government decisions, such as trying to retake the territories militarily because of those very expectations created earlier.

The shape of Georgia

Cartographic anxieties are often discussed in postcolonial contexts like India (Krishna 1994, Ramaswamy 2002), or newly forming states-in-the-making like Abkhazia (Kabachnik 2009). However, cartographic anxieties are a feature of the entire nation-state system. This concept is applicable to any boundary changes or where concern is shown over the ‘shape’ of the country, thus making it inherently an integral component of nationalism and a ubiquitous
symptom of the nation-state system. Georgia’s latest round of state building emerged with the declaration of independence on 9 April 1991 as they left the Soviet Empire. Since then, Georgia has exhibited cartographic anxieties, with the loss of Abkhazia and South Ossetia featuring prominently in both national political discourse and people’s daily concerns.

Cartographic representations are a means through which the preoccupation with territorial integrity is readily seen. To have legitimate and total control over a piece of territory is ‘viewed as a matter of national right’ (Murphy 1991, p. 131). Maps are one of the dominant ways by which national states assert their physical and conceptual claims and sovereignty over a territory (Neocleous 2003). Maps attempt to legitimize territorial claims by rendering them naturalized, allowing the territorial outline of a state to become synonymous with the nation. Irakli states that he has ‘seen some pictures’ of Abkhazia and he ‘sees the map and knows what it looks like on the map’ (R 2: M, 28). The map is the vehicle through which he gains the knowledge of what and where Abkhazia lies, and that it is a part of Georgia. Irakli continues, saying that when he sees that map it is ‘absolutely’ clear to him that Abkhazia is part of Georgia (R 2: M, 28).

National maps are a common way that territorial integrity is reinforced. As Radcliffe (2009) describes, national maps, also referred to as ‘maps-as-logo’ (Anderson 1991), are not maps that provide information showing physical features or the cities of a country, nor can it be used to get around. Instead, by having a paucity of attributes, the silhouette of the state becomes prominent in national maps and helps to instil this image, the outline or shape of the country, into the popular imagination. In response to a question about the loss of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Eka states: ‘How can I feel? I regret it very much. I cannot get accustomed to this idea’ (R 4: F, 60). It will remain difficult for Georgians to get used to this notion precisely because of the performative power of national maps and the corresponding discourses espousing the right to territorial integrity.

National maps appear in a wide variety of places, including billboards, posters, stamps, currency, tourist items, governmental websites and elsewhere on the Internet (Figure 2). The logo for the Sakartvelo television station is a national map of Georgia. The Georgian five lari note (introduced in 2002), features a map of Georgia that depicts the neighbouring countries and the Black Sea (Figure 3). The only marking on the map is of Tbilisi, asserting the capital’s dominant position as the central city governing the entire territory.

In 2010, Georgia changed its passport entry/exit stamps, with the new design including a national map of Georgia. National maps of Georgia are also found on both official government websites and private sites run by individuals. A national map that clearly emphasizes the territorial shape of Georgia is found on this website, with the national flag of Georgia filled inside the borders: http://republicofgeorgia.deviantart.com/art/Republic-Of-Georgia-49189831.

Figure 2. The geobody of Georgia as captured on a postcard. Author’s collection
Many official government websites feature maps, and national maps, of Georgia, including the National Statistics Office, the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Finance, the Department of Tourism and Resorts of Georgia, the Office of the State Minister of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, the Office of the State Minister for Reintegration, the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees of Georgia and the My House Program.\textsuperscript{13}

But the shape of Georgia cannot co-exist on the same world political map with the geobody of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as it stands today. Nowhere is this paradox captured more visibly than in the popular 2009 Georgian reality show/talk show Cell #5, hosted by Ustnobi (The Stranger), a popular singer who lived in self-imposed exile in his prison cell. He vowed not to leave his cell until Saakashvili was no longer in office, since his regime has made all of Georgia, and all Georgians, prisoners themselves. The opening credit montage of the programme shows the national map of Georgia (as it is internationally recognized today), then prison cell doors start to close and the two separatist regions are lopped off leaving a shape that is not recognizable to Georgians and is designed to arouse anger and despair at the loss of two integral regions of the national territory (Figure 4).

Losing territories, or the threat of losing them, are often depicted in visual representations (Ramaswamy 2002). Separatist groups challenge the territorial status quo and seek to actualize their own geopolitical vision. From the Georgian perspective, this disfiguring of the country will have an emotional impact. Visually speaking, seeing the new ‘shape’ of Georgia with the two lost territories will arouse anger and sadness, highlighting the importance of maps, how ubiquitous they are, and how conflated they are with who ‘we’ are.

Then there are those cartographic representations where the lack of control over the separatist territories is highlighted and agonized over. It is here where the cartographic anxieties become truly evident, since concern over losing the territories is what is focused on. For instance, during the 2009 cell protests, a national map was painted on a banner that marked Abkhazia and South Ossetia in red (Figure 5).

Other examples include the introduction to the Cell #5 television show as discussed above and the maps presented on certain websites such as that of ‘The Club of Experts’, a pro-Georgian site that offers analysis of relevant current affairs regarding Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia (http://eng.expertclub.ge/). On the top banner of the site is a national map of Georgia that has the two separatist regions shaded grey, and it proceeds to show flames rising out of them (Figure 6 and Figure 7).
Another example shows an individual using graphic-design tools that further arouse cartographic anxieties. In a short 1:21 video named ‘Ertiani Sakartvelo’ (translates to ‘United Georgia’) (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9TzFKYa2a5U), we see a national map of Georgia with the Georgian flag within the silhouette of the borders, and the Abkhazian and South Ossetian flag within their territories as well. Then the two separatist territories flags are slowly erased, removing them from the screen and revealing an unmarked Georgian flag with Georgia fulfilling its territorial integrity.

Since August 2008, Russia has featured more prominently in the visual and cartographic representations as the source of Georgia’s territorial losses, and thus the main reason for
cartographic anxieties. In another clip uploaded onto YouTube, we see a national map of Georgia with the two separatist territories coloured red and being pecked at by a two-headed bird from Russia (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQUsyKTFQ-g: the scene mentioned can be viewed 47 seconds into the video). Russia is also seen to hack away with a mallet at the national map of Georgia, as found in this protest postcard (Figure 8).

It is not only that part of the territory will be missing on a map, but that a part of Georgian national identity will be absent as well. These discourses help create the idea that Georgia can only be true to itself and be a complete identity with both Abkhazia and South Ossetia as part of Georgia.

**Amputating the (geo)body of the nation**

On 27 September 1999, the sixth anniversary of the Georgian expulsion from Abkhazia, President Eduard Shevardnadze articulated the conflation of nation and territory in a radio interview:

> Abkhazia is still a physical pain and an unhealing spiritual wound to all of us. Our wounded soul will not heal until the conflict is settled peacefully, though, even in this case, a scar will remain forever. (BBC 1999)

The territory, as the geobody of the nation, cannot be divided, as that would mean one is dividing the nation as well. Losing Abkhazia is commensurate with amputating a limb from the body of the nation. The loss of national territory will have a lasting impact, for even if the territories are returned, the pain of the loss will be inscribed in the cultural memory of the nation and is expressed through physical, bodily imagery. This effectively scars the nation, and will serve as a reminder of
conflict. As several of my respondents intimated, even though they have never been to Abkhazia, ‘it hurts still’ (R 1: M, 23), and that ‘everyone has encountered this big pain’ (R 10: M, 25).

In 2010, a new documentary was made by Salome Jashi that provided a stark, and shocking, peek into what goes on at the patriotic youth camps. The Leader is Always Right (Jashi 2010) helps document nationalistic education and the performance of nationalism in Georgia. It poses some important questions as well, challenging the idea that to be a patriot is to love one’s country; instead, as a young boy who struggles to enjoy himself deftly articulates, patriotism is about obedience and not asking questions.

The documentary allows viewers a brief and rare ethnographic entry into the world of the patriotic youth camp. We see the kids adorned with Georgian flags and other symbols on their clothing, various cheers heralding ‘Glory to Georgia’, and daily singing of the national anthem as the Georgian flag is raised. The team-building exercises not only help unite the ‘squads’ of kids, but also help them to express their national identities to each other. In one early scene, a teenage boy discusses a potential call and response that his squad could use. He will shout: ‘Abkhazia’, and everyone will respond: ‘We’ll be back.’

I want to focus on one specific moment from the documentary. Towards the end of their stay at the camp, there are performances put on for the camp attendees. In one play, we see students dancing about jovially to music on stage. Suddenly, there is a voice that comes from offstage, and everyone freezes:

Voice: Is there a nation happier than ours?
Kid: Who are you?
Voice: What are you celebrating, Georgians?
Kids: What are those sounds? What’s happening?
Voice: Feeling good, Georgians? Drinking and eating? And you are not forgetting anything?
Kid: Who are you?
Voice: I’m the one who is buried alive, whose scalp was ripped off, whose breasts were cut off.
Kids: It’s horrible, it’s horrible.
Voice: I’m the mother who was forced to swallow her son’s taken out eye. I’m the woman who was raped every day. I’m the woman whose hands were tied to a tree and feet were tied to a tank and was thus torn in two . . . Georgia will never unite as the body of this girl will never unite. I am Abkhazia, I am your pain. I’m your grief. I’m your sorrow. I’m the one who was waiting. Waiting when Georgian blood will burst in your veins. Stand hand-in-hand! Isn’t this country yours?

Kid: My dear country why are you so sad. If the present is no good the future will be ours!
Then everyone chants repeatedly: Will be ours! (Jashi 2010).

The dialogue is quite extreme, but captures the emotional symbolism of territorial integrity discourses and seeks to instil and re-instil it for those who attend the youth camp.

The metaphors of the body and fear over losing territory became common themes directed at Russia in the aftermath of the August 2008 war. Alu felt that: ‘Russia is trying to dismember our territory’ and ‘doesn’t recognize our government as legitimate . . . If I don’t recognize you as the owner of your hand, or foot, how can we have normal relations with each other’ (R 7: M, 37). This metaphor is captured visually in a poster seen in Tbilisi entitled ‘Friendliness’ (http://www.michaeltotten.com/archives/2008/08/the-truth-about-1.php). A Russian soldier holds out his hand to shake with the Georgian individual. However, the Russian has used the sword in his other hand to lop off both the Georgian’s arms, which the Russian has tucked away and are labelled Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Temuri Yakobashvili, Georgian Minister for Integration, indignantly declares that Russia never ever will be able to ‘swallow’ Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Al Jazeera English 2009). A political cartoon that I saw converted into a T-shirt for sale in the Old Town in Tbilisi (Figure 9) shows a bear with the national map of Georgia in its mouth, with Abkhazia and South Ossetia shaded red.

A poster in Tbilisi, entitled ‘Stop Russia!’, shows a demonic figure, complete with red eyes and fangs, donning a military cap with the Russian eagle and the word ‘Russia’ written on it, sinking its fangs into the map of Georgia (http://www.michaeltotten.com/archives/2008/08/the-truth-about-1.php). The mouth of the figure has severed South Ossetia from the geobody of Georgia, and its right hand has broken off Abkhazia.

**Contending with cartographic anxieties**

Territorial integrity is a major issue in Georgia and people feel strongly about it. Despite how natural it seems for Georgians, the idea of the return of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is regularly reproduced by government policies and rhetoric. Through subtle and explicit means, state practices help to reinforce the discourse of Georgian territorial integrity and the integral nature of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to Georgia both in banal and volatile ways. Whether communicating the importance of territorial integrity through billboards, speeches, currency, cartographic images or youth camps, these government policies and nationalist discourses help to socialize
the public. Maps, including national maps, help to sanction, legitimize and garner support for the violent claiming and reclamation of territory (Neocleous 2003), and operate as an integral part of the justification for Saakashvili’s attempt to seize Tskhinvali on the night of 7 August 2008, as well as a means to naturalize the doctrine of territorial integrity.

Through three presidents, civil wars, roving militias, two separatist conflicts, economic collapse and a conflagration with Russia, one policy remained constant – that of territorial integrity. Understanding how the notion of territorial integrity becomes naturalized and commonplace in Georgia is important to examine, as this will impact how the conflict is dealt with by the Georgian government and whether the public is supportive. The format of negotiations, as well as what types of concessions are willing to be made, and whether there is desire for further military solutions, will be influenced by the public’s perception of what these decisions impart for their national identities and the future of the country, while those very perceptions are affected by government practices that prioritize territorial integrity.

However, despite the predominance of these overtly nationalistic and uncompromising discourses that prioritize Georgia’s territorial integrity, there are competing, alternative voices that prescribe other solutions (see Kublashvili et al. 2004). In addition, several people that I spoke with did offer different perspectives, and held out hope that the younger generation will have a different outlook on the issue. For instance, Levan asked: ‘But what about my daughter’s generation, things might be different when they are in charge’ (R 3: M, 52)?

But take the example of Irakli, who has never been to Abkhazia, but has a strong desire to go, and hopes someday he will be able to go to its beaches and swim. Since he has never been there and it was not his home, he does not have his own personal memories; for him it ‘exists more like an idea, an abstract notion’ (R 2: M, 28). However, he tells me that he has lots of relatives who talk about Abkhazia constantly and they remember it nostalgically; it is through these stories that his own desire developed to want to visit Abkhazia. Teimuraz offers a similar tale:

I always knew Abkhazia was a part of Georgia. First of all from history, and I really love Georgian history and know it very well. And second of all from my life, among my friends, my classmates, friends of my friends, my generation and so on, I know many IDPs, who left Abkhazia at a small age, with them around and them talking about it all of time I never doubt that Abkhazia is a part of Georgia and I’ll be glad that we get it back (R 12: M, 27).

What Irakli and Teimuraz are indicating is that the passing of time will not automatically erase people’s connection with, and affections for, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Memories of family members and friends who have lived and/or vacationed there, and the symbolic power of hundreds of thousands of IDPs, even the younger generation who have never been to their ‘home’, will continue to generate powerful attachments to the ‘lost’ territories amongst the Georgian populace via the telling of stories, the sharing of memories, the viewing of photographs, and the sentimental longing to regain the territories, all significant in their performative affects in reproducing territorial integrity discourses.

While many insinuate that ‘only time will tell’, if government discourses continue to focus on territorial integrity and state practices – such as patriotic camps and what is included in national-education curricula – and inculcate nationalist fervour, the younger generation may come to learn the mantra of territorial integrity with as much vehemence, or maybe even more. Thus, cartographic anxieties may not be calmed, as various discourses and practices will continue to pick at (separatist) wounds, indefinitely postponing their healing.

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Notes

1. Many national symbols, as well Georgia’s borders, are inherited from, and were developed during, the Soviet period (Gachechiladze 1997).
2. Due to space constraints, I will not attend to the intricacies of how Abkhazia and South Ossetia managed to separate from Georgia. For good overviews, see Slider (1997), Cornell (2001), George (2009a) and de Waal (2010).
3. The emphasis on Abkhazia, as opposed to South Ossetia, will be apparent, until 2008, due to the fact that most IDPs were displaced from there and the territory was more clearly not under Georgian control; it was also a more prominent feature in the Georgian imagination due to nostalgia and memories of vacationing there. When respondents were asked to name the five most important events in the past two decades in Georgia, the conflict in Abkhazia ranked second, ahead of the 1991 Georgian declaration of independence, with the conflict in South Ossetia ranking sixth (Sumbadze 2006, p. 52).
4. 15 interviewees were selected using snowball sampling. All interviews were conducted in Tbilisi. My intention was not to achieve a representative sample or focus on a particular demographic, but simply to gain insight into the Georgian perspectives on issues related to territorial integrity discourses through the respondents’ own narratives.
5. In 2007, defense spending was US$575 million (de Waal 2010, p. 207) and rose to nearly US$1 billion by 2008 (Cheterian 2009).
6. Adjara, with its historically Muslim population, was a third region that was not under Tbilisi’s control, though Abashidze did not invoke separatism or independence in the same manner as the authorities in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.
7. Many new signs which prominently feature the distance to ‘Soukhumi’ have been installed and dot the main Georgian highway.
8. According to a survey conducted in June 2006, youth camps were seen as the most successful government undertaking in recent years, with 69.3% of respondents approving of their establishment (Sumbadze 2006, p. 32).
9. All names of respondents from my interviews are pseudonyms. The information found following the quotations refer to Respondent number, gender and age.
10. This is not to suggest there were no failures. In 2004, tensions rose following Georgia’s closure of the Ergneti market in South Ossetia, leading to hostilities briefly resuming in August 2004.
11. It is important to note that these belligerent and/or nationalist discourses and policies coincided with parallel discourses that emphasized dialogue, granting autonomy to Abkhazia and peaceful solutions. However, according to the Abkhazian perspective, the existence of these nationalist policies called into question the sincerity and feasibility of the other, more peaceful discourse.
12. For an image of the logo, see: http://www.humanrights.ge/index.php?a=main&pid=8154&lang=eng
14. For an overview of the challenges Georgia faced during the Shevardnadze period, see Nodia (2002). For statements on the priority of preserving territorial integrity in the 1990s, see Wright (1996, p. 145) and Tarkhan-Mouravi (2005).
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