

Natalie Sabanadze, *Globalization and Nationalism. The Cases of Georgia and the Basque Country*. Budapest & New York: Central European University Press, 2010, viii + 218 pages. ISBN 978-963-9776-53-1

reviewed by Kevin Tuite

This book, based on an Oxford PhD thesis, begins with the seeming paradox that expanded globalization has not led to the demise of nationalism, but rather appears to have encouraged its resurgence as a disintegrative and protectionist “backlash against the integrative and universalizing tendencies of globalization” (p. 34). Author Natalie Sabanadze [NS], who as of this writing is Senior Adviser to the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, proposes the counter-hypothesis that “globalization and nationalism are not contradictory but complementary processes”, in that “forces of nationalism tend to develop pragmatic relationship [sic] with globalization that serves political and security interests of a national community” (p. 4). Of particular interest to NS are instances of “government-led nationalism” (p. 54). This can lead to the marginalization of extremist nationalist movements by governments which promote openness to the global community while co-opting nationalist symbols or rhetoric, as in Saakashvili’s Georgia; or on the other hand, the incorporation of populist nationalists into the ruling coalition, as appears to be happening in Russia (p. 54).

As laboratories for exploring the relation of nationalism to globalization, NS has chosen her homeland of Georgia, representing the new nation-states that emerged from the break-up of the USSR, and the Spanish Basque Country, as a sub-state European region where nationalism is both active and institutionalized. Of these two cases, I feel more qualified to discuss the former (although I did note some remarkable parallels between the different manifestations of nationalism in the Basque Country and Québec, where I have lived for the past 20 years). NS traces Georgian nationalism back to movements for cultural, linguistic and political rights in the 19th and early 20th centuries, when Georgia was part of the

Russian Empire. She characterizes these movements as Herderian, inclusive and self-critical (pp. 68-76). The rather light colors in which NS depicts Georgian nationalism up to the Red Army invasion of 1921 serves to heighten the contrast with her dark portrayal of the initial phase of post-Soviet nationalism, dubbed “national fundamentalism” and associated principally with Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the dissident who became post-Soviet Georgia’s first president (pp. 89-98). NS places the blame on Soviet Georgian intellectuals, who, with the overt or covert support of the leadership, fostered the primordialized and self-congratulatory concepts of national identity which informed much of the exclusionary nationalist rhetoric of the late 1980s and early 90s (pp. 81-88). This account rings true, but should be extended to include Tsarist-period scholars who contributed to the modernist linguistic and ethnological concepts of ethnicity which replaced earlier notions of Georgian identity rooted primarily in religious affiliation. After a period of “national apathy” under the presidency of Shevardnadze, nationalism reemerged in the new century in the form of competing movements, an anti-Western and anti-globalist strain (favorite targets of which include the Soros Foundation and newly-introduced Protestant sects); and a pro-Western, Europe-oriented nationalism encouraged by the government, especially after Saakashvili’s rise to power. (An interesting feature of these competing nationalisms, not developed by NS, is that both make reference to Georgian Orthodox identity. The anti-globalists oppose Orthodox morality to “unhealthy” trends, practices and cultural products imported from the West, often accompanied by an orientation toward the fellow-Orthodox Russians; whereas Saakashvili promotes Orthodox symbols as a sign of Georgia’s attachment to Christian Europe).

Rather little is said in this book about Georgia’s ethnic minorities. The lesson learned from South Ossetian war of August 2008, which must have occurred just as the manuscript was about to go to the printers, is that “globalization is no protection from power politics”

(p. 111). The only extended discussion of Abkhazia is mostly about the politics of cultural preservation (p. 178). The cases of South Ossetia and Abkhazia could have been used, in my opinion, to exemplify a longstanding scheme of transnational interaction and alliance-making against which current relations between nationalism and globalization could be assessed. The engagement of the Abkhaz leadership with Moscow for leverage against Tbilisi, even as Georgians seek support from the West against Moscow, conforms to a configuration of crossing alliances that has a long history (as any student of the Caucasus knows well). Modern manifestations of crossing alliances, including several cases mentioned in *Globalization and Nationalism*, typically oppose a pro-Western or genuinely globalist orientation to one based on perceived solidarity of religion (Islam, for example), ethnicity (Russian support for co-ethnic minorities in the Baltic states, p. 177), or marginalization (the Basque party Herri Batasuna as “the voice of those who have no voice in Europe”, p. 159).

My overall impression of this book is positive. The comparative approach has been underused in studies of the political history of the Caucasus; NS lays the groundwork and deconstructs some of the key concepts for future work in this direction. Her case study of Georgian nationalism draws on Georgian-language sources, including some hard-to-find periodicals, which are inaccessible to many foreign commentators. The book is attractively bound and printed, but the syntactic and lexical infelicities cropping up here and there in the text indicate that the manuscript should have been looked over one last time by a proofreader.

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