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Contested Names: (Re) Naming of Places and Nation- Building in Soviet Georgia

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Abstract:

This study examines the renaming of settlements in Soviet Georgia. The goal of the research is to determine the extent to which toponym change was employed as a strategy to build the Soviet Georgian nation. Since toponyms are not chosen at random by political authorities, studying toponyms can reveal a lot about the attitudes, perceptions, and ideologies of those in positions of political authority.

The article's focus is on the events that caused toponyms to change rather than the examination of toponyms from a linguistic perspective. The toponym is viewed as a performative act in this article rather than an inscription. Having stated that, the study first seeks to understand the nature of national spaces created in Soviet Georgia before examining the situation of the country's ethno-political system.

Keywords:

Georgia, Soviet Union Toponyms, Nation-Building, Ethnic Minorities, Renaming

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Introduction

“Mamiev is not competent to make the claim that an overwhelming number of South Ossetian toponyms are of Georgian origin,” wrote the Ossetian historian Tskhovrebova (1971: 243) in her book *Toponyms of South Ossetia in Written Sources* as a criticism of the Georgian scholar Mamiev’s remarks regarding the etymological history of the Ossetian toponyms. Seven years later, village entrance signs in Georgian were vandalized by demonstrators in Abkhaz ASSR (Saparov, 2015: 154). These two instances show clearly how toponyms were thought of as more than mere names. The names given to the locations symbolized narratives, concepts, and attitudes that frequently, if not always, had competitors.

The mere fact that toponyms are more than just names has been well acknowledged by the scholarly community. Commenting on toponym changes that took place in Eastern Europe, Maoz Azaryahu (2012: 388) argues that it is toponyms that are being utilized by governmental authorities to “advance concepts of national identity and project of state formation.” In their analysis of indigenous Maori toponyms in New Zealand, Lawrence D. Berg and Robin A. Kearns (1999: 99) came to a conclusion that toponyms are nothing but a part of a symbolic-material order that imposes normality on the people. Yet these scholars are not alone in their remarks as there is a large and growing body of literature that examines the politics of renaming from a variety of paradigms (Alderman 2003, 2008; Berg and Vuolteenaho, 2009; Jordan, 2012; Kadmon, 2004; Kearney and Bradley, 2009; Nash, 2009; Rofo and Szili, 2009; Rose-Redwood, 2008; Rose Redwood, Alderman and Azaryahu, 2010; Swart, 2008; Withers, 2000).

Perhaps no other state mastered the renaming of toponyms like the Soviet Union. By changing the name of more than half of its settlements, it was the Soviet Union became the largest name-changer in the world history (Peterson, 1977: 15). Toponyms of Finnish origin in Karelia, Japanese toponyms in South Sakhalin, and German toponyms in Eastern Europe are just a few examples of changed toponyms during the Soviet era. Moving on to the Caucasus, research conducted by Arsène Saparov (2003) has established that a significant number of toponyms with Turkic (Azerbaijani) provenance in Soviet Armenia were erased and replaced with Armenian ones. It has also been observed altering toponyms in Soviet Azerbaijan primarily served two purposes: first, boosted the legitimacy of the political regime, and second, assisted in erasing foreign “elements” that threatened the national concepts (Saparov, 2017: 550).

Nevertheless, far too little attention has been paid to toponym changes that took place in Soviet Georgia. Maria Diego Gordon (2017) carried out a somewhat pertinent study in which the author examined the (re)naming practices in the Georgian districts home to ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis. Gordon concluded that renaming practices in Georgia have contributed to the “Georgianization” of the national space. Even though Gordon’s study significantly contributed to scholarship on Georgia and critical toponymy, it has two significant limitations. First, the author did not examine toponym changes that took place in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. These two regions are of special importance in examining the modern history of Georgia since they both had a distinct political status. Second, a systemic understanding of how toponyms were executed for nation-building purposes during the Soviet period lacks in Gordon’s research.

Having mentioned the research gap, it would be logical to look at the other factors that make studying the toponym changes in Soviet Georgia relevant. First, compared to its neighbors, Soviet Georgia has always been more ethnically diverse. Three ethno-territorial autonomies - namely, Abkhazia, Adjara, and South Ossetia - were established on the territory of Soviet Georgia despite its tiny size and population. Given toponyms were used for strengthening the status of titular ethnic groups in Soviet Armenia and Soviet Azerbaijan, it can thus be suggested that this might be the case for Soviet Georgia as well. Second, in the late 1980s, ethno-territorial conflicts began to destabilize Georgia, as well as its neighbors. In the case of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, toponyms have been used intensively for national legitimacy purposes (Saparov, 2022). It is therefore likely that such connections did exist between toponyms and ethno-territorial conflicts in the Soviet Georgia.

That being said, this study attempts to explore how toponyms were used for building a Soviet Georgian nation during the period of 1921-1988. In other words, it is hoped that studying place-names and their evolution will shed a light on the nature of interactions between the Soviet Georgian state and the ethnic minorities residing on the Georgian territory. The loci for this study are the regions with a high share of ethnic minorities. To be more particular, the study focuses on four regions of Soviet Georgia: Abkhazia, Imereti, Guria and Samegrelo-Zemle-Svab (Javakheti), and South Ossetia.

This study will answer the following research questions:

- *Central research question:*
To what extent was renaming used as a strategy in Soviet Georgia to strengthen titular nation's ethno-political status in territories inhabited by a high proportion of ethnic minorities?
- *Sub-questions:*
 - 1) Which kind of toponyms were changed? And which kind of toponyms were used for naming purposes?**
 - 2) Were settlements inhabited by certain minorities more targeted than others?**
 - 3) Was the renaming of places as isolated practice or a systemic one?**

As far as the structure of the research is concerned, this study is composed of an introduction, five themed chapters, and a conclusion. The first chapter of this study begins by laying out the theoretical dimensions of the research, and looks at how the critical study of toponyms was conducted by various scholars. It then goes on to the methodology used for this study in the next chapter. Chapter 3, however, gives a brief overview of the history of four regions that were chosen as the study loci. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the research, focusing on three key themes: renaming dynamics, etymological affiliation of toponyms, and the relationship between ethno-political structure of the districts with the renaming practices. Lastly, Chapter 5 discusses renaming patterns within relevant conceptual frames, focusing particularly on the status of ethnic groups in Soviet Georgia.

Chapter 1. Theoretical Framework

1.1. Human, Name, Power Triad

Naming has always been an integral part of human life. From the moment when humans, members of the kingdom of *Animalia*, evolved and acquired the ability to make a speech, they began to name the objects around them through vocal sounds - later would be called the language as an advanced form of communication. For thousands of years, people have given names to both living and inanimate things, including their children and pets, as well as locations and things they utilize on a daily basis. Names, an essential component of the human cycle, have historically had three purposes: 1) to remember, 2) to differentiate, and 3) to demonstrate a sense of belonging.

The power of names, or more specifically, the power of naming, is one of the oldest non-physical abilities of human beings and has been highly valued by numerous societies. Naming was regarded as humanity's sole access to divine power in prehistoric Mesopotamia (Wallis, 1987: 24). The first mission of Adam, who was considered the first human according to Abrahamic religions, was to give names; the animals passed in front of him one by one, and it was Adam who gave each of them a particular name. In ancient Egypt, saying someone's name was understood as invoking that person's power, and names were used very carefully as a divine category (Wallis, 1987: 36). So said the Gospel of Luke (9:49): "Master [Jesus], we saw one casting out devils in thy name." In Islam, it is believed that *Allah* has 99 sacred names.

Abrahamic religions believe that it is the ability to name that distinguishes humans from other creatures. However, it was not only ancient civilizations that appreciated the power of naming. The ability to name and humanity were two sides of the same coin, according to French philosopher René Descartes (1960: 42): "if you lack the ability to name, you are not a super-animal (human) then." Johann Gottfried Herder, a German philosopher, went so far as to claim in his *Essay on the Origin of Language* that humans have a naming compulsion (Sjöholm, 2017). *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe may be the best book that illustrates the power of naming without intending to do so. Crusoe, a castaway, met a native and gave him the name *Friday*, demonstrating how people can "construct" things only by employing basic linguistic techniques. In her essay on the significance of names, Cecilia Sjöholm (2017) draws the

conclusion that Crusoe creates a completely new sort of mastery in which *Friday* is rendered completely unnecessary; Crusoe did not require *Friday* to affirm his abilities since he was the Master with the power of naming.

Although the power of naming has been recognized in some form or another for a long time, the social sciences have only recently begun to pay attention to this topic as a specific research field. In the 19th century, toponyms started to be examined more to support historical legitimacy in national historiography disputes. Such works can also be found in great detail in Georgian history, too. For instance, V. Kvarchiya (1985) released the book called *Toponyms of Abkhazia in Written Sources* in 1985 to prove the autochthonous status of the Abkhaz people by pointing out the etymological roots of the place names in Abkhazia. In her book, *Toponyms of South Ossetia in Written Sources*, Ossetian researcher Z. Tskhovrebova (1979) also tried to explain the origins of the toponyms used in South Ossetia.

Scholars in the social sciences and humanities have been paying increasing attention to the power of toponyms since the early 1990s. The Portuguese author Fernando Pessoa (1982: 7) provided what is arguably the most poetic articulation of how language interacts with power: “Civilization consists of giving something a name that does not belong to it and then dreaming over the result. And the false name joined to the true dream does create a new reality. The object does change into something else because we make it change.” For the discipline of critical toponymy, which characterizes renaming activities as “a political activity par excellence of control over space,” Pessoa’s statement serves as a compass (Pinchevski and Torgovnik, 2002).

But it was Michael Foucault’s work on the notion of power and Edward Said’s critical viewpoints on history that sparked the studies of sometimes overlooked aspects of place-making (Vuolteenaho and Berg, 2009: 7). Even though geographers like Yi-Fu Tuan (1991) recognized the importance of power in naming decisions as early as the 1980s, Paul Carter’s (1988) book, *The Road to Botany Bay*, was the first to examine the colonial aspects of the history of renaming in Australia and to make illuminating comments about the human, power, and name triad. Lawrence D Berg and Robin A Kearns’s (1996) analysis of toponyms in New Zealand from the perspective of nation-building and post-colonial discourse has also played a special role in “de-colonizing” minds such as Carter’s book.

While many authors pointed toward the authoritarian nature of naming as a strictly top-down procedure forced on the people (Myers, 2009; Rose-Redwood, 2008) contends that names are usually - though not always - chosen in accordance with the preferences of the dominating masses to win their support. To sum up, despite differences in approaches, proponents of critical toponymy are more concerned with how names are being constructed and by whom, instead of looking at names as a simple text.

1.2. Name, Space, Power Triad

Foucault (1980: 149) hinted at the significance that space plays in power dynamics by noting, “a full history remains to be written of places, which would at the same time constitute the history of powers.” Yet Foucault was not alone in his deduction. It was the humanist geography scholars that started to discuss the relationship between name, space, and power triad (Voulteenaho, 2009: 9). They emphasized the role of power by pointing out that the names given to the spaces were not random but deliberate. J. Nicholas Entrikin (1991: 14) considered space is a blend of the objective (what’s seen) and subjective (what’s perceived). But Rose (1993: 61) chastised humanist geographers for failing to understand the significance of power in space, particularly powerlessness of the members of the marginalized groups.

Rose was not the only one who disagreed with humanist geographers. To disprove the binary perception of space, Edward Soja (1996: 57) created his *Third space* notion based on Lefebvre’s *Social Space* and Foucault’s *Heterotopia* concepts. Soja argues that there are three levels of space: buildings, homes, and other physical structures make up the *First Space*, which is physical space. The *Second Space* is the intelligible space. This is the state of physical space in human thought. Those who shape the second space are mainly those who have power - including politicians. The *Third Space*, which Soja describes as the pinnacle of his theory, is “real and imagined space, lived space, the way that people actually live in and experience that urban space.” The sociologist Henri Lefebvre (1974), who served as Soja’s inspiration, observes in his book *The Production of Space* that social space emerges as a harmony of the physical and non-physical, even though, in essence, he rejects the binary approach of humanist geographers.

Nevertheless, humanist geographers and sociologists do not provide the best theoretical foundation for critical toponymy. These paradigms are problematic for several reasons. First, neither paradigm discusses how names are used to transform spaces into places, and even when they do, they do so in a very cursory manner. Second, in most cases, geographers and sociologists define space as a concept with no limits and additional value. In the words of Yi-Fu Tuan (1977: 6), the space is abstract. In critical toponymy, however, space is viewed as a “more constrained, stabilized, and interrelated phenomenon” (Vuolteenaho, 2009: 9). To put it in other words, space is a visible expression of a specific period, and does not exist of observable boundaries (Tuan, 1977: 6).

In the words of De Certeau (1984: 93-117), settlements are created not as “constellations that hierarchize and semantically order the surface of the city,” but as “imaginary totalizations formed by the sight.” De Certeau’s argument draws attention to a communication system that exists between the hegemon with power (the governing elite) and the masses without power (the population) over a space. In other words, names and toponyms transmit official portrayals of the prevailing socio-political order.

1.3. Some Are More Equal: Whose Space Is It?

As was previously established, place names project the dominant socio-political order into space within the hegemonic social relations. Although this projection generally does not elicit negative emotional implications from society, the names assigned to, in certain instances, do reflect the experiences of omission (Manzo, 2003: 50). Malone (1999: 20) noted that choosing who belongs to a space and who does not is part of the politics of belonging over toponyms.

Moving on to the levels at which exclusion occurs, it is worthwhile to start with the idea of the community itself because the answer is probably found there. Usually, Western discourses of the community require the production of the *Other* to bear responsibility for the substantive, private, and particular social life (Berg and Kearns, 1996: 110). This *Other* comprises those who do not fit within the confining bounds of dominant identity (Yeatman, 1962: 6). The stigmatization of the *Other* in spaces through naming practices leads us to the dichotomic nature of the naming of places. Thus, the politics of naming is both a *politics of space* and a *spatialized politics*: the former defines who decides names and controls space, whereby the spatial defines who has the legitimacy to speak (Keith and Pile, 1993).

Yeoh explains the logic behind the power of name as a manner of legitimizing claims since naming has been considered a first step in claiming possession (Yeoh, 1996: 299). But Fried (2000: 193-205) contends that attachment to one toponym typically takes place when others are excluded and that this attachment may inadvertently encourage the use of violent means, such as conflict, war, and ethnic cleansing, to eradicate the *Other*. Entrikin (2002: 19-25) expresses a similar viewpoint and observes that there is a greater chance of conflict if a toponym is held by various groups. In agreement with these opinions, Manzo (2003: 47-61) adds that the battle over whose history, stories, and memories would be preserved is the primary function of exclusion in the conflicting scenarios.

After acknowledging the presence of the *Other*, it is worthwhile to examine the attempts made by the *Other* to resist the *Self* or vice versa. Hegemony theories acknowledge that dominating groups oversee shaping cultural space, but they also maintain that the narratives of subordinate groups pose a threat to the dominance. To highlight the extent to which marginalized groups have refused to accept new names as part of their campaigns of resistance, Kadmon (2004: 85-87) introduced the term “toponymic warfare.” On the other hand, “toponymic cleansing” refers to the intensive use of place-making practices by representatives of the dominant group to obliterate the *Other* (Alderman, Azaryahu, and Rose-Redwood, 2010: 460).

Understanding that toponyms cause conflicts is also useful for avoiding those conflicts. To investigate whether place-naming can be used as a tool for advancing or impeding social justice, Alderman, Azaryahu, and Rose-Redwood (2010: 462) go so far as to link the politics of naming with social justice ideas, arguing that “we must expand our understanding of the nature of the symbolic resistance and struggle that underlies the naming process.” By combining these two ideas, they hope to increase awareness of the need for fair cultural and political representation and to stop the symbolic erasure of historically underprivileged socio-economic groups and their identities.

These discussions bring up the issue of the significance of toponymic research. The aforementioned examples demonstrate that studying toponyms, which is a symbolic representation of the space utilized to build identity, allows us to have access to a larger range of issues in addition to linguistic data. Therefore, the chapters that follow will go from the theoretical realm to a map of Soviet Georgia to read the meanings buried behind the renaming practices.

Chapter 2. Research Methodology

The analysis of toponyms and their evolution plays a key role in understanding the nature of relations between the Soviet Georgian state and non-titular ethnic groups. Therefore, this study examines the toponym changes that took place in four regions of Soviet Georgia between 1921 and 1989. In this research, ‘toponyms’ refers to only *comonyms* (village names) and *astionyms* (city/town names) since only these two kinds of toponyms represent inhabited settlements.

For two reasons, the final two years of Soviet rule in Georgia (1990–1991) are not included in the study. It is mostly related to the fact that it was a time when inter-communal violence and instability pervaded the entire country, particularly in areas with sizable concentrations of ethnic minorities. This calls into doubt the data’s accessibility and veracity of what happened at the time. Even while unrest and violence in the focus areas were not limited to 1990–1991, this time is notable for one aspect. In the autumn of 1990, pro-independence/anti-communist political forces led by Zviad Gamsakhurdia came to power, and Georgia had a referendum on the “reinstatement of pre-Soviet independence” in the spring of the next year. Despite the fact that Georgia was still part of the USSR under international law during these two years, classifying the Gamsakhurdia period as the “Soviet” is misleading on many levels and more importantly, contradicts the research objective, which is to examine the role of toponym changes in Soviet nation-building policies.

As far as the geographical focus is concerned, four regions of Soviet Georgia inhabited by a high proportion of ethnic minorities are taken as case studies in this study. These four historical regions are Abkhazia, Borchaly, Meskheta-Javakheti and South Ossetia. But those regions’ definitions should be further elaborated, as there are some inconsistencies in defining their exact boundaries. This research examines only the Soviet period but taking Soviet-era administrative definitions is problematic as there was never a separate administrative unit called ‘Javakheti’ during the Soviet period and ‘Borchaly’ as a separate administrative unit existed only for a short period of time. It was only during the independence period when ‘Kvemo-Kartli’ and ‘Samtskhe-Javakheti’ *mkhares* (administrative divisions in modern Georgia) emerged as separate territorial units covering most of the historical Borchaly and Javakheti regions, respectively. On the other hand, the use of administrative divisions of the independence period is also equally problematic, as modern Georgia does not have a territorial unit called ‘South Ossetia’. To solve this problem, Soviet-era administrative boundaries were

used as a reference point for Abkhazia and South Ossetia. What were Soviet-era Adigeni, Akhalkalaki, Akhaltsikhe, Aspindza, Borjomi, and Bogdanovka *raions* (Shelomentsev, 2008: 6) have been amalgamated under the name “Meskheta-Javakheti.” On the other hand, Soviet-era Bolnisi, Dmanisi, Gardabani, Marneuli, Tetritskaro, and Tsalka *raions* (Shelomentsev, 2008: 6) have been grouped under the name of “Borchaly.”

Having identified the time span and focus zones of the study, the very understanding of ‘toponym change’ must still be specified. Examining toponym changes has a relatively long tradition within critical toponymy field, and many researchers have utilized toponym changes to analyze the socio-political order, narratives, discourses (Alderman 2002, 2003, 2008; Berg and Vuolteenaho, 2009; Ghulyan, 2020; Jordan, 2012; Kadmon, 2004; Kearney and Bradley, 2009; Nash, 2009; Rose- Redwood, 2008; Rose Redwood, Alderman and Azaryahu, 2010; Saparov, 2005; Saparov, 2015; Saparov, 2017; Saparov 2022).

In this study, toponym change means changing the name of the settlement, which can be in various forms: giving a completely new name with a new meaning, giving a new name by translating the former name, making some changes to the existing name and so on. For example, on 16 August 1936, by a special decree of the Soviet Georgian authorities, the city of Sukhum in Abkhazia became Sukhumi (Zayats, 2001: 28). This example shows how a completely new toponymy was created by using only one letter (in the case of Sukhumi, it was the letter i). Adding “i” to the end of words ending with consonants to make them in the nominative case is a rule of the Georgian language (Cikobava, 1964).

However, unlike Sukhum/Sukhumi, not all such changes have been documented. Gachagan village located in Marneuli municipality can be taken as an example. Russian imperial archives show the settlement’s name was Gachagan (Mammadli, 1995: 45). In daily communication, the villagers call the village Gachagan too. But all Soviet maps (including those of the 1920s) display the village’s name Gachagani. Unlike in the case of Sukhum/Sukhumi, there is no evidence that the Gachagan toponym was changed during the Soviet period. In this regard, Gachagan/Gachagani is not exceptional; there are hundreds of settlements with such “mysterious” toponymic alterations. But how can this enigma be explained?

I refer to the obvious orthographic variations between toponyms from the imperial and post-imperial eras as “undocumented changes.” It may be the case therefore that these variations during the imperial period, when Georgia was administered by Russian imperial governors-

general and Russian was the official language, took place because it was imperial officers who recorded local toponyms by translating them into Russian. Only after the collapse of the Russian empire did Georgian become the official language. It was the national elites – though with different ideological backgrounds - who ruled three political systems in the post-imperial period: 1) the federalist state of South Caucasus, 2) the independent Georgian republic, and 3) Soviet Georgia. It is reasonable to believe that the fact that Georgian was the official language (or one of the official languages) in all three governmental systems, and that the decision-making process was mostly - but not entirely - in the hands of local actors, had a significant impact on the registration of toponyms. Since the name reporting took place in Georgian, it is possible to hypothesize that some toponyms were “automatically” adjusted into the Georgian language (like Gachagan’s transformation into Gachagani).

These “undocumented changes” were not included in the study since the acts of renaming could not be found in official documents. The research included toponym changes that could only be verified through documents and gazetteers. To be more particular, gazetteers called *Administrative Territorial Division of the Georgian SSR* were used as the main source. These gazetteers made it possible to read the official decrees related to the renaming policies, to compare the names of settlements for different time periods and to identify differences. These gazetteers can be easily found in paperback form in the National Archives of Georgia, and they are also available online in both Georgian and Russian. The Soviet military maps were excluded from this study for three reasons. First, the Soviet military maps are too detailed, which means an immense and time-consuming work of collecting the toponyms. Second, the Soviet military maps cover only certain periods giving researchers only a snapshot of the toponymic landscape rather than its evolution. Third, there were a few possibilities for choosing valid and objective maps. It mainly stems from the fact that maps usually show what needs to be shown rather than depicting the objective reality (Winichakul, 1994: 110).

Nevertheless, the study did not solely rely on gazetteers from the Soviet era. There is a growing understanding that relying solely on gazetteers limits examination of the toponymic landscape as the “performative actions” (Myers, 1996). Therefore, other administrative and legal papers, including laws and decrees, were also carefully examined. Numerous papers, statistical data on subjects like demographics, history and ethnography were consulted in order to examine the performativity of the landscape and the textuality of toponymic performance (Rose Redwood, Alderman and Azaryahu, 2010: 466).

Overall, 230 toponyms were extracted from the sources. I have constructed a dataset in which all renaming acts are displayed (see: Annex 2). The extracted data were first examined from an etymological standpoint, to determine not only the origins of changed/given toponyms but also the associations they had formed. Toponyms were categorized into eight linguistic categories: Abkhaz, Armenian, Georgian, German, Ossetian, Slavic, Turkic, and Other. This dimension of analysis allows us to ascertain which type of toponyms were used in Soviet Georgia to erase other toponyms for nation-building purposes. The data set was then examined from a dynamics standpoint to uncover whether the toponymic changes were related to other events that took place in the same period activities. Lastly, the number of toponym changes was compared with the ethnic composition of the focus zones to examine the extent to which toponym changes in Soviet Georgia were used to build a national space in minority inhabited areas.

As for some terminological clarifications, ‘now’, ‘nowadays’, ‘today’ refer to August 2022 in this study. Moreover, this study uses the definition of ‘ethnic minority’ instead of ‘national minority’ given the former’s relevance in the post-Soviet nationality policies (Broers, 2019). The ‘Turks’ means speakers of one of the Turkic languages. This study uses ‘Abkhazs’ instead of ‘Abkhazians’, ‘Ahiska Turks’ instead of ‘Meskhetian Turks’.

In terms of the research’s limitations, it should be emphasized that the study only covered four districts of Soviet Georgia. While the case studies allow in-depth study of these regions, conclusions cannot be drawn about the whole territory of Georgia. This study is preliminary research focusing on four case studies and further research is needed to cover the whole of Georgia. The availability of data is the second limitation of the study. Particularly, the data from the early years of the Soviet period is inaccessible mainly because the bureaucratic processes are not fully documented. Therefore, it is likely that certain toponym changes were overlooked. Initial findings, however, allow us to infer that such instances were not the norm. Etymological categorization is the third research constraint because it is subject to author bias. Although it is thought that such errors are rarely common, it is possible that some toponyms were not correctly categorized. To lessen the impact of those inaccuracies on the study, various linguistic resources were also consulted.

Chapter 3. Historical Background

This section briefly explores the history of Soviet Georgia, and then touches upon the modern history of the four focus regions. As mentioned in Chapter 2, reading toponyms only as the text does not help to understand their performative aspect. This makes it more difficult to comprehend the nature of interactions between ethnic minorities and the state in Soviet Georgia, which is a key component of the research puzzle. Therefore, it is especially important to look at the political, social, and identity transformations of these regions before presenting the data about the toponym changes.

3.1 Soviet Georgia

The Bolsheviks had fully Sovietized the South Caucasus by seizing Tiflis in 1921. Their primary objective, like that of any revolutionary government that took power, was to solidify their hold on political power. In this sense, the Bolshevik government faced its greatest threat from the uprisings that erupted in Georgia between 1921 and 1924 (Rayfield, 2012: 340). However, they also had to cope with a more pressing problem: critical pillars of Georgia's statehood were either in question or absent.

The very concept of modern statehood had already begun to take shape by the end of the 19th century, but it was not until 1933 that the modern statehood concept became a binding international agreement called the Montevideo Convention (Lauterpacht, 2012: 419). According to this convention, a state must possess the following four characteristics to be considered one: 1) a defined territory, 2) a permanent population, 3) an efficient government, and 4) the capacity to maintain international ties. The First Georgian Republic lacked many important components of the modern statehood notion.

First, the First Republic never succeeded in having clearly defined boundaries, like its neighbors. This state claimed lands from Trabzon (in modern-day Turkey) to Gakh (in modern-day Azerbaijan), although it was never able to exert effective control over most of those areas. Since Georgia did not have clearly defined boundaries, hence it is challenging to assert that there was a permanent population. Tiflis had a functioning government, but there was no effective control over any of the areas because, again, there were no borders. However, unlike its two neighbors, the First Republic was partially recognized internationally, allowing its officials to carry on with their duties even while living in exile until the 1950s.

Therefore, the main objective of the Bolshevik administration, not only in Georgia but throughout the entirety of Soviet geography, was the creation of distinct borders. In the early years of Soviet authority, each republic's internal political governance models were also devised. Despite being small in territory and population, three autonomous regions - Adjara, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia - were formed within Soviet Georgia. Fairly shortly after, in March 1922, Soviet Georgia's level of political sovereignty was significantly diminished, and it was incorporated into the Transcaucasian SFSR. To strengthen the control of the Bolsheviks in Georgia, a variety of oppressive techniques were frequently employed. Violent collectivization attempts disguised as economic de-capitalization have largely had disastrous effects on the rural populace. Only in 1930, did more than 100,000 animals die in Georgia (Rayfield, 2012: 350).

The Transcaucasian SFSR was abolished in 1936, which increased Georgia's sovereignty, although Georgia was still subject to the same repressions as the rest of the USSR at that time. In Soviet Georgia alone, between 30,000 and 60,000 individuals were killed in the years 1936–1938, while thousands more were detained (Parrish, 1996: 102). Although a slight reduction of repressions from 1938 normalized the socio-political situation, with the beginning of the Great Patriotic War in 1941, dark clouds once again began to appear over Georgia. The Nazi forces advanced quickly in the early going, reaching the borders of Georgia, and even though it was only for a brief period of time, they were able to seize certain locations in the far northern regions of Abkhazia.

The post-war period was no less repressive. To prevent them from leaving the country after the war, many workers in agriculture and industry had their passports taken away. Lavrentiy Beria, who formerly oversaw the repressions, became a target in 1951. By arresting those of Mingrelian origin that were close to Beria, the major objective of the Mingrelian Affair was to undermine Beria's power. The people detained were charged with participating in allegedly an undercover network, pursuing anti-Bolshevik policies, and serving Western imperialists (Suny, 1994: 287). Another 20,000 people were transferred from Georgia to Siberia and Central Asia in 1952 as punishment, but many of them were not even made their way there (Rayfield, 2012: 353).

Stalin's death resulted in a significant reduction in political persecution. Lavrentiy Beriya's execution in December 1953 marked the start of a new era for Georgia. 1956 saw widespread protests across Georgia in response to Khrushchev's anti-Stalin doctrines. Even while the

country's standard of living generally rose, the Khrushchev era's agricultural reforms actually made things worse for the peasants.

Georgia, like other parts of the Union, started to see the economy's "latent capitalization" more clearly under Brezhnev's leadership. The development of consumerist economic relations, the expansion of the black market, and the violent spread of corruption have changed the socio-economic landscape drastically in Georgia. Official figures indicated virtually little economic growth in Georgia, but the reality was far different (Suny, 1994: 186).

It would not be wrong to say that the government became a "national communist" when Eduard Shevardnadze came to power in 1972 (Rayfield, 2012: 373). Apart from protests for the protection of the Georgian language's status, it was during this period that a number of national issues were tolerated. With the beginning of the period of *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* in 1985, Soviet Georgia was gradually shaken by ethno-territorial conflicts, and the process reached its climax in 1990 when the nationalist forces came to power.

3.2. Borchaly

Located at the crossroads of the modern-era borders of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, the Borchaly region has long acted as an industrial and agricultural nucleus for the Georgian state. The region has also been distinguished from the rest of Georgia because of its cultural and religious diversity. Although the Kvemo-Kartli *mkhare* ('modern-day administrative division') of Georgia covers most of the historical Borchaly, such a territorially defined unit did not exist during the Soviet era, the exception being the short-lived *Borchalinskiy raion* ('Borchaly district') that covered only a part of the historical region. If to take administrative-territorial units of Soviet Georgia in 1981, the *raions* covering the historical Borchaly were: Bolnisi, Dmanisi, Gardabani, Marneuli, Tetritskaro, Tsalka.

When describing the region in his *M'ujam al-Buldan* in the 13th century, the Arab-Greek traveler Yagut Al-Hamawi (Meynard, 1861: 94) wrote: "Borshaliyya is the name of a place in Arran, it is mentioned in the chronicles of the Persian rulers." As for the history of the toponym, some linguists (Bakshiyeva, 2010: 255) argue that the toponym Borchaly is a combination of the Turkic words *boru* ('wolf') and *chala* ('valley/dwelling'). The origin of this toponym -

which translates to “valley/dwelling of wolves” - is linked with the arrival of Turkic tribal configurations to the region in classical antiquity.

In 1604, the Safavid throne founded a feudal quasi-state known as the Borchaly Sultanate to reward *sultans* (‘lords’) for their achievements in keeping the empire’s boundaries secure. The local lords started to gain more from the Safavids’ downfall in the late 18th century as fealty became largely symbolic (Broers and Yemilianova, 2020: 99). The downfall of the Safavid monarchy and decline in the Ottoman strength rapidly attracted the attention of the Russian Empire which previously had only limited trading interests in the Caucasus. When visions and interests of local non-Muslim actors overlapped with that of Russians, Empire began to seek a formal foothold in the region. In 1783, Erekle II, King of Kartli-Kakheti, signed the Treaty of Georgievsk with the Russian Empire – hence, east Georgia, including Borchaly, denounced its Iranian allegiance and became a Russian protectorate (Broers and Yemilianova, 2020: 100).

In 1801, Russia annexed eastern Georgia, and this move prompted the First Russo-Iranian War, which ended with the Treaty of Gulistan in 1813 confirming a decisive Russian victory over the Qajar of Iran. The turbulent period of 1801-1828 did not go unnoticed in Borchaly, and as the region came under full Russian control, the Muslim population of the region halved. Although some of the expelled Muslim population came back after the stabilization of the situation in 1828, the demographic gap was also filled by non-Muslim communities that were settled by the Russian Empire to alter the demographics of the region (Shopen, 1852: 525-540).

Russians struggled in managing the newly seized territories and it can be seen in the number of administrative experiments that they used to incorporate the areas into the Empire better (Saparov, 2015: 20). In Borchaly, for example, *Tatarskaya distantzia* (‘Tatar province’) was established within the Georgian Governate as a semi-autonomous district ruled by local Muslim *begs* (‘lords’) in coordination with Georgian officers (Mammadli, 1995). Until 1880, Borchaly kept its self-rule in the Georgian Province (1801-1840), then in the Georgian-Imereti Province (1840-1846), and finally, in the Tiflis Province (1846-1917). In 1880, the political-administrative status of Borchaly was elevated and the *Borchalinskiy uezd* (‘Borchaly district’) consisting of four *uchastok* (sub-counties) – Borchaly, Ekaterinenfeld, Trialet, Lori – was established (Mammadli, 1995). What distinguished the new arrangement from the previous was that Borchaly *uezd* consisted of parts of the modern-era Lori district of Armenia too.

Three new nation-states emerged in the South Caucasus after the imperial system fell apart, and Borchaly became the primary concern of an interstate conflict: a) Armenia claimed the mountainous parts of Borchaly (Lori) due to the predominance of Armenians there; b) Azerbaijan claimed the plain parts due to the predominance of Muslims (Azerbaijanis), and c) Georgia claimed the Borchaly *uezd* as a whole in line with the Imperial-era boundaries.

In December 1918, the war between Armenia and Georgia began for control over Borchaly, and ended on January 1, 1919, with the British mediation. According to the agreement reached between Armenia and Georgia, the northern part of Borchaly (mainly plain areas) remained under the Georgian control, whereas the mountainous southern part was given to the Armenian control. This truce did not last long as the Georgian government seized the southern parts of Borchaly in the autumn of 1920 taking the advantage of the Armenian-Turkish War.

But in 1920, a new force joined the struggle over the Caucasus - the Soviets. After the Red Army invaded Armenia and Azerbaijan in 1920, the Menshevik government in Tiflis tried a number of diplomatic maneuvers to stop them from penetrating Georgia. Despite the Georgian government's success in securing a pact with the Bolsheviks, the cease-fire was short-lived, much like many other agreements made at the same time. The Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (GeoSSR) was established in the village of Shulaver in Borchaly on February 16, 1921, after the Red Army seized the region on the pretense of aiding the pro-Bolshevik rebels in Lori.

In solving the Armenian-Georgian dispute over Borchaly, the Bolsheviks opted for a *status quo ante bellum* option and repeated what was brokered in 1919: the mountainous part – where the majority were Armenians – was attached to Soviet Armenia, while the mainland remained in the hands of Georgians. A different approach was adopted for the Azerbaijani-Georgian dispute. Georgian side denounced its claims to Gakh-Zagatala/Saingilo region and in return, the Azerbaijani side agreed to a Georgian control over the Azerbaijani-populated lowlands of Borchaly.

After the completion of the border-making processes in 1921-1923, the toponym Borchaly was used only for the territories that remained under the Georgian control. In 1929, Borchaly *uezd* was abolished, large chunks of it were incorporated into Tbilisi *raion* and in the small part of the former *uezd*, *Borchalinskiy raion* ('Borchaly district') was established. Borchaly toponym

ceased to exist in 1947 when the district's name was changed to Marneuli (Mammadli, 1995: 2).

The question of why Borchaly was not given an autonomous status in the Georgian SSR despite having a high proportion of ethnic minorities and a certain degree of self-rule in the pre-1918 period remains unanswered in the literature. Although it still must be elaborated further in future research, it seems the absence of local demands for autonomy among the Azerbaijani population living in Borchaly played a huge role in this regard.

3.3. Meskheta and Javakheti (Javakh)

During the Soviet period, two historical regions – Meskheta and Javakheti – were never part of the single administrative unit. It was only during the independence period, when the Georgian government established Samtskhe-Javakheti *mkhare*, which is composed of two historically distinct parts. Javakheti – known as *Javakh* to the local Armenian population – is separated from the fertile lowlands of Kartli by a volcanic range covered in alpine meadows, and because of harsh climate it is often referred as “Georgia’s Siberia” (Coene, 2010: 159). On the other hand, Meskheta is rich in river valleys and its position as a crossing point between Anatolia and the Caucasus allowed its residents to have intensive connections with ancient Anatolian civilizations. It is believed that the toponym “Meskheta” is a remnant of the ancient *Mushki/Moschoi* people that used to live in the region during the Iron Age (Rayfield, 2012: 12). As for the toponym of “Javakheti”, it can be traced back in the Urartian manuscripts as *Zabakhae* (Rayfield, 2012: 13).

The region's significance in Georgian history is remarkable because it set the stage for the breakup of the once-unified Georgian Kingdom. Meskheta declared its secession from the Georgian Kingdom during the ascendancy of Qvarqvar II Jaqeli in 1451. Secession also occurred in terms of religion, as *atabegs* (‘princes’) decided to split from the Georgian Orthodox Church and follow the Greek and Antioch Churches instead. However, it did not take long for Meskheta to maintain its de facto independence, and the region soon became a battleground for the Ottoman-Safavid wars. The Ottoman-Safavid wars badly damaged the region, and its inhabitants eventually fled to nearby locations, particularly inland Georgia.

Samtskhe-Javakheti first joined the Erzurum *eyalet* ('province') after the Peace of Amasya in 1555, but later all the newly gained Georgian regions were merged under the name of the *Gurjistan eyalet* (Broers and Yemelianova, 2020: 97). Due to their fidelity to the Ottoman throne, members of the Jaqeli family remained to rule the province. The Ottomans made the area a part of the Childir *eyalet* in 1625, effectively abolishing the authority of the local Christian nobility. After converting to Islam, the Jageli family continued to control the area as *pasha* ('an honorary title in the Ottoman political system').

The region's Ottoman past can be traced not only in the historical annals. Ahiska Turks – a Muslim ethnic group that speaks Turkic – are considered the legacy of the Ottoman Meskheta. There are two confronting theses in explaining the ethnogenesis of Ahiska Turks. The Georgian thesis contends that Ahiska Turks are descended from Georgians who were coerced into becoming Muslims as a result of the long-standing Ottoman strategy of assimilation. On the other hand, some contend that interactions between Muslims from Anatolia and Samtskhe-Javakheti over a lengthy period led to the emergence of Ahiska Turks. The Georgian thesis's plausibility is called into question by the fact that many Christian communities, including Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks, were able to maintain their Christian identities in one way or another despite residing under Ottoman control (Khazanov, 1995: 195).

Nevertheless, the region would witness other new ethno-cultural identities emerging in the following centuries. The region was caught up in the Ottoman-Russian conflict two centuries after the "Ottoman peace." Russians took over the Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki regions as a result of the Treaty of Adrianople in 1829, which acknowledged Russia's decisive victory over the Turks in the Russo-Turkish War of 1828–1829. Perhaps no treaty had such a profound impact on the region's ethno-cultural balance as the Treaty of Adrianople. A sizable portion of the Muslim people in the area left their homes after the Ottoman defeat in 1829, despite the fact that some communities, like the population of Akhaltsikh, were purposefully destroyed their homes to prevent them from passing into Russian hands. As thousands of Armenian and Greek refugees from the Ottoman Empire started to settle in the Caucasus, abandoned villages in Meskheta and Javakheti rapidly found new owners. Following the Treaty of Adrianople, some 120,000 refugees—mostly Armenians, but also Greek and Assyrians—arrived at the western frontiers of the South Caucasus in a fairly short amount of time (Shopen, 1852: 525-540).

What were Ahalkalak *sanjak* and Ahiska *sanjak* under the Ottoman rule began to be called *Akhalkalakski uezd* and *Akhaltikhskiy uezd* within the Georgian Governate. In 1840, by order of Nicholas I of Russia, *uezds* were attached to the Georgian-Imereti Province. In 1846, the *uezds* were transferred to the newly formed Kutaisi Province. From 1865, *uezds* were placed under the control of the Tiflis Province and remained so until the end of the Russian Empire (Sanosyan, 1991). The census of 1897 shows that while 72.3% of the population of Akhalkalak *uezd* was Armenian, the Turks of Akhaltikh *uezd* were able to maintain their demographic preponderance and made up 35.1% of the population (Troynitskovo, 1905: 74-81).

In the centuries that followed the fall of the Russian Empire, the Ottomans once again invaded the region, where they stationed their forces during the Caucasus Military Campaign of 1918 on their route to the Caspian Sea. In May 1918, Akhaltikh and Akhalkalak *uezds* were declared as belonging to the newly founded Georgian Republic, even though Armenians were majority there. While Georgia's claims to those areas were disputed by the First Armenian Republic, Erivan (Yerevan) was never able to take control of Akhalkalak and Akhaltikh.

The Armenian-Georgian dispute over the region erupted once more in 1921, when Georgia was Sovietized. On July 7, 1921, negotiations regarding the Armenian-Georgian dispute took place in the Caucasian Bureau (*Kavbiuro*), which was tasked with resolving territorial disputes in the South Caucasus. Following talks in the plenary session, it was decided that the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party would have the final say over the region's future. This aspect was a blatant sign that the Bolsheviks backed Georgia's argument. Both Akhalkalak and Akhaltikh *uezds* were retained as parts of Soviet Georgia, as decided by the Central Committee of the Georgian Communist Party. Despite having a large ethnic minority population, Meskheta and Javakheti (Javakh), like its neighbor Borchaly, was unable to achieve territorial autonomy inside Soviet Georgia.

3.4 Abkhazia

Abkhazia's historical boundaries stretch from the Inguri River in the south to the Psou River in the north. According to etymology, the toponym of Abkhazia is thought to have sprung from the Mingrelian word *apkha*, which means "back" (Hewitt, 1999). However, the territory is referred to by ethnic Abkhazs as *Apsny*.

Abkhazia had a closer relationship with the ancient civilization centers than many other regions of the Caucasus because of its advantageous natural geography. Greek traders started to settle in Abkhazia as early as the sixth century BC. During the Georgian Golden Age, Abkhazia flourished as a part of the unified Georgian monarchy (11th-13th centuries). Historical records attest to the fact that Abkhazia continued to play a key role in coastal trade far into the Middle Ages. For instance, starting in the 14th century, Genoese traders started building factories and little commercial hubs all along the Black Sea coast (Rayfield, 2012: 142).

In 1570, the Ottoman fleet invaded vital port cities in Abkhazia; as a result, the area was turned into an Ottoman protectorate, with *Suhum-Kale* (now Sukhumi) serving as the capital. Since the people and nobility of Abkhazia started converting to Islam, a variety of cultural and religious ties that existed between Abkhazia and Georgia were broken. Under the Ottoman authority, Abkhaz nobility maintained their de facto autonomy and even went so far as to use Ottoman support to expand their borders toward formerly Mingrelian-controlled territories, such as the Inguri River and its surroundings (Oreshkova, 2016: 186).

However, as the Ottoman Empire began to gradually lose power starting in the 18th century, Abkhazia split apart more than before. Russia's military expansion into the South Caucasus since the late 18th century and eastern Georgia's transformation into a Russian protectorate by signing the Georgievsk Treaty (1783) further spurred pro-Russian circles in Abkhazia. Giorgi Shervashidze, who was called Safar Bey before converting to Christianity, filed a formal appeal in 1809 to obtain the Russian protectorate for Abkhazia. The Russians rushed quickly to occupy the citadel of Sukhum after realizing they had a great opportunity to seize control of the strategically significant town. Russia intended to use Abkhazia as a buffer between its own territory and the insurgent North Caucasian populations (Saparov, 2015: 25).

Due to the significant losses sustained at the front during the Crimean War (1863-1856), the Russian military presence was called back from Abkhazia. The bulk of the population revolted to be with the Ottomans, and Shervashidzes started talks with the Ottoman sultan right once out of fear that Russia would lose the war and that Abkhazia's nobles would be punished if the Ottomans arrive. Nevertheless, despite losing the conflict, Russia maintained authority over Abkhazia, and instead of punishing the "disloyal" Abkhazs, the Russians chose to cooperate

with the rebels as they were backed off out of concern for a potentially violent reaction (Saparov, 2015: 25).

But Abkhazia was punished eight years later, when the Tsar consolidated his power in the North Caucasus in 1864. Russians abolished the Abkhazian principality, which had existed since 1460, the Shervashidzes were detained, and the recalcitrant were either killed or exiled. What was the Abkhazian Principality was re-organized into a *Sukhumskii voennyi otdel* ('Sukhum Military Department'). As a division of the Kutaisi Governate, Sukhum Military Department was superseded in 1893 by *Sukhumskii Voennyi Okrug* ('Sukhum Military Okrug'). The situation in Borchaly and Meskheta-Javakheti was repeated in Abkhazia after Russia gained complete control: the Muslim community started to leave because they did not want to continue living under Russian rule. Although initially these migrations included Muslim nobles, after the pro-Ottoman uprisings of 1864 and 1878, some 50,000 Abkhaz were driven forcefully out of Abkhazia. After 1810, it is estimated that Abkhazia's population fell by half over the ensuing six decades (Müller, 1998).

As in Borchaly and Meskheta-Javakheti, abandoned Abkhaz villages were quickly re-populated by newcomers. The imperial administration promoted the emigration of Christian communities from Anatolia, Europe, Iran, and Russia and provided lucrative economic conditions for newcomers. This strategy particularly helped Armenian and Greek refugees from the Ottoman Empire, who, unlike their Russian and European neighbors, were more easily able to adjust to a natural environment which was familiar to them. Mingrelians living nearby were drawn to the abandoned Abkhazian villages too. More than 40,000 people arrived in Abkhazia from 1886 to 1897 alone, and by the turn of the century, the population was as follows: Georgians (including Mingrelian peasants) made up more than half of the population, Abkhazs approximately 30%, Russians mostly lived in cities, while Armenians and Greeks primarily worked on the tobacco and tea plantations (Müller, 1998: 218-239).

Abkhazia struggled with a complicated ethnic and economic situation toward the end of the Russian Empire because of changes in the demographics that occurred after 1864. Despite its small size, Abkhazia entered political turmoil after the 1917 revolution. The Abkhaz nobility regarded themselves more as belonging to the North Caucasus, while Mingrelian peasants supported the Georgian Bolsheviks, and the urban class upheld the Georgian Mensheviks (Saparov, 2015: 43). But as regional tensions rose, Abkhazia and Georgia were compelled to

join hands. To establish a framework for the relationships in these circumstances, the Abkhaz People Council (APC) and the Georgian National Council engaged in negotiations. On February 9, 1918, the parties signed an agreement reaffirming that the future of Abkhazia would be decided based on self-determination (Gamakharia and Gogia, 1997: 402).

Although Abkhazia and Georgia were depicted as two legally equal parties in the February 9 agreement, the subsequent actions entirely disregarded the parity. Even though Georgia's decision to militarily intervene in Abkhazia to aid APC in defeating the Bolshevik offence succeeded in its goal of retaking Sukhum from Bolsheviks, the Georgian military presence increased Abkhaz nobles' reliance on Tiflis. APC became little more than a political organization with no real influence in Abkhazia's politics (Saparov, 2015: 46). APC aimed to strengthen its diplomatic contacts with external parties to gain support after being shut out of Abkhazia's politics. The Ottoman Empire, APC's first stop, fell short of their expectations because it was already in a complete state of crisis. Contacts with Anton Denikin's White Army did not only not result in any assistance but also aggravated Georgian Mensheviks

Tiflis disbanded the Abkhaz People Council to stop APC from "betraying" the Georgian side. A new Council that was predominately made up of Mensheviks - who were also in charge in Tiflis - soon started operating. Making a declaration that Abkhazia should be an autonomous province inside Georgia was one of the first tasks of the newly formed APC. Despite the considerable internal dissent, APC did make such a statement in March 1919. The declaration demanded that Abkhazia be granted autonomy within the borders of Georgia, with the specifics to be spelt out in the Georgian constitution (Gamakharia and Gogia, 1997: 435). A few days before the Soviet invasion, the Georgian government did, indeed, issue some very ambiguous statements on Abkhazia's autonomy, but as the Bolsheviks successively took power in February 1921, those statements had little value (Saparov 2015: 48).

The major obstacle in front of the Bolsheviks in Abkhazia, in contrast to Borchaly and Meskheta-Javakheti, was settling the region's political future since it was a pending pre-Bolshevik dispute. In March 1921, the Abkhaz Bolsheviks, taking advantage of the political unrest in Tiflis, declared the independent Abkhaz Soviet Socialist Republic (Abkhaz SSR). But 8.5 months later, in December 1921, the Abkhaz SSR and the Georgian SSR signed a unique union pact, making Abkhazia a "treaty republic" within the Georgian SSR—a first of its type in the Soviet legal system. The political status of Abkhazia was revised only ten years after,

and Abkhazia was subsequently designated as an autonomous soviet socialist republic (Abkhaz ASSR) within the Georgian SSR.

Historian Arsène Saparov (2015: 42-64), who examined the history of Abkhazia's autonomy, argues that the Bolshevik experiment in Abkhazia was primarily the product of compromise and the immediate need of the Bolshevik leadership to resolve urgent problems. The Bolsheviks supported the idea of "independent Abkhazia" while it was necessary to solidify the control over Abkhazia, but they turned to the idea of Abkhazia within Georgia as soon as it was necessary to cement their control over Tiflis.

3.4. South Ossetia

The toponym of South Ossetia only came into being in 1921 with the formation of the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast. As a result, unlike the three aforementioned areas, it has historically been viewed more as a political unit than a historical one. The toponym of Ossetia, however, has been mentioned in various historical sources. Although the toponym of Ossetia has mostly been used to refer to the region in the North Caucasus where Ossetians reside, it has also been used since the 19th century to refer to numerous locations in modern-day Georgia. For instance, in his report to the Russian Tsar in 1802, Russian Lieutenant General Karl Knörring referred to the Ossetian towns along the Didi Liakhvi river in Georgia as *Ossetia* (Knörring, 1866: 587).

The Georgian words *Osi* and *Oseti*, respectively, are the roots of the names "Ossetians" and "Ossetia." Although the self-identification of the Ossetians has long been a subject of discussion in the contemporary Ossetian national identity, it is said that the Georgian word *Os* is derived from the word *As* used by the Ossetians to designate themselves. Since they are the only Iranian-speaking people to live in the Greater Caucasus Mountain Range, historians believe that modern Ossetians are descended from the Alans, ancient Iranian-speaking semi-nomadic tribal formations.

The lands, including modern-day South Ossetia, underwent a period of protracted fragmentation after the fall of the united Georgian Kingdom in 1490. Small local quasi-states ruled by *eristavi* (the Georgian equivalent of a duke), who were content to collect taxes for

foreign vassals, were one of the key characteristics of this period. Thus, there were eight such quasi-states in modern-day South Ossetia (Bakradze and Chubinidze, 1994: 8): 1) Samachablo, ruled by the Machabeli family, 2) Ksan *saeristivo*, which covered most of present-day South Ossetia, 3) Rachis *saeristivo*, 4) Satseretlo, 5) Saamilakhvro, 6) Sapalavanoishvili, 7) Sapalavandishvili, 8) Savaxtanqo. These quasi-state leaders were keen on settling Ossetians in Georgian territory as *khizans*, a form of indentured servitude between Georgian feudal lords and Ossetian peasants. By establishing favorable conditions for Ossetians to settle, Georgian rulers resolved two significant issues. The arrival of Ossetians, who were loyal, Christian, and culturally similar to Georgians, ensured demographic expansion, and more agricultural activities, hence increasing the wealth of Georgian feudal lords.

The Ossetian settlements in Georgia were indeed exceptional cases on many levels. First of all, since peasants had virtually no authority over their own communities, it was a very unequal relations system, much resembling the caste system in India. Ossetians living in the South Caucasus never had statehood in any shape or form since serfdom and the region's dispersed geography prevented the establishment of Ossetian aristocracy. Because the Ossetians were a part of a Georgian cultural-religious realm, interactions between Georgians and Ossetians were entirely done through socio-economic lenses rather than religious and cultural ones.

However, Ossetians who lived in the northern Caucasus foothills took a quite different route because they were among the first Caucasian populations to submit to Russian rule in 1774 under the Treaty of Kuchuk Kainarji. The Ossetians were able to dodge the Russian Empire's retaliatory measures against the mountain peoples since they were primarily Christians and resided near the strategically significant Daryal Pass. Ossetians residing in the north and south of the Caucasus joined a unified political area for the first time in history in 1813 when Russia completed the annexation of the South Caucasus with the Treaty of Gulistan.

Relations between Georgian nobles and Ossetian peasants deteriorated with the advent of the Russian imperial era. Ossetian peasants were burdened with high taxes that further bankrupted them, and the peasants frequently rebelled against paying taxes. The number of uprisings shows how difficult it was for the Russian imperial government to control the tensions between Ossetians and Georgians, which had initially been of a socio-economic nature. Ossetian peasants launched nine significant uprisings against their Georgian landlords between 1802 and 1850 alone, and Russians struggled mightily to put an end to them (Saparov, 2015: 29).

Although the Ossetian peasant uprisings during the Russian imperial period were numerous, this period was also particularly significant for the development of the Ossetian national identity in a number of ways. The creation of the *Ossetinskii okrug* ('Ossetian province'), which included the majority of modern-day North and South Ossetia, in 1842 marked the first time in history that an administrative unit bearing the name of Ossetia existed (Esadze, 1907: 79). The Russian Empire abolished serfdom in 1864, which was the second significant development. The Ossetian peasants began to move more easily after being freed from their obligations to the Georgian feudal lords, and they eventually began to settle in more industrial areas (Vaneev, 1956: 280). This alone laid the ground for the development of a separate Ossetian national intelligentsia. The Georgian Military Highway, a vital route bridging the north and south of the Caucasus, allowed the Ossetians to forge close ties with industrial hubs like Tiflis and Vladikavkaz, and benefit from modernism reforms implemented by the imperial authorities, particularly in terms of reducing illiteracy. Additionally, the socialist inclinations that started to emerge among the Ossetian peasants in the early 20th century played a significant role in terms of organization and ideological enlightenment of the Ossetian populace.

The armed clashes that followed the fall of the Russian Empire may be the greatest illustration of how once socio-economic tensions between peasants and landowners evolved into tensions between two distinct ethnic identities. One such clash between armed Ossetian peasants and Georgians occurred in Gori *uezd* in February 1918, and the fighting got so out of hand that Tshkinval was even briefly ruled by armed Ossetian squads (Kulumbegov, 1957: 15).

The Ossetian-populated regions of the South Caucasus were regarded as belonging to Georgia after that country's proclamation of independence in May 1918. The Ossetian National Council, which represented Ossetian intellectuals, however, believed that the future of the area was more firmly tied to North Ossetia and stressed the significance of a separate political arrangement for Ossetians. In April 1920, a spontaneous revolt was used by the *Okruzhkom*, which ran concurrently with the Ossetian National Council and unified the Ossetian Bolsheviks, to impose Bolshevik control in Georgian regions where Ossetians resided. The Ossetian revolt was put down by the Georgian government in a very cruel way, resulting in the burning of dozens of Ossetian villages, the deaths of over 20,000 people, and the expulsion of about 40,000 Ossetians from their homes (Vaneti, 1933: 127).

The deadly revolt of 1920 forced the Bolshevik Ossetians to migrate to North Ossetia, where they institutionalized their efforts further and even created revolutionary paramilitary units. Months later, in February 1921, the Ossetian Bolsheviks moved back into the South Caucasus and took control of a sizeable area of what would later be known as South Ossetia, including Tskhinval. This was made possible by the Bolsheviks' capture of power in Tiflis. The Ossetian Bolsheviks successfully implemented their political agenda to secure territorial autonomy for Ossetians in Georgia after assuming de facto control of the region and securing the return of the displaced Ossetians (Saparov, 2015: 71).

However, there were two difficulties in establishing territorial autonomy for Georgian regions populated by Ossetians. The first was the geography of the regions where Ossetians lived - the Ossetian *okrug* did not encompass the entire ethnic Ossetian population of Georgia, and geographical obstacles prevented the consolidation of the regions inhabited by the Ossetian population into a single administrative unit. The second issue had a stronger connection to the Ossetian history. Except for the geographical unit of 1842, it was more challenging for Ossetians than, say, Abkhaz to convince Georgians to give autonomy to Ossetians who did not have a history of statehood in the South Caucasus. The Ossetian Bolsheviks' desire to make Tskhinval the center of their proposed territorial autonomy angered the Georgian side as well. Ossetians had a demographic share of only 8.8 percent in 1917 in Tskhinval, where Georgian Jews made up most of the population (for comparison, Jews were 38.4 percent, Georgians were 34.4 percent, Armenians were 17.7 percent). The absence of an Ossetian city in the South Caucasus and the significance of an urban elite for identity formation were the fundamental drivers behind the Ossetian Bolshevik claims to Tskhinval (Saparov, 2015: 76).

Ossetians were granted territorial autonomy by the *Kavbiuro* on October 31, 1921, and the final decision on the borders of the autonomy, covering Tskhinval too, was made on December 20, 1921, despite the completely divergent positions of the Ossetian and Georgian policymakers regarding the future of Ossetians in Georgia. Three elements, according to historian Arsène Saparov (2015: 66-87), have given Ossetians a unique political status within Georgia. First, the size of the Ossetian-Georgian conflict in 1920 made it impossible to overlook its consequences. Second, in the spring of 1921, the Ossetians used a power vacuum to seize control of significant regions of Georgia's Ossetian-inhabited regions, including Tskhinval, setting up a *fait accompli* for future negotiations. Third, Russian Bolsheviks considered Ossetian peasants to be "loyal supporters" of Bolshevism because they had supported their ideologies as early as 1917. As a

result, the Russian Bolsheviks pushed on granting Ossetians of Georgia a different political position - i.e., the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast.

Chapter 4. Results of the Toponymic Analysis

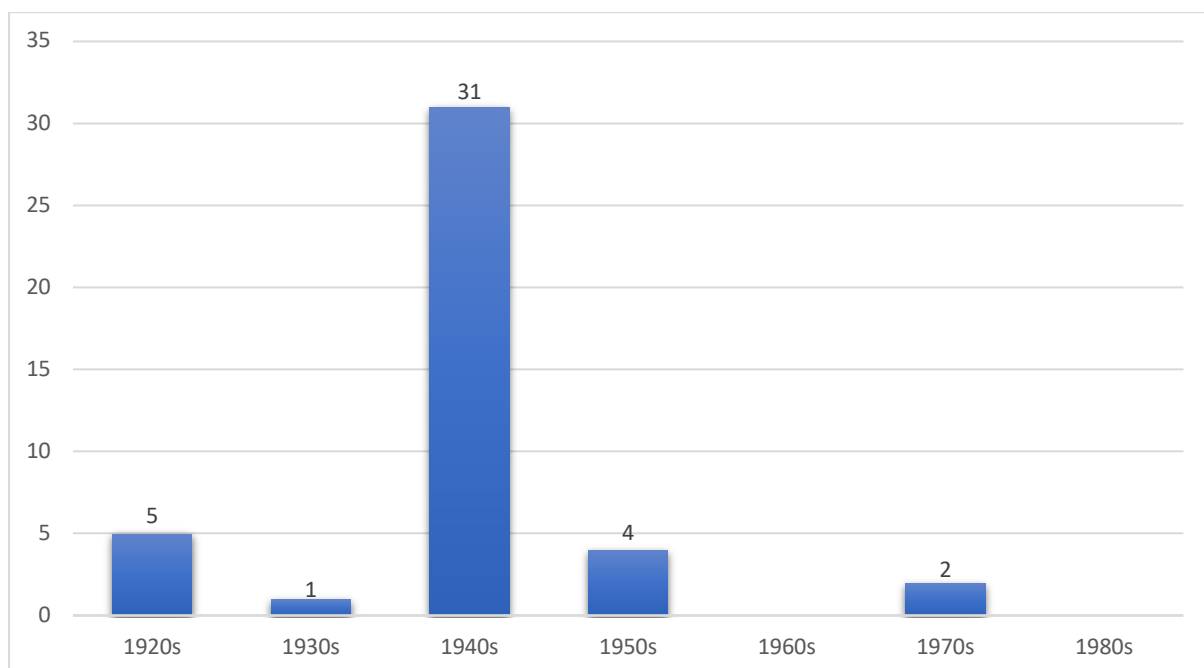
The findings of the toponymic study for each region are presented in this chapter. A total of 230 acts of renaming that occurred on Soviet Georgian territory between the years 1921 and 1989 were extracted. Three different concepts were used to process the retrieved data. First, an attempt was made to determine how the renaming acts were dispersed over seven decades. Second, the etymological affiliations of the changed and given toponyms were evaluated. Lastly, the share of ethnic Georgians in each district was compared to the number of renaming acts to see if there was any correlation.

As was already established, reading toponyms solely as texts makes it impossible to comprehend their *dispositif* nature. The discussion and analysis of the data will be done in the following chapter to ascertain the significance of toponym changes in the formation of the Soviet Georgian nation as the objective of this chapter is just to provide the findings that have been extracted.

4.1. Renaming of Places in Borchaly

The study found that 43 toponyms were changed in the Borchaly region during the Soviet era. The renaming policy was of sporadic nature in the beginning since only six renaming acts took place up until the 1940s. Table 1 demonstrates that three of such changes occurred in 1921, the year Georgia came under Bolshevik rule. It is apparent from the table that Borchaly underwent 13 toponym alterations in 1949, which is a record high for all renaming acts.

Table 1: Number of renaming acts in Borchaly per decade

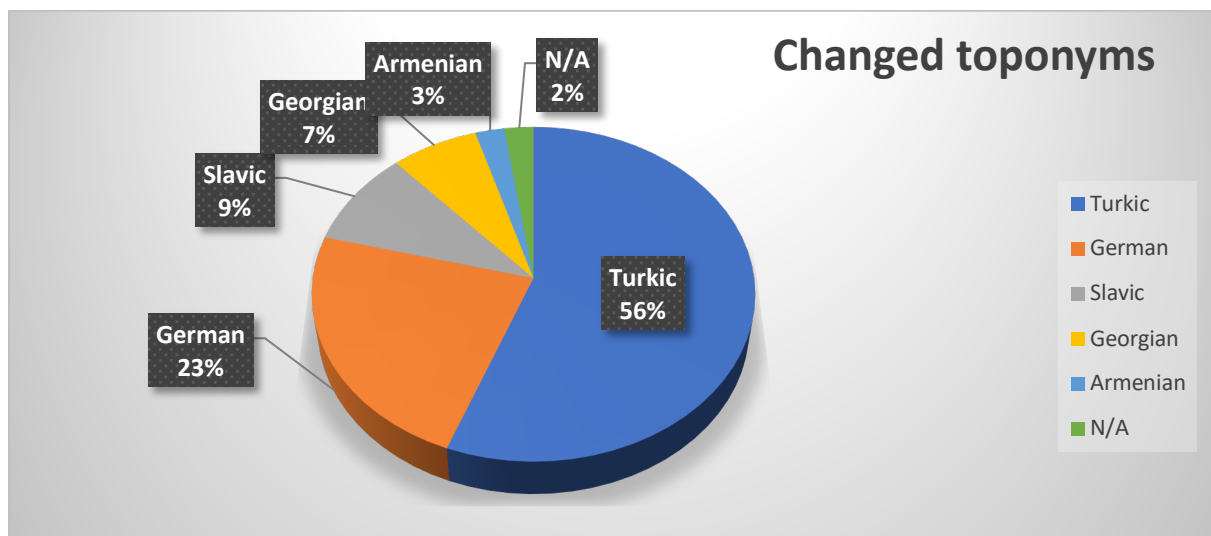


Only four toponym changes were recorded in the post-1949 period until 1972. Satskhenhesi village of Gardabani *raion* became Saakadze in 1972. A year later, in 1973, Gardabani's other village Soghanlug became Ponichala. The only toponym alterations recorded in Borchaly during the final three decades of Soviet authority were those two changes of 1972 and 1973.

It can be seen from Chart 1 that more than half of the altered toponyms had Turkic origins in a linguistic sense when analyzing the etymological background of the toponym changes. In total, 24 Turkic toponyms were erased from the Soviet Georgian landscape throughout the Soviet period. According to the chart below, German toponyms were also significantly impacted by

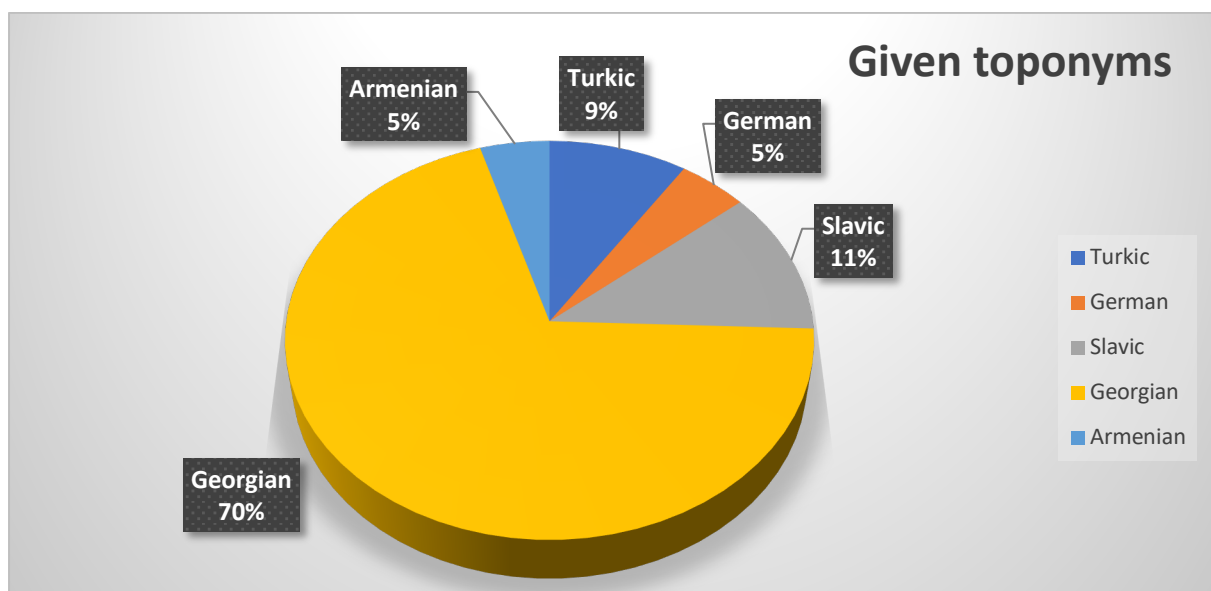
Soviet renaming policy: 10 German toponyms — or 23 % of all changed toponyms—were changed in Borchaly.

Chart 1: Etymological distribution of the changed toponyms in Borchaly



As shown in Chart 2 below, the majority of the given toponyms in Borchaly, or around 70% of them, were of Georgian origin. Moreover, Soviet authorities also used five Slavic toponyms for naming purposes of settlements located in Borchaly.

Chart 2: Etymological distribution of the given toponyms in Borchaly



A comparison of the number of changed and given toponyms reveals that only Turkic and German toponyms had a negative balance since the number of changed toponyms was more than the given ones. For instance, only four Turkic toponyms were used for naming purposes,

while 24 Turkic toponyms were changed by Soviet authorities. This is also true for German toponyms; 10 German toponyms were altered, while only two German toponyms were used to name settlements.

On the other hand, the given/changed balance was unquestionably favorable towards toponyms in Armenian, Georgian, and Slavic languages. What is striking about the data is the fact that 30 toponyms of Georgian origin were used to name settlements, while only three Georgian toponyms were changed. Although the given/changed balance was positive in favor of Armenian and Slavic toponyms, the quantity disparity was not significant. Only four Slavic toponyms were altered as a result, and five were used as new names. As far as Armenian toponyms are concerned, only one toponym was altered, and two settlements were named.

Table 2 displays the number of renamed places and the share of ethnic Georgians in each district of Borchaly to determine whether a link between these two concepts was present. The patterns that the data thus far has revealed are somewhat unexpected because they seem counterintuitive. For instance, the only two districts of Borchaly with a disproportionately higher ethnic Georgian population were Gardabani and Tetrtskaro *raions* (45,6 percent and 45,8 percent for 1989 respectively). Despite having similar ethnic proportions, Gardabani saw roughly three times as many toponym changes as Tetrtskaro. An analogous trend to the Gardabani/Tetrtskaro case may be seen in the comparison of the Bolnisi and Dmanisi *raions* as well. The proportion of people of ethnic Georgian descent in these two districts fluctuated between 20 and 30 per cent throughout the Soviet period. Despite having a similar percentage, Dmanisi experienced nine times more toponym changes than Bolnisi, which had only two such changes.

Table 2: Share of ethnic Georgians and number of renaming acts in Borchaly

Districts	Share of ethnic Georgians (1989)	Number of renaming acts
Bolnisi	21,7%	2
Gardabani	45,6%	8
Dmanisi	28,1%	18
Marneuli	6,5%	7
Tsalka	3,6%	5

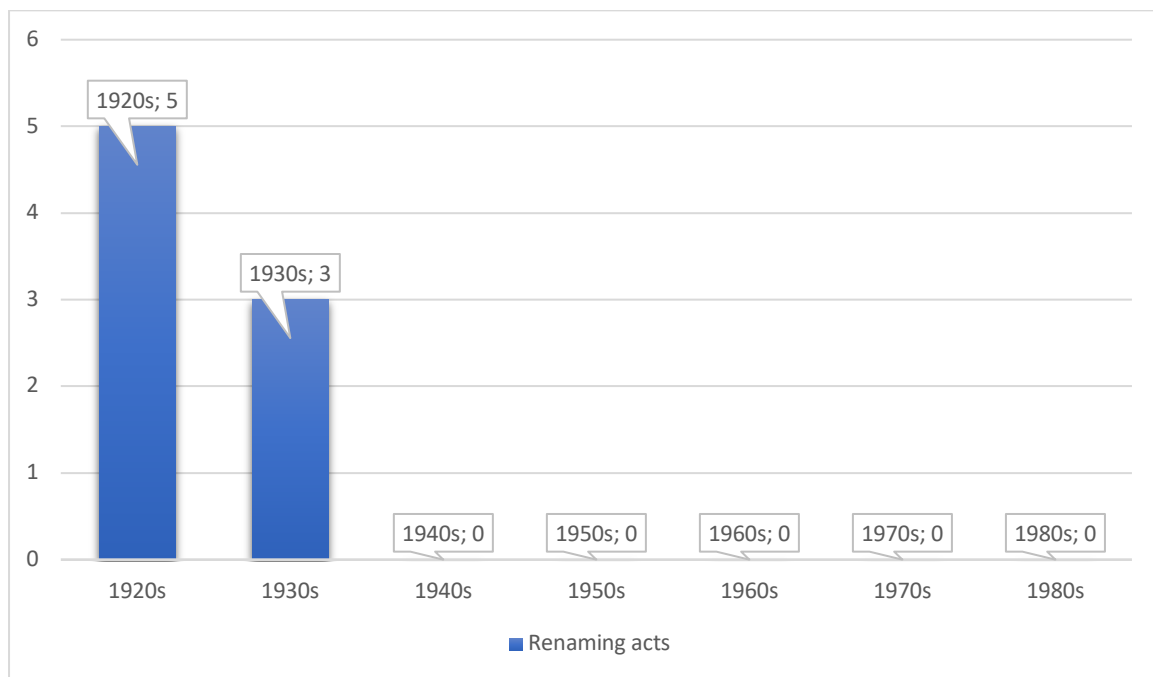
A small number of renaming acts were recorded in the Marneuli and Tsalka *raions*, where the ethnic Georgian population has historically been a minority. Only seven renaming acts occurred in Marneuli *raion*, where only 6.5 per cent of people were of ethnic Georgian descent as of 1989. In Tsalka *raion*, where the percentage of Georgians was never higher than 5 percent throughout the whole Soviet period, five toponyms were changed.

In conclusion, the data demonstrate that Borchaly did experience a moderate toponymic cleansing policy during the Soviet era. To claim that Borchaly had a systemic renaming policy would be quite deceptive. The most surprising finding from the data was that, despite certain Turkic toponyms being substituted with Georgian ones, the renaming of Turkic toponyms was fairly low in regions like Bolnisi and Marneuli where the majority were historically Turkic-speaking Azerbaijanis. Furthermore, the Soviet renaming practices caused German spaces to be completely obliterated from Borchaly's landscape. The data shows that in two periods - the first decade of Soviet rule and after Second World War - toponyms in Borchaly were targeted more intensively.

4.2. Renaming of Places in Meskheta and Javakheti (Javakh)

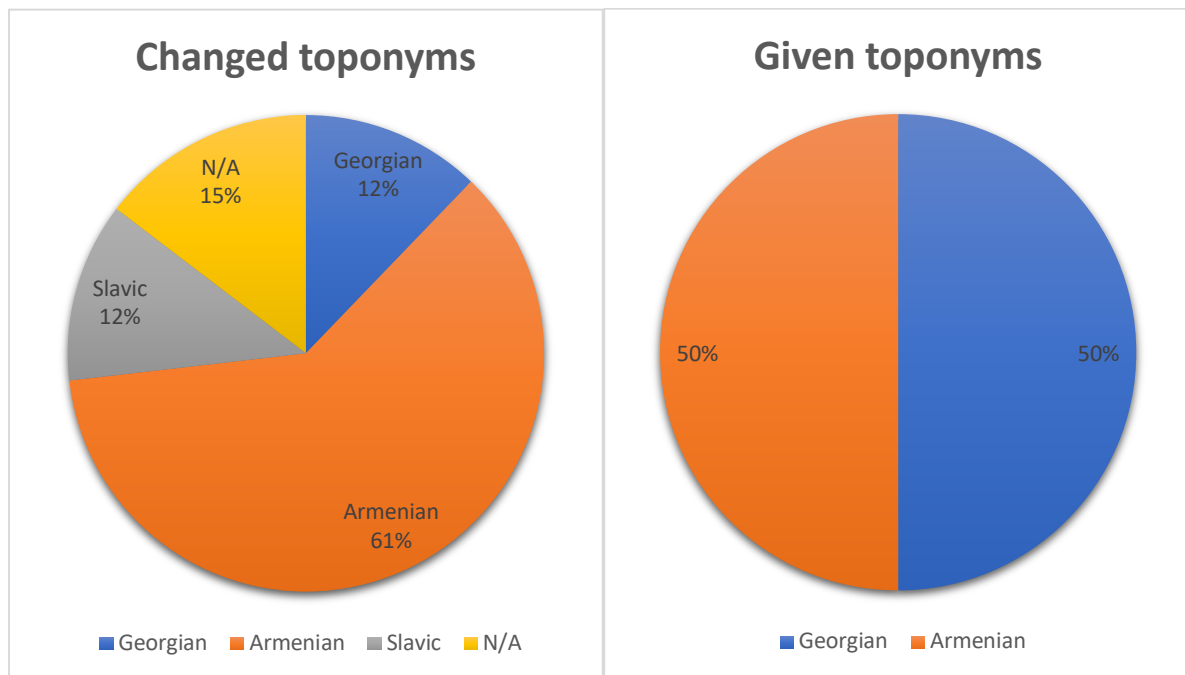
During the years 1921 to 1989, Meskheta and Javakheti (Javakh) regions saw a total of eight toponym modifications. As seen in Table 3, five such changes happened in the early years of Soviet rule. Three other renaming acts occurred in the years preceding the Second World War. Surprisingly, no toponym alteration act was documented after the Second World War.

Table 3: Number of renaming acts in Meskheta and Javakheti per decade



All of these renaming acts took place in the Akhalkalaki and Bogdanovka *raions*, where Armenians have made up the vast majority of the population. Five toponyms of Armenian provenance were renamed in Javakheti, as shown in the pie charts below. However, there was no proof that an Armenian toponym was used ever for naming purposes. Instead, it can be seen that the Soviet regime preferred Georgian and Slavic toponyms in renaming places in Javakheti.

Chart 3: Etymological distribution of changed and given toponyms in Meskheta and Javakheti



There is no observable systemic pattern in the distribution of renaming acts in the Meskheta and Javakheti. Akhaltsikhe *raion*, which had a minority Georgian populace until WWII, did not experience any renaming acts, while Akhalkalaki *raion*, whose only around 8 percent of the population was ethnic Georgian, underwent six name changes (See: Table 4).

Table 4: Share of ethnic Georgians and number of renaming acts in Meskheta and Javakheti

Districts	Share of ethnic Georgians (1939)	Number of renaming acts
Adigeni	13,2%	0
Aspindza	19,9%	0
Akhalkalaki	7,5%	6
Akhalsikhe	10,5%	0
Bogdanovka	0,3%	2

In general, it is rather surprising to see that the western parts of the region – to be more particular, Akhaltsikhe, Adigeni, and Aspindza *raions* - where the absolute majority of the

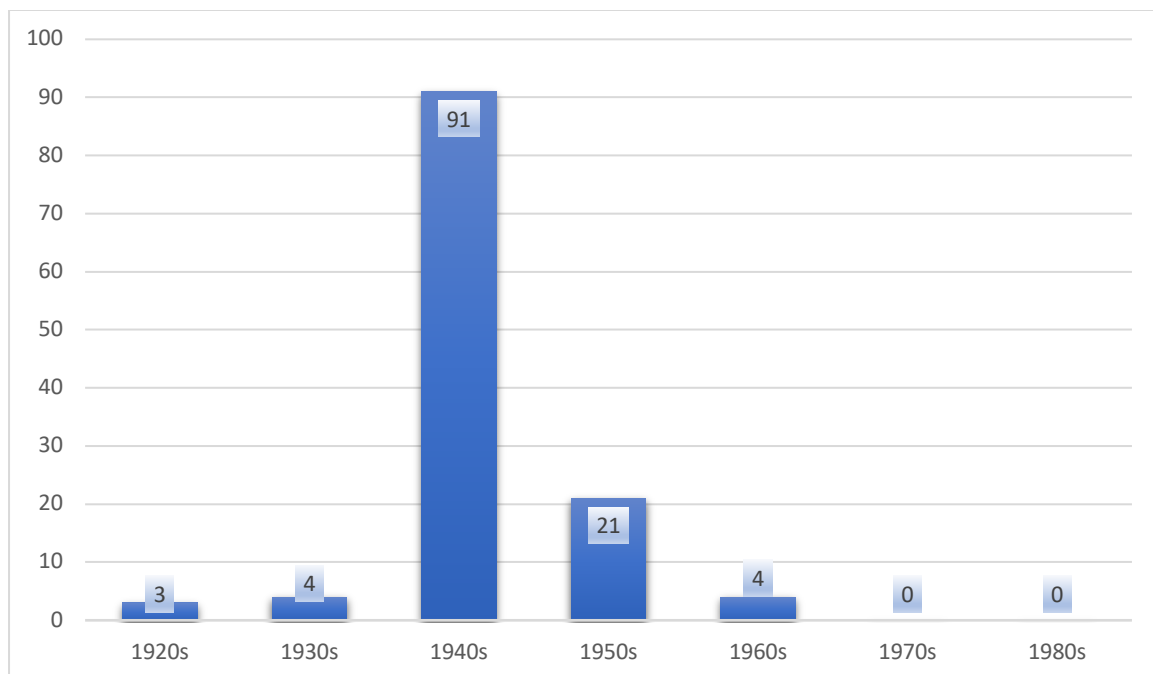
population were Muslim Ahiska Turks until their deportation during the Second World War, were not subjected to any kind of renaming practices. It is difficult to explain this result, but it might be related to the fact that toponyms with Georgian roots have historically been employed in that area, negating the need to make an already-Georgian space more Georgian. However, it is also crucial to keep in mind that the “undocumented changes” phenomena discussed in Chapter 2 might also occur in Meskheta due to the population’s use of phonetically Turkish versions of Georgian toponyms. For instance, the local population pronounced what was called *Adigeni* in Georgian as *Adigon*.

Even if the historical retention of Georgian toponyms in the Meskheta region can account for the absence of toponym changes there, it is still unclear why renaming acts were so infrequent in the Javakheti region. Perhaps this is a topic for further research using different types of sources, including archived records of Soviet decision-making procedures. In general, it is difficult to conclude that the alterations that occurred in the Meskheta and Javakheti regions were systemic. Unlike the German toponyms in Borchaly, these alterations did not end in the complete eradication of any non-Georgian toponyms.

4.3. Renaming of Places in Abkhazia

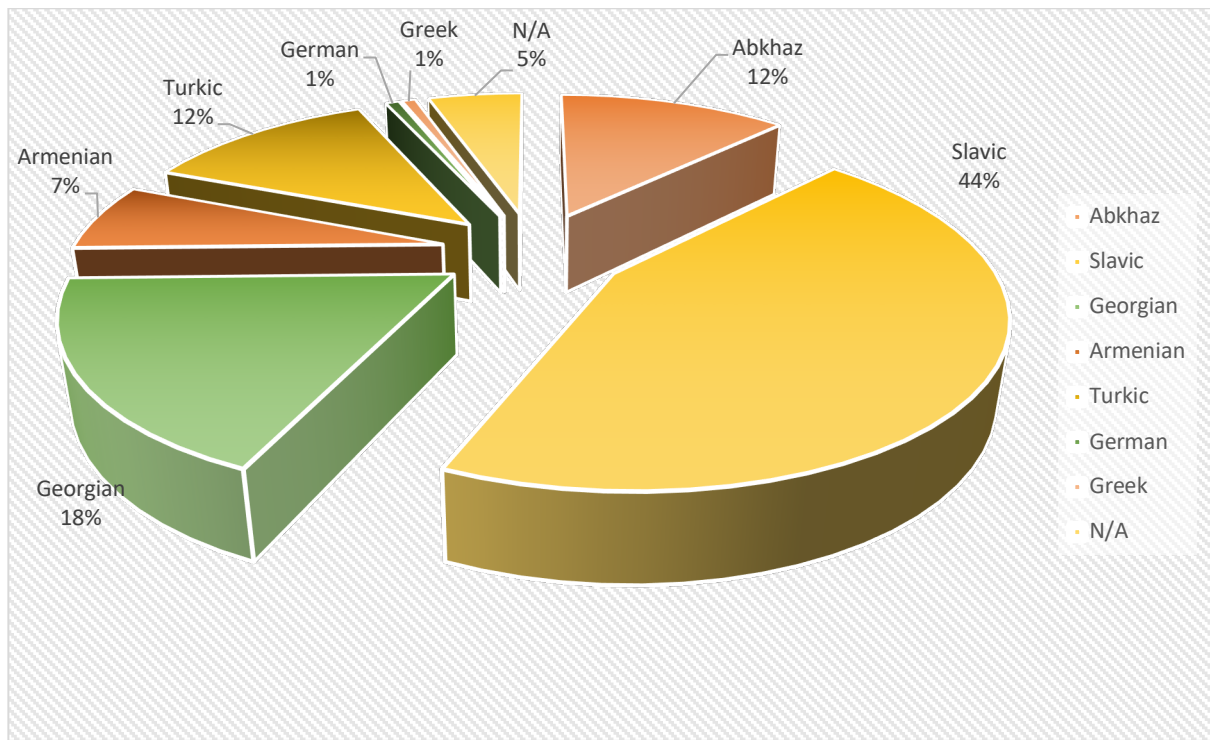
Abkhazia, which once even had the highest autonomous status in the USSR, underwent a significant toponymic cleansing, in contrast to Borchaly and Meskheta-Javakheti. 124 acts of renaming were reported in Abkhazia until 1989. Looking at the distribution of toponym changes by years, it can be seen that just in two decades - between 1940 and 1960 - 113 acts of renaming took place. Besides, the majority of toponym changes in the 1950s were simply the restoration of toponyms that had been altered in the previous decade. Only seven renaming acts were made during the period preceding the Second World War.

Table 5: Number of renaming acts in Abkhazia per decade



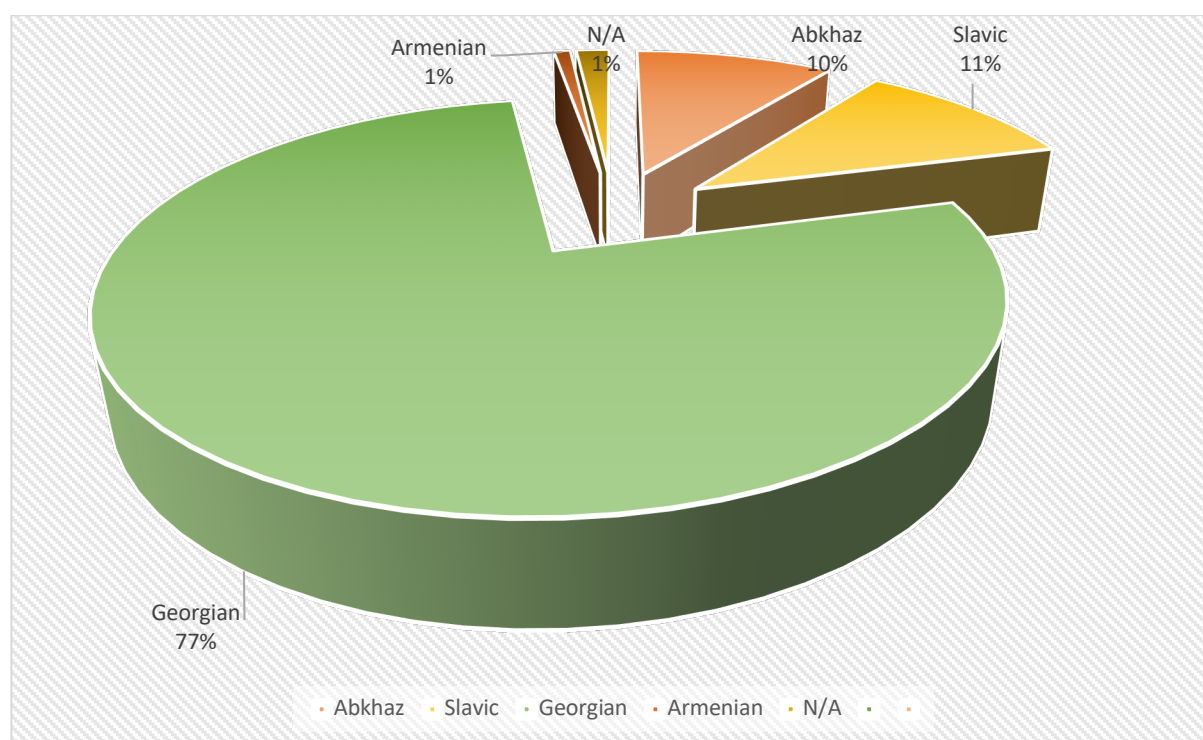
The next section of the data was concerned with the etymological implications of toponyms. Chart 4 below demonstrates that Slavic toponyms were particularly affected by renaming policies: 13 Slavic toponyms were used to name settlements, whereas 63 toponyms, or five times as many, were renamed. Armenian toponyms had a similar fate but in smaller numbers. Only one village was awarded an Armenian toponym, while nine Armenian toponyms were changed.

Chart 4: Etymological distribution of changed toponyms in Abkhazia



According to the findings, which are depicted in the Chart 5 below, the fate of Turkic, German, and Greek toponyms was more agonizing. These toponyms were completely lost from the Abkhaz landscape and were never used again, unlike Armenian and Slavic toponyms. When discussing toponyms with Turkic roots in this context, one thing should be specified: Turkic toponyms in Abkhazia do not reflect the presence of Turkic speaking peoples in the area but rather the legacy of the Ottoman Empire. For instance, the Turkic words *Abaza* (‘Abkhaz’) and *dag* (‘mountain’) are the roots of the toponym *Abazadag*, which was changed to *Kvalioni* in 1948. On the other hand, toponyms of Turkic origin like *Fundukluk* and *Otluk* that appeared on Abkhazia’s territory in the 19th century were mostly brought by Armenian and Greek refugees fleeing from the Ottoman rule.

Chart 5: Etymological distribution of given toponyms in Abkhazia



Only 18 Abkhaz toponyms had their origins changed throughout the study period, even though the given/changed ratio was negative. Seven other Abkhaz toponyms were utilized to name villages, in addition to the restoration of five altered toponyms in the 1950s. The most obvious conclusion to be drawn from the data is that, in terms of given/changed ratio, only Georgian toponyms had a positive result. Only 25 toponyms of Georgian origin in all of Abkhazia were altered, but 93 toponyms, or more than three times as many, were used to name villages all across the territory.

In the present study, comparing the share of ethnic Georgians in each district with the number of renaming acts was revealing on many levels (Table 6). Gali, for instance, has always been predominately populated by Georgians, although Ochamchire's ethnic Georgian population has fluctuated throughout Soviet history between 20 and 40 percent. But each district only saw five changes to its toponymic landscape. It was somewhat surprising to find that renaming acts that happened in the Gali district resulted in the erosion of Mingrelian – Kartvelian ethnic groups like Georgians – toponyms. The fact that Mingrelian Case (1951-1952) and these renaming acts (1952) overlapped led us to believe that, although being a Kartvelian-speaking ethnic group, the Mingrelians were not deemed “enough Georgian” by the Soviet Georgian authorities, who consequently eliminated their national space from Georgia's landscape.

Table 6: Share of ethnic Georgians and number of renaming acts in Abkhazia

Districts	Share of ethnic Georgians (1970)	Number of renaming acts
Gagra	22,1%	38
Gudauti	11,7%	23
Sukhumi	42,5%	21
Gulripshi	50,3%	29
Ochamchire	43%	5
Gali	88,3%	5

Similar toponym changing patterns were also observed in Gudauti, where the Georgian population was the smallest, and the Sukhumi *raion*, where the Georgian population had a share of 30-40%. Despite having drastically different ethnic compositions, both districts saw a comparable amount of toponym alterations (Gudauti - 23, Sukhumi - 21) as in Gali and Ochamchire.

The Gagra district, which is the region's northernmost section, experienced the greatest number of toponym changes, as seen in the table above. Armenians and Russians made up the majority of the population in this district, where 38 renaming acts took place. Another significant revelation was the fact that toponyms of Slavic origin were drastically altered and replaced with toponyms of Georgian origin in the 1940s, when Gulripshi *raion* was founded at the expense of a portion of Sukhumi. In Gulripshi, where Georgians and Armenians made up the majority of the population, approximately 30 toponymic alterations have been recorded overall.

The study of toponym changes in Abkhazia helps in uncovering similar patterns with those of Borchaly. For example, Georgian toponyms were so frequently utilized in both regions throughout the Soviet era, particularly between the years 1940 and 1960, to replace non-Georgian toponyms. This policy caused the entire erasure of German toponyms in Abkhazia and Borchaly. Despite the differences in the contexts, this policy has also led to a sharp decline in the number of settlements with Turkic toponyms.

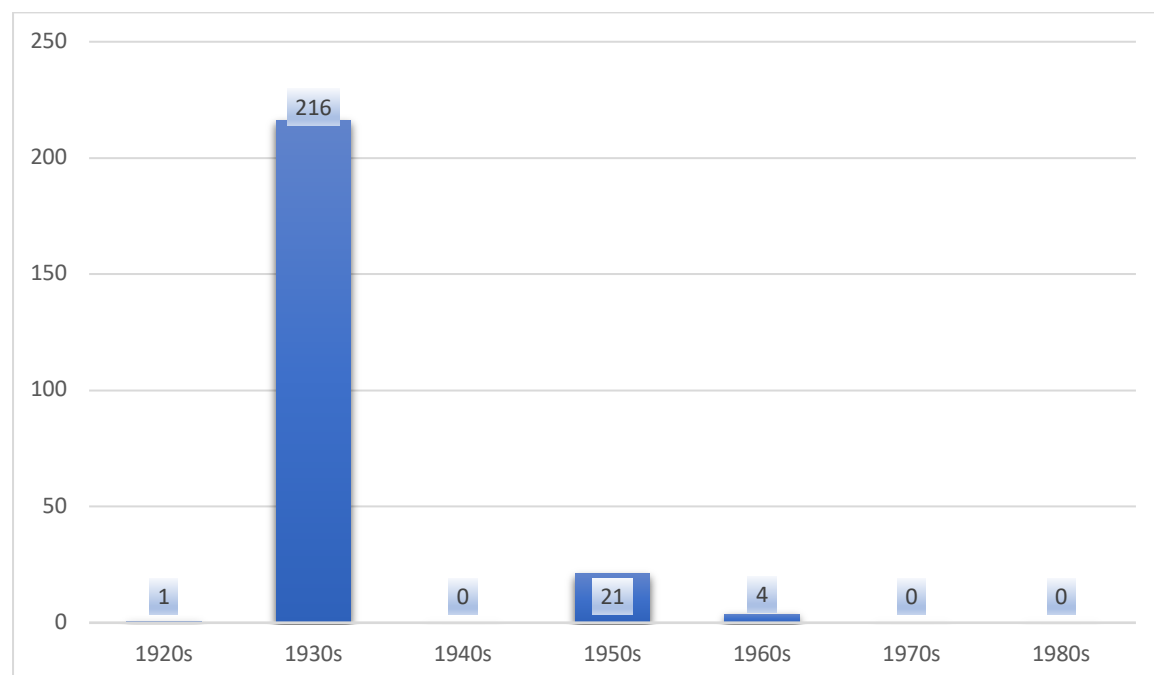
However, it is apparent that the renaming acts in Abkhazia were more systemic in nature than those in Borchaly. The fate of Slavic toponyms was a different pattern altogether. Thus, despite the fact that Slavic toponyms were more frequently used to name new settlements in Borchaly and Meskheta-Javakheti, toponyms of Slavic origin were severely eradicated in Abkhazia in a relatively short amount of time. The third distinction between the regions was that some changed toponyms in Abkhazia had been restored, which was not the case in Borchaly and Meskheta-Javakheti. Hence, it could conceivably be hypothesized that Abkhazia's ethno-territorial status did play a role in this regard, while non-autonomous Borchaly and Meskheta-Javakheti had no chance of making their voice heard.

4.4. Renaming of Places in South Ossetia

The region that saw the largest toponym alterations was the South Ossetian Autonomous *Oblast* (AO), another autonomous province of Soviet Georgia. Some sources even assert that over 70% of South Ossetian toponyms were altered in some form during the Soviet era. For this study, 218 instances of renaming that took place in South Ossetia were identified.

Of the 218 alterations, 216 were made in the year 1934. The Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party of South Ossetian AO approved the publication of a small brochure prepared by the South Ossetian Research Institute of Local Lore Studies in the same year, under the title *New names of settlements, rivers, and mountains of South Ossetian AO*.

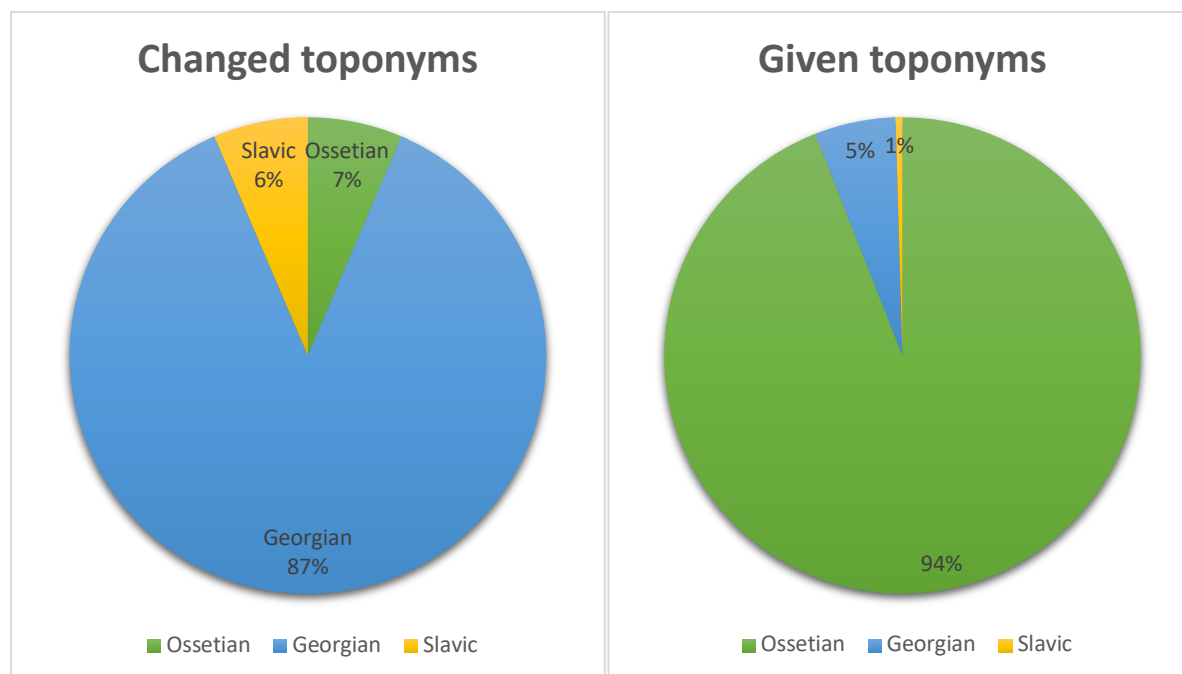
Table 7: Number of renaming acts in South Ossetia per decade



However, South Ossetia stands distinct from the rest of Soviet Georgia in a number of ways. First off, only in the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast Georgian toponyms were altered extensively. Only 12 toponyms of Georgian origin were used to name settlements, whereas 190 toponyms were changed. Second, it became evident (see: Chart 6 below) that there was a significant discrepancy between what was written in the legislation and what was really happened. For instance, despite the fact that numerous communities had their names formally

altered, the villages nonetheless went by their previous names. This in and of itself begs the question of what this policy was all about.

Chart 6: Etymological distribution of changed and given toponyms in South Ossetia



Looking at the distribution of toponym changes by region (see: Table 8 below), it can be observed that the main focus of changes was Leningor and Tskhinvali *raions*, with 86 and 68 toponymic changes, respectively. Historically, the share of the Georgian population in these two regions in the demographic balance was around 30-45%. In Dzau and Znaur districts, however, the number of toponymic changes is close to each other: 28 and 36 toponymic changes, respectively. However, there is a serious difference in the ethnic balance between these two regions.

Table 8: Share of ethnic Georgians and number of renaming acts in South Ossetia

Raions	Share of ethnic Georgians (1970)	Number of renaming acts
Tskhinvali	40,3%	68
Znauri	30,1%	36
Dzau	5,2%	28
Leningori	47,9%	86

The Leningor and Tskhinvali regions saw the most changes, with 86 and 68 toponymic changes, respectively, when looking at the distribution of toponymic changes by region. Historically, these two regions combined demographic share of Georgians was somewhere between 30 and 45 percent. The number of toponymic alterations in the Dzau and Znaur districts is comparable, with 28 and 36, respectively. However, there was a significant disparity in the ethnic makeup of these two regions.

Chapter 5. What Do Toponyms Tell Us About....? Analysis and Discussion of the Data

As was already noted, the data extracted as a result of the toponymic analysis is analyzed and discussed in this chapter. The purpose of this study is not to conduct linguistic research, nor to address the etymological aspects of the toponyms. Its goal is to ascertain the extent to which toponym changes were used for nation-building purposes in Soviet Georgia.

In this chapter, two concepts are developed using the extracted data. The first concept – “multilayer national spaces” - makes use of toponym changes to try and explain what national-cultural spaces were established in Soviet Georgia. According to hegemony theories, dominant groups or classes design national spaces. But it is toponyms turn spatial ideas with a more abstract character into reality, into what is experienced and witnessed on a daily basis. In other words, the toponymic analysis enables us to comprehend the kinds of spaces that the dominant political groups wished to construct. Moreover, hegemony theories do acknowledge that spaces constructed by dominant groups are never monolithic and frequently challenged by representatives of non-dominant subordinate groups. By itself, this enables us to assert that studying toponyms sheds light on both the layers of spaces as well as relationships between dominant and non-dominant groups within the produced spaces.

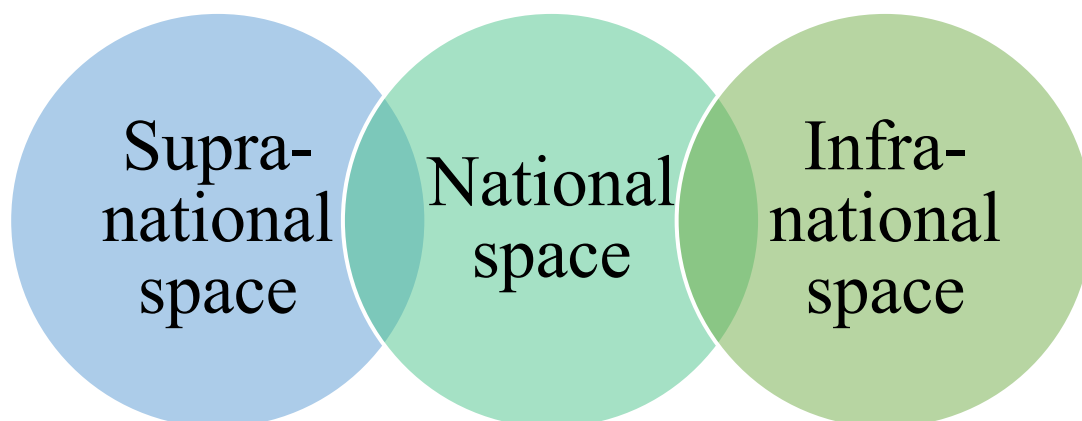
Even though the first concept touches upon the system of relations between dominant and non-dominant groups, it does not discuss the nature of those relations. Therefore, the second concept – “the hierarchy of nations” - attempts to examine the degree to which various ethnic groups had access to the political power held by the dominant group. This concept allows us to observe how the attitude of the dominant political group towards ethnic minorities in Soviet Georgia was and how it evolved throughout the country's history. It is primarily because of the fact that the level of access to political power and the dominant's group perception [about you] are strongly correlated.

5.1. World Within World: Multilayer National Space of Soviet Georgia

The scholarly debates surrounding the triad of name, power, and space were mentioned in Chapter 1. The fact that space is the emancipation of power is acknowledged by not just adherents of the Foucauldian approach but also by other paradigm members (humanist geographers, critical toponymy scholars). In other words, space is shaped by power, and power is shaped by space (Harris, 1991: 678).

This concept, which I am the author of, is created as a result of the conceptualization of toponym changes that took place in Soviet Georgia. As can be seen in Table 9 below, there were three layers of the national space of Soviet Georgia. The first layer, the supra-national space, was the embodiment of the political system in which Georgia was included. Although decision-making in this space took place at the Union, Republic and local levels, the socio-ideological embryo of this space originates from the Center. The second layer is called the national space. This space covered only the administrative borders of Soviet Georgia and its socio-ideological root stemmed from Tbilisi, even if some of the decisions related to this space were made in Moscow and sometimes in Akhalkalaki, Marneuli, Sukhumi and Tskhinvali. The last layer, which I refer to as infra-national space, was territorially vaguer than the second one. The socio-ideological locomotive of this layer was the non-dominant ethnic groups living in the territory of Soviet Georgia, albeit decisions were made in various locations.

Table 9: Three layers of space in Soviet Georgia



To explain more in detail, the first layer manifested in the form of identity-building based on the ideological pillars of the Soviet Union. This policy, which was carried out intensively in the first years of the establishment of Soviet power, aimed at eliminating non-Bolshevik elements from the Soviet landscape (Suny, 1994). The policy of purging non-Bolshevik elements was not unique to Georgia and covered the entire USSR territory. When speaking of non-Bolshevik elements, the main ones meant were the toponyms with connotations to the non-socialist socio-political systems such as monarchy, feudalism, and religious institutions (Hirsch, 2005).

In 1934, the decree issued by the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party of South Ossetian AO on the change of toponyms in the territory of the region specifically mentions the importance of cleaning up non-Bolshevik elements: “in addition, among our geographical names there are names are given in honor of feudal lords and religious figures, all of which are necessary to be changed and corrected.” (Tskhovrebova, 1979: 148)

To give an example of cleansing non-Bolshevik toponyms, in 1925 the village of Petropavlovskoe, located in Abkhazia and named in honor of Tsar Peter the Great, was renamed Primorskoe. A similar example was recorded in 1921 in Borchaly: the settlement, which was compactly inhabited by Germans and was named Katharinenfeld in honor of Empress Catherine the Great, was renamed Liuxemburg in honor of the Marxist-revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg. In the same year, the village of Aleksandrovka named in honor of Tsar Alexander I in Borchaly was renamed Rosenberg. Regarding the religious toponyms, a good example would be the renaming of three Monasteri villages in South Ossetia in 1934 into Farsag, Duarau, and Dongaron, respectively (Tskhovrebova, 1979: 250).

The use of toponymy for the establishment of the Bolshevik identity was not only based on the erasure of non-Bolshevik elements, but also on the line of perpetuating Bolshevik names. For example, in 1925, Shulaver village of Borchaly, which did not have a non-Bolshevik element in its name, was renamed Shaumiani in honor of Stepan Shaumian, an Armenian socialist revolutionary originally from Baku. As another example, the toponym of Akhagori in South Ossetia, formed from the combination of the Georgian words *akhal* (‘new’) and Gori¹, was

¹ Gori – a city in eastern Georgia, close to the administrative boundaries of South Ossetia.

named Leningori in honor of Vladimir Lenin in 1934. The toponym of Tskhinval, the largest city in South Ossetia, was changed to Stalinir (Stalin + *Ir* [*Iron*]², i.e., ‘Stalin’s Ossetia’) in honor of Joseph Stalin. In the same year, the village and district of Okonia in South Ossetia was changed to Znauri to perpetuate the name of Znaur Aydarov, who was one of the founders of the Ossetian communist party and died during the 1920 Georgian-Ossetian conflict.

Sometimes, the erasure of non-Bolshevik elements and the perpetuation of Bolshevik names took place simultaneously. For example, in South Ossetia, the village of Georgtsminda, translated as the ‘place of St. Georg’, was renamed Isachchikhaeu (*Isaach* + *khaeu*, i.e., ‘Isaac’s village’) in honor of the Ossetian Bolshevik-revolutionary Isaac. However, the Soviet leadership sometimes, as a non-Bolshevik element actually changed the Bolshevik names. For example, in 1948, in Abkhazia, the village of Trotskoe, named in honor of the revolutionary, Soviet statesman, and founder of the Red Army, Leon Trotsky, was renamed Chanchkeri.

Although the Slavic language was the main reference point in giving Bolshevik toponyms, the toponyms promoting Bolshevism were adapted to local contexts in the early days of Soviet power. For example, when the village of Korinta, where ethnic Georgians lived compactly in South Ossetia, was renamed, the village was given the name Shroma, which means ‘labor’ in Georgian. Giving the name of Stepan Shaumian, an Armenian by ethnicity, to a village where Armenians lived compactly, and Rosa Luxemburg, a German by ethnicity, to a village compactly inhabited by Germans, are examples of this approach.

The second form of using toponyms for the purpose of identity-building, unlike the first, was not throughout the Union, but at the level of the republic as can be seen in Table 9. This policy aimed at the creation of a territorially defined Georgian nation within the Soviet-era administrative boundaries of the Georgian SSR. As Annette Bohr (1998 in Smith et al., 1998: 139) rightly mentioned, “the practitioners of Soviet ideology generated a belief system which held that each titular nation is individually connected through its putative history to a particular territory that is a national patrimony of that nation”.

In 1936, by the decision of the Soviet leadership, the name of the capital Tiflis was changed to Tbilisi. Etymologically, although the toponyms Tiflis and Tbilisi have the same meaning,

² Iron/Iryston (Ossetia in Ossetian)

the fact that the latter version is a purely Georgian version is an example of how Georgia's national space was Georgianized through toponym changes. Phonetic "Georgianization" of toponyms can be considered the most widespread pattern. So aside from the documented examples of Sukhum being renamed Sukhumi in Abkhazia in the year Tiflis was renamed, I suspect that similar but "undocumented changes" took place more often in rural areas. This phenomenon, which I call "undocumented changes", as discussed in Chapter 2, can be observed by comparing imperial maps with Soviet-era maps (See: the case of Gachagan/Gachagani in Chapter 2).

Another pattern of toponymic "Georgianization" took place in the form of direct translation of names. For example, the toponym Orekhovo (Abkhazia), which translates from Russian as 'the place with walnuts', was changed in 1948 and replaced by the toponym Kakliani, which gives the same meaning in Georgian. Another example is from Borchaly: in 1940, the toponym Aghbulag, which means 'white spring' in Azerbaijani, was replaced by the toponym Tetrtskaro, which has the same meaning in Georgian.

The third pattern of "Georgianization" of toponyms manifested itself in the form of giving new toponyms. Although some of those given toponyms had the character of restoration of the historical names of the areas, others were non-endemic. For example, the name of the village of Garakilsa, where ethnic Azerbaijanis lived, was changed in 1949 and replaced by the Georgian toponym Vake, which means 'plain'. In another example, in 1943, the name of Hoffungstal ('valley of hope'), a compact settlement of Germans, was changed to Akhalsheni, which means 'new place'.

However, there were structural and demographic factors that hindered the complete institutionalization of the hegemony of the titular nation in Soviet Georgia. So, despite its small territory, there were two ethno-territorial autonomies on the territory of Soviet Georgia: the Abkhaz ASSR and the South Ossetian AO. In addition, even if they did not have autonomy, the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities, which had their own neighboring kin-states, also occupied a special place in the ethno-political order of Georgia, which will be discussed in detail later. All this stimulated the use of toponymic cleansing for/by non-titular ethnic groups. This factor takes us to the third space – infra-national space created for the non-titular groups.

Infra-national space means the use of toponym changes in the regions of Georgia where ethnic minorities inhabited in high proportions to strengthen the identity of those ethnic minorities. For example, in the 1940s, the village of Gaya Khojaly, where ethnic Azerbaijanis lived compactly, was renamed Enikendi, which means ‘new village’ in Azerbaijani. In Javakheti (Javakh), the name of Zres village, where Armenians lived compactly, was replaced by a new – socialist though – Armenian toponym Kirovakan in the honor of revolutionary Sergei Kirov. As a result of the toponym changes that took place in South Ossetia in 1930, the number of Ossetian toponyms increased dramatically. Just in one year, the Soviet Ossetian authorities gave 205 toponyms of Ossetian origin to the settlements located in the autonomous region.

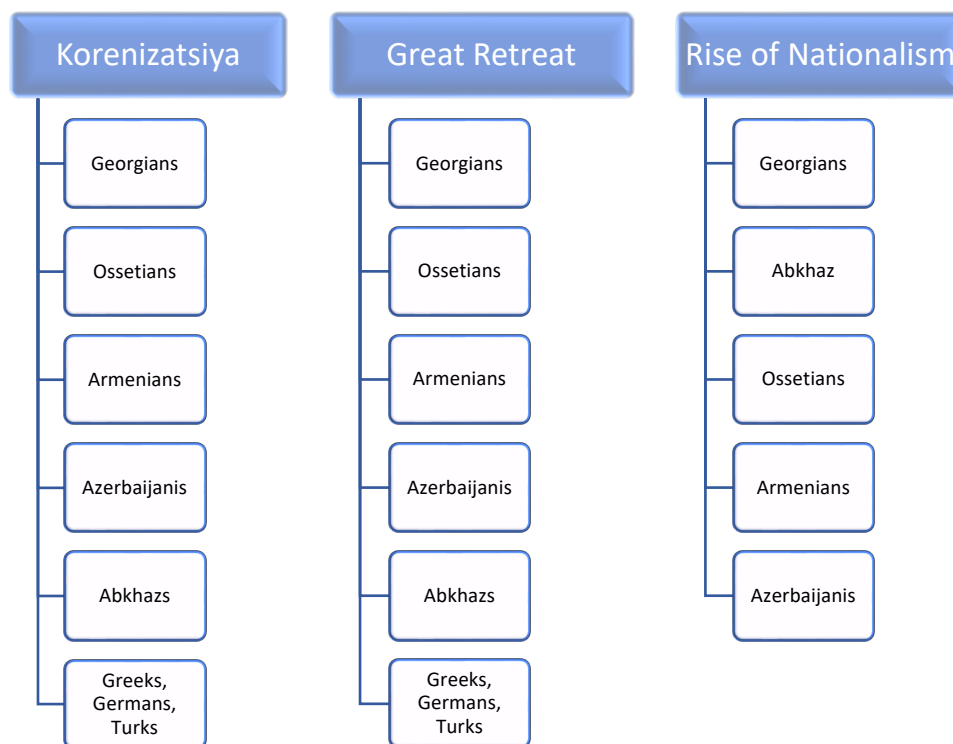
5.2. Hierarchy of Nations: Who Was Superior to Whom?

It was mentioned in Chapter 1 that the triad of name, power, and space results in asymmetrical power relations. In a hegemonic system, subordinates depend on the dominant, but the level of dependence is not the same. The nature of the relationship between the subordinate and the dominant affects this variation. More specifically, it hinges on how the dominant perceives and treats the subordinate. If the dominant feels threatened by the subordinate, the former would make every effort to prevent the latter from gaining access to political power. If the dominant does not perceive any threat or have any feeling of insecurity towards the subordinate, then it is likely that the former will allow the latter to attain political power, albeit in a limited form.

In Soviet Georgia, as in every other part of the Soviet Union, the distinction between titular and non-titular ethnic groups was institutionalized, and the ethnic Georgian population was designated as the dominant, titular people of the country (Goff, 2020: 24). In other words, non-Georgian population was regarded as the ethnicities having a secondary say in the landscape of Georgia. But characterizing the relationships between dominant and non-dominant, titular and non-titular peoples as coercive and authoritarian in nature would not be accurate. As was already mentioned, the dominant's acceptance of the non-dominant determined the status of the latter. It can be inferred from the intricate history of the ethnically diverse Soviet state and Georgia that a variety of circumstances contributed to the way the dominant perceives the non-dominant. In other words, hegemonic relationships inside a nation have frequently evolved; at times, certain non-dominants have grown stronger, while at other times, they have been supplanted by others.

As was stated at the outset, the purpose of this study is to determine whether toponym alterations in Soviet Georgia were systematic or isolated, as well as which ethnic groups experienced more and which ethnic groups experienced less toponymic cleansing. I use the concept of the hierarchy of peoples developed by the historian Krista Goff to find answers to these questions as well as how the ethno-political order in Soviet Georgia evolved. According to this concept, there was a hierarchy of peoples just as there was the hierarchy of states in the Soviet Union. The position of ethnic groups in the country's ethno-political order is referred to as hierarchy; it should be mentioned that this hierarchy was created from the perspective of the dominant group. Considering that this hierarchy was not a formal and monolithic concept, the installation of a hierarchy corresponding to the three different ethno-political periods that the USSR passed through can play an auxiliary role in answering the above-mentioned questions

Table 10: Hierarchy of nations over three different ethno-political periods in Soviet Georgia



Korenizatsiya

The first ethno-political period of Soviet rule is called the *Korenizatsiya* ('nativization') period in scholarly literature. This term was based on the principles of Marxist self-determination,

which Lenin especially supported, and aimed to integrate each ethnic group into the Soviet system. The main goal of the Bolshevik regime was to reconstruct national identities, freeing them from “backwardness with anti-Bolshevik elements” and adapting them to the modern concept of the nation (Suny, 2002). The officially declared main goal of this policy was to eliminate the destructive consequences of the Russification policy implemented in the imperial period and to show that the Soviet Union was equal to all by fighting “Great Russian chauvinism” (Kotljarchuk and Sundström, 2017: 156).

In Soviet Georgia, the highest part of the hierarchy belonged to the ethnic Georgians, who were the titular nation, not only during the *korenizatsiya* period, but also as a whole during the Soviet period. Out of the 139 toponyms of Georgian origin were used for the purpose of giving names in the four regions. In 1923, while speaking at the 12th Congress, Joseph Stalin noted that the goal of *korenizatsiya* was not only fighting with the “Great Russian chauvinism”, but also “Georgian chauvinism”. In his opinion, this policy should have put an end to the forced “Georgianization” of ethnic minorities, and every ethnic group of Soviet Georgia should have felt the power of self-determination.

Non-titular Ossetians were the biggest beneficiaries of so-called the fight against the “Georgian chauvinism” policy. As can be seen from the data presented in Chapter 4, South Ossetia was the only region where toponyms representing the titular nation did not gain dominance, and on the contrary, became a minority. As a result of the toponym changes in South Ossetia during the Soviet period, the number of toponyms of Ossetian origin increased sharply, and this increase took place only due to the erosion of toponyms of Georgian origin.

The main reason why South Ossetia was such a unique example and avoided toponymic “Georgianization” is directly related to the autonomous status of the region. Although South Ossetia had the lowest status – it was an autonomous *oblast* – among the autonomies granted to ethnic groups at the level of the USSR, South Ossetia's posture vis-a-vis Tbilisi was quite different in the real situation. So, unlike other autonomous *oblasts*, the region was directly managed by the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party of South Ossetia. There were also a number of ministries in South Ossetia that were not directly controlled by Tbilisi. In the first three decades of Soviet rule, those institutions were able to do important work in establishing the South Ossetian national identity.

If the second place belonged to the Ossetians, it is possible to claim that the third was Armenians. In the Soviet period, Javakheti (Javakh) region suffered the least from toponym cleansing - practically it did not suffer, and the Armenian settlements in other regions were not subjected to toponymic cleansing either. However, as in South Ossetia, there were several historical reasons why the territories inhabited by Armenians were subjected to minimal toponymic cleansing in Javakheti (Javakh). First, the east of the region – that is, the areas where the Armenian population was particularly populated – has historically been a sparsely populated area due to climate and geography. This in itself resulted in the absence of large and dense settlements in the region - unlike the neighboring Borchaly. Secondly, the Armenian population that began to settle in the region in the 19th century usually settled in the abandoned villages bearing the Georgian toponyms and, in some cases, the newcomers did not change the old toponyms at all. For example, the ethnic composition of Akhalkalaki, which is one of the largest cities in the region and is etymologically Georgian toponym, has changed significantly throughout history, but the name of the city has not changed once.

It is possible to say that Azerbaijanis have the next place in the hierarchy. In general, only two toponyms belonging to Azerbaijanis were changed during the *korenizatsiya* period. During this period, the absolute majority of toponyms of Azerbaijani/Turkic origin in Borchaly were able to maintain their existence. One of the main reasons why Azerbaijanis escaped mass toponymic cleansing can be explained by their relations with the neighboring Azerbaijani SSR. From the first years of the Soviet rule, the ethnic Azerbaijani population in Borchaly and the ethnic Georgian population in Gakh/Saingilo have been inter-twinned with each other. According to Krista Goff (2020: 86-93), a historian who conducted research on the Georgian villages in Gakh during the Soviet period, the fate of Georgians in Gakh was made dependent on the fate of Azerbaijanis in Borchaly, and when the violation of the rights of Azerbaijanis in Borchaly intensified, there were reciprocal actions against Georgians in Gakh.

It is possible to claim that the next place on the hierarchy belongs to the Abkhazs. Although, according to the data in Chapter 4, Abkhazia recorded only one change of an Abkhaz toponym during the *korenizatsiya* period, overall, the decline of Abkhazia's political status during this period makes it the second-to-last place. Just as in South Ossetia, the autonomous status of the region can be cited as the reason for the escape from the massive toponymic cleansing. As mentioned before, due to its autonomous status, Abkhazia occupied a special place in the political-legal system of the USSR and always had high levels of the political autonomy

throughout its existence. Although Abkhazia's political status had seen a decline during the first two decades of Soviet rule, even at its lowest political status it was higher than many autonomies of the USSR.

The last part of the hierarchy of nations for the *korenizatsiya* period belonged to the Greek, German and Ahiska Turks. Although some German toponyms were changed during this period, the German national space in Georgia was not subject to any "cleansing" since the given names were, in fact, German. The Greeks, who played the role of a pariah community, some of them living in Abkhazia, and others in the hilly areas of Borchaly, bypassed the toponymic policy in a positive sense. Although Ahiska Turks living in Meskheta were more numerous than Greeks and Germans and concentrated in one specific area, no steps have been taken to create a national space for them. On the contrary, it is possible to claim that toponyms phonetically pronounced in Turkish by the local population were recorded in Georgian in this period, as discussed in Chapter 2 (see: undocumented changes).

Great Retreat

In a speech in 1936, Joseph Stalin announced that the transition to socialism had already taken place (Saparov, 2015: 63). Although the extent to which the political-economic system was governed by socialist principles is still a matter of debate, there was indeed a major shift in the nationality policies in the Soviet Union. Against the background of increasing Nazi ideological threat from the West, the Soviets began to see the national intelligentsia, which they considered to be the leading force of progress during *korenizatsiya*, as "enemies of the people". Historian Francine Hirsch (2005: 274) interprets Stalin's announcement as follows: "precipitated an all-out effort to further accelerate the revolution and its program of state-sponsored evolutionism. Ethnographers responded by facilitating the rapid completion of the consolidation of clans, tribes, and nationalities into Soviet socialist nations."

As said before, ethnic Georgians continued to occupy the first place in the hierarchy. The absolute majority of Georgian toponyms, especially in Borchaly and Abkhazia, were given in this period, and even the name of the capital was changed from Tiflis to Tbilisi. Also, in this period, a new direction of Georgian national identity – extra-territoriality – appeared and supported by the government. Although the *korenizatsiya* policy was based on the denial of

extra-territoriality, the promotion of national territorial expansion had been started with the Great Retreat policy.

As the operational and tactical conditions gradually changed in favor of the Soviets in the Second World War, the Soviet leadership began to consider the scenarios of possible territorial expansions against two neighboring states – Iran and Turkey. The extra-territorial aspects of Azerbaijani and Kurdish identities were mobilized in the direction of Iran, and as a result, Soviet troops occupied the northern regions of Iran inhabited by ethnic Azerbaijanis and Kurds and created Bolshevik quasi-states there – namely, Azadistan and Mahabad Kurdish Republic. Although the leadership of the Georgian SSR tried to take advantage of the favorable geopolitical situation to resettle the Georgians living in Iran – also known as Fereydan Georgians - to Georgia, this process did not yield any results (Goff, 2020: 63).

At that time, Turkey was defined as the main direction of the extra-territorial dimension of the Georgian national identity. In 1945, in an article published by Georgian historians Simon Dzhnashia and Nikolai Berdzenishvili in the *Komunisti* newspaper, Turkey's cooperation with Nazi Germany during the war was criticized and the handing over of the Black Sea coasts of Turkey and the Laz-inhabited areas of eastern Anatolia to Soviet Georgia was evaluated as a means of restoring “historical justice” (Goff, 2020: 73). The widespread publication of this article throughout the USSR and its transmission to foreign media indicates that the theses in the article directly served the Soviet leadership interests of supporting Georgia's territorial claims against Turkey.

Unlike Iran, Soviet claims in the direction of Turkey remained only on paper and military annexation was never implemented. Although Soviet Georgia failed in its plans regarding Turkey and Iran, its territory was, indeed, expanded. A part of the dissolved Chechen-Ingush ASSR was given to the Georgian SSR, and as a result, Georgia grew by 7,100 km². The Soviet leadership's legitimization of Georgian territorial expansions had long-lasting effects on Georgian national identity. The willingness of the Soviet leadership to use augmented Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia to legitimize Soviet annexation claims encouraged local leaders to look beyond their own republics. It did not take long for them to link external claims to internal ones, setting a new course for intra- and inter-republic national relations during and after the war (Goff, 2020: 81).

Thus, six months after the end of the war, in November 1945, the General Secretary of Georgia, Kandid Charkviani, raised the issue of the annexation of three districts – namely, Balaken, Gakh, Zagatala – of the neighboring Azerbaijani SSR. Although the Azerbaijani-Georgian territorial quarrel did not enter an active phase and the issue was soon calmed down by the Soviet leadership, this act of Charkviani in itself is a good example of how the post-war political situation had motivated Bolshevik leaders to bring otherwise nationalistic elements into their agenda. Another event contributed to the strengthening of the ethno-political status of the Georgians in Georgia during this period was the fact that ethnic groups belonging to the Kartvelian language family, such as Adjarians, Mingrelians, Svans, Laz people, were officially designated as ‘Georgian’ since the 1940s.

If we are to continue with other ethnic groups in the hierarchy, it is interesting that Ossetians continued to hold the second place. Thus, from the point of view of toponym change, the process of “Georgianization” of Ossetian toponyms in South Ossetia was not recorded, and the results of the “Ossetianization” policy, which took place during the period of *korenizatsiya*, were preserved. Despite the fact that South Ossetia avoided toponymic cleansing, the ethno-political status of Ossetians, in general, saw a decline. Thus, in 1937, the de facto “independent” elements of autonomy existing in South Ossetia were abolished and the region became more dependent on Tbilisi. Two years later, the Latin script was abolished, and the Cyrillic alphabet was prepared for Ossetian on the basis of Georgian language. In North Ossetia, however, the transition to the Cyrillic alphabet took place on the basis of Russian. In the words of Arsène Saparov (2015: 144), the grounds for the “Georgianization” of the people living in South Ossetia and the Russification of the people living in North Ossetia were laid. In 1940, all schools teaching Ossetian in South Ossetia ceased to operate, and Ossetian students continued to receive education either in Georgian or Russian (Hewitt, 1989: 139).

Armenians were positioned after Ossetians in the hierarchy, as in the period of *korenizatsiya*. In this period, only three toponym changes occurred in Javakheti (Javakh) region, where Armenians lived compactly. But interestingly Armenian-inhabited settlements in Abkhazia were subjected to a serious “toponymic cleansing”. The names of the absolute majority of Armenian-inhabited settlements, which mostly had toponyms of Slavic and sometimes Turkic origins, were changed in 1948 and replaced with Georgian toponyms. Thus, in the 1940s, more than 50% of the toponyms changed in the Abkhazian ASSR covered areas where Armenians lived. It is an equally interesting phenomenon why the central authorities decided to rename

more Armenian toponyms than Abkhaz ones. Although it still must be researched; it is possible to claim that Armenian toponyms became first target since it was not Abkhaz but Armenian toponyms that were the biggest non-Georgian toponyms in Abkhazia.

Azerbaijanis come next after Armenians. In 1945, when Charkviani raised the Gakh/Saingilo issue, and the first secretary of the Communist Party of the Azerbaijan SSR, Mirjafar Bagirov, not only rejected the territorial claims of his Georgian colleague, but even demanded the incorporation of Borchaly to the Azerbaijani SSR (Goff, 2020: 83). Although neither Bagirov's nor Charkviani's demands were realized, the ethno-political situation in both countries changed as much after this territorial quarrel. At a time when the KGB of the Azerbaijan SSR began to tighten its control over ethnic Georgians living in Gakh, the process of changing the Azerbaijani toponyms in Borchaly was started. As a result of the changes covering the years 1947-1949, the names of all cities with Azerbaijani toponyms located in Borchaly were replaced with Georgian toponyms: Sarvan to Marneuli, Bashkechid to Dmanisi, Garayazi to Gardabani.

Abkhazs again took the second-to-the-last in the scale, despite the fact that the ethno-political situation was much worse than during the *korenizatsiya* period. In 1936, Nestor Lakoba, the head of the Central Executive Committee of the Abkhaz SSR, who played an important role in shaping the modern Abkhaz national identity, was poisoned by the wine he drank during a dinner he had with Lavrentiy Beria, Stalin's close comrade-in-arms, in Tbilisi (Saparov, 2015: 151). A fairly popular figure, Nakoba was accused of "latent nationalism", "aiding Trotsky", and "attempting to assassinate Stalin", and even after his burial, his body was exhumed, burned, and buried in a completely different place, upon Beria's argument that "traitors do not deserve to be buried in Abkhazia" (Khrushchev, 2004: 188). What was done against Lakoba was an indication of the beginning of the period of repression in Abkhazia. Repressions were not limited to Lakoba; supporters of Lakoba, mostly ethnic Abkhazs, were dismissed, some exiled, and others executed. The purged Lakoba's network was soon replaced by individuals loyal to Beria, who were mostly ethnic Georgians (Goff, 2020: 84).

In 1938, the Latin alphabet was abolished in Abkhazia and a new alphabet was created based on the Georgian alphabet (Hewitt, 1998: 171). Since 1941, education in the Abkhazian language was gradually reduced in Abkhazia, and by 1946, this process reached its culmination point - the complete cessation of Abkhaz education (Hewitt, 1998: 172). The interesting part

of the matter is that during the re-organization of Abkhaz schools, Abkhaz students were transferred to Georgian-language schools instead of Russian-language schools (Saparov, 2015: 151). Also, since the beginning of the 1940s, the process of educating Abkhaz cadres for political management was stopped (Saparov, 2015: 152).

Two events that affected the ethno-political status of Abkhazia during this period should be specially mentioned. First, immediately after the dismissal of Lakoba, a committee called *Abkhazpereselenstroy* was created in September 1937 on the basis of Beria's instructions to relocate people from other regions of Georgia to Abkhazia. As a result of the activity of this committee, 10 new *kolkhozes* covering 10,000 people were created in 1937-1941 on the territory of the Abkhaz SSR (Dzhonua, 1992: 242). These *kolkhozes*, consisting of ethnic Georgians, were established mainly among Abkhaz villages and were exempted from taxes on the products they produced (Indjgiya, 2004). A clear example of the planning of this resettlement at the highest level is the document called the *Action Plan for Resettlement in Abkhazia 1940-1944* prepared by the Committee of Ministers of the USSR in 1940 (Indjgiya, 2004). It was on the basis of this document that thousands of families were forcibly resettled from different areas of Soviet Georgia to new locations within the administrative borders of Abkhazia.

As for toponymy, the names of 95 settlements were changed in this period, and the absolute majority of the toponyms given in that period were Georgian. Cities in Abkhazia, as in Borchaly, were particularly affected by toponym changes. In 1936, the name of the city of Sukhum was changed to Sukhumi, and in 1948, the name of the city of Psyrtskha was changed to Akhali Afon. Although the number of changed toponyms of Abkhaz origin was much less than toponyms of Slavic origin, a special point should be noted here. In Abkhazia, ethnic Abkhazs never had a demographic preponderance, even though they were majority in the 19th century. For example, in the Abkhaz ASSR, where about 312,000 people lived according to the 1939 census, only about 57,000 people (i.e., only 18% of the population) were qualified as ethnic Abkhazs.

In this period, the last place of the hierarchy was occupied by Greeks, Germans and Ahiska Turks, as in the same period of *korenizatsiya*. A full "toponymic war" was waged by Soviet authorities against those ethnic groups and as a result, their national spaces were completely erased from Georgia's landscape. The mere fact that these three ethnic groups had relations

with foreign “unfriendly” countries (Greeks - Greece, Ahiska Turks - Turkey, Germans - Germany) had increased the feeling of insecurity towards them in the Soviet ruling elite. In 1942, the Nazi army achieved serious successes in the battlefield and even managed to control a number of points in Abkhazia. The tolerance of the Soviet side, which was fighting a life-and-death battle, against those who had or were likely to be related to the Nazis in one way or another, was reduced to zero, and the sharpest repressive methods were used.

In 1941-1942, all Germans living in the South Caucasus were unequivocally deported to Central Asia. In 1943, as the situation at the front gradually changed in favor of the Soviets, the process of punishing the “culprits” in the South Caucasus was restarted. In 1944, by special order of Stalin, about 95,000 Ahiska Turks, Greeks, Kurds, Hemshin people³ were deported from Georgia and sent to Central Asia (Goff, 2020: 84). But before the first waves of deportation ended, in 1949 about 45,000 people - mostly non-Georgians - were expelled from Georgia with “Operation Volna”. Due to the toponym changes that took place in the 1940s, all the toponyms representing the deported peoples were erased and thus the existence of German, Greek and Ahiska Turkic national spaces in the territory of Soviet Georgia came to an end.

The consequences of these deportations for Georgian national identity-building were quite significant. So, although Georgia represented only about 2% of the USSR in terms of population, Georgia represented about 14% of the deportees in the USSR (Kaiser, 2015: 84). Discussing the uniqueness of Georgia, historian Krista Goff (2020: 85) concludes that Tbilisi Bolsheviks, who took advantage of the closeness with Moscow and Georgia’s special political weight in the USSR at that time, used the opportunity to deport “non-Georgian elements” from the country for further “Georgianization” of the landscape. This policy has really paid off and many of the places where ethnic minorities used to live were, indeed, Georgianized. For example, although the ethnic Georgians of the Meskheta region were usually 10-15% of the population, they were able to gain an absolute advantage as a result of the mass deportation of the Ahiska Turks.

³ Hemshin people or Hamshenis – Muslim Armenians.

Rise of Nationalism

The nationality policies of the Stalin era left traces on the Union, the results of which lasted for years. The strengthening of the hegemony of the titular nations, which was supported at the state level, brought back elements of the “Great Russian chauvinism” that Stalin had openly criticized at the time. For the Georgian Bolsheviks, who were able to successfully defend their interests on the Union-level policymaking during the war and had a certain degree of “independence”, the post-war period meant the loss of this hegemony. This period was a period when the non-titular peoples began to fight more actively for their lost rights, and the political elite of Georgia further distanced itself from the Centre.

Although Georgians were still at the top of the ethno-political hierarchy as the titular nation, the situation in Georgia was not entirely clear-cut for Georgians in the 1960s-1980s. Speaking at the 20th party congress on February 25, 1956, Nikita Khrushchev severely criticized the Stalin cult and even mocked the relations between the Georgian people and him (Khrushchev, 1956). The Georgian SSR, which was considered second in terms of political weight in the USSR during Stalin’s time, did not welcome this speech and considered it an attack on the Georgian national identity. In March 1956, the crowd, angered by the Moscow’s anti-Georgian/anti-Stalin sentiment, held large demonstrations in Tbilisi and more than 20 people lost their lives due to the intervention of the Soviet Internal Troops. The actions started with slogans against the government’s new policy and ended with anti-Russian Georgian nationalist slogans.

Khrushchev’s agricultural policies led Georgian peasants to suffer from many fields they had been engaged in for years. The Inguri hydropower plant, which was started to be built on the administrative border of Abkhazia-Georgia, caused great environmental damage (Rayfield, 2012: 369). Anger against Khrushchev, who removed Stalin’s grave from Red Square, reached such a high level that some groups even tried to assassinate him while he was on a visit to Georgia. With Brezhnev’s rise to power, corruption became more chronic and the transition of Georgian society to a de facto capitalist way of life accelerated (Rayfield, 2012: 370).

In 1972, a new era was started when Eduard Shevarnadze, who grew up in a religious family, came to power in Georgia. During Shevarnadze’s rule, several important moments happened in terms of further “Georgianization” of Georgia. It was during his time as a result of increased

urbanization and industrialization that Georgians were able to gain a demographic advantage in Tbilisi. The resettlement of Iranian Georgians to Georgia was started. It was also as a result of Shevarnadze's policy that Georgian Jews started moving to Israel, and more than 25,000 Jews left Georgia within seven years (Rayfield, 2012: 371). In 1977, with the election of Ilia II as the patriarch, churchgoing was no longer persecuted and new churches began to be built across Georgia.

By the 1980s, political activism had already begun to rise in Georgia. Essentially socio-ecological issues such as the use of the David Gareja monastery as an artillery base, the construction of a nuclear power plant on the Black Sea coast, and the construction of a railway along the Daryal pass, became anti-government slogans and were considered by the nationalists as an attack on the Georgian identity. The thesis that the Bolshevik government pursues an anti-Georgian policy reached its climax when the 1978 USSR constitution prioritized Russian over other languages, including Georgian. Moscow had to back down in the face of protests by thousands of people in Tbilisi, and the status of the Georgian language was protected in the new constitution (Rayfield, 2012: 371).

In this period, serious changes took place on the national hierarchy. So, for the first time, the Abkhazs were able to sufficiently raise their ethno-political status using the opportunities created by the post-Stalinist period. Education in the Abkhaz language was restored, and the Cyrillic-based Abkhaz alphabet was launched (Saparov, 2015: 152). 25 toponym changes took place during this period and a certain number of toponyms Georgianized during the Stalin period were reversed. The "rebirth" for Abkhazia also manifested itself in political representation. So, if ethnic Abkhazians had only 4% representation in the city/village secretaries in 1949, this figure reached 40% in 1978 (Slider 1985: 54). Since the mid-1950s, only in Abkhazia, ethnic Abkhazs began to be appointed as the first and second secretaries, while in other regions, one of the secretaries was definitely Russian (d'Encausse, 1979: 144).

The apex of Abkhazia's "rebirth" took place in 1977, with the publication of an open letter containing anti-Abkhazian sentiments by the Georgian authorities. The protests that followed the letter demanded that Abkhazia be attached to the Russian SFSR. Protests began to take place in some regions in a more violent form, and even the statue of Georgian writer Shota Rustaveli was attacked, some of the Georgian name plates were destroyed. With Moscow's reaction to the events of 1977-1978, the ethno-political status of the Abkhazs became even

more stronger. It was during this period that Abkhaz State University was established in Sukhumi, Abkhazian newspapers were launched, Abkhaz television and radio channels were opened for the first time, and the former Georgian-Abkhaz theater in Sukhumi became a purely Abkhaz one (Hewitt, 1989: 141).

For the Ossetians, who were on the next part of the hierarchy, the situation was more negative. In 1961, as part of the post-Stalinist policy, the name of the administrative capital of South Ossetia, Stalinir, was renamed to Tskhinvali, the Georgian name of the city. However, the weakening of the ethno-political status of South Ossetia was mostly due to socio-economic reasons. Thus, since the 1960s, with the increase of industrialization and urbanization, the population of South Ossetia began to migrate from mountainous villages to the central parts of Georgia – particularly, Gori and Tbilisi. The demographic problem in South Ossetia was so chronic that the post-war population of the region never returned to its pre-war levels (Kabisova, 1980: 179). Although the Cyrillic-based Ossetian alphabet was restored in the post-Stalin period, South Ossetia's rapid disintegration due to socio-economic reasons and very poor development in itself had a negative impact on the ethno-political status of Ossetians.

If we now turn to the Armenians, the Javakheti (Javakh) region, where Armenians lived compactly, became a victim of geopolitical struggle. Thus, especially during the Cold War, Javakheti began to suffer from additional security limitations due to its border with Turkey. The 147th motorized rifle regiment of the Soviet army and intensive special service networks were located in Javakheti, and the region was declared a closed military zone (Melikyan, 2009: 189). The entry and exit of not only foreign citizens, but also Soviet citizens to Javakheti was strictly controlled, and the arrival of people who did not live in the region became practically impossible in many cases (Overland, 2009: 3). Also, the post-Stalin period was equally difficult for the Armenian community of Tbilisi, which historically played an important role in the ethno-political status of Georgian Armenians. Thus, the city's Armenian population remained almost stable (150,000) in the post-Stalin period and declined in percentage terms due to the increase in the city's Georgian population. In addition, more and more Georgian Armenians have begun to turn to the Armenian SSR to meet their cultural and educational needs.

Azerbaijanis, occupying the last place of the scale, were the ethnos that quantitatively suffered the most from toponymic "Georgianization" in the post-Stalin period. Thus, while some of the changed Abkhaz and Armenian toponyms were restored in the 40s, no Azerbaijani toponym

was restored in the post-Stalin era. On the contrary, a number of Azerbaijani villages were renamed with new Georgian names. The migration of Azerbaijanis to the neighboring Azerbaijan SSR, much like Georgian Armenians, had become more intensive especially after the late 1970s. The migration of ethnic Azerbaijanis with the lowest level of knowledge of Georgian to Baku instead of Tbilisi for better socio-economic conditions had led to a gradual decrease of the Azerbaijani population, especially in cities such as Dmanisi.

Conclusion

The aim of the present research was to examine how toponym changes were used for nation-building purposes in Soviet Georgia. This study appears to be the first research in English that thoroughly examined the toponym changes in Soviet Georgia and its role in the ethno-political system of the country. The research has identified that the renaming acts had a systemic nature and toponyms were intensively used for building the Soviet Georgian nation. Besides making several contributions to the current literature on critical toponymy, the findings of this research complement those of earlier studies regarding Soviet Armenia and Soviet Azerbaijan; hence, it could conceivably be argued that toponyms were used to strengthen the ethno-political status of the titular nations in all three countries of the South Caucasus.

To be more particular, the political and cultural landscape of Georgia became more homogenous due to the toponymic erosions carried out by the Soviet authorities against various ethnic minorities. The cultural and political landscape was not, however, simply black and white when it came to the “Georgianization” process. The nature of relations between the state apparatus and ethnic minorities frequently changed mainly because of the ideologically same yet fundamentally different nationality policies pursued by the Soviet authorities. For example, if the principles for creating national spaces for the ethnic groups residing in Georgia were strictly followed during the early years of Soviet rule, the situation drastically changed on the eve of the Second World War, and the political status of all ethnic minorities was obviously lowered. In the post-Stalin era, however, national discussions grew more heated in Georgia, as they did in the other parts of the Union.

This research also exposes many intriguing details concerning the Soviet Georgian system of ethnopolitics. The study demonstrates that Ossetians and Armenians were the ethnic groups whose national-cultural spaces were adversely affected the least throughout Soviet Georgia's history. It is possible to hypothesize that close cultural and religious ties between the ethnic Ossetians and Georgians, and more active participation of ethnic Armenians in the country's socio-political life did play a role in shaping the position of the Soviet authorities towards these two ethnic groups. The political leadership of Soviet Georgia not only agreed to grant South Ossetia territorial autonomy but also tolerated the widespread substitution of Georgian

toponyms in the autonomous region with Ossetian toponyms, even though there had been a bloody armed confrontation between the Ossetians and the Georgians before the Soviet era.

On the other hand, observations enable us to draw the conclusion that the Soviet Georgian leadership felt more insecure about the Abkhaz populace. Contrary to Ossetians, there were no significant violent conflicts between Abkhaz and Georgians prior to the Soviet era, but the toponymic cleansing of the Abkhaz national-cultural space in Soviet Georgia was more intense. It appears that the political leadership of Soviet Georgia developed a sense of caution after seeing how Abkhaz national intellectuals were more pro-independence, particularly in the 1920s. The study also reveals that the sense of insecurity against the ethnic Azerbaijani population intensified, and the change of Azerbaijani toponyms was carried out more rapidly, especially after the Second World War. This can be regarded as a response to the increased sense of insecurity and surveillance that Soviet Azerbaijani authorities carried out against the ethnic Georgian people of the Gakh-Zagatala region when Tbilisi made territorial claims against Soviet Azerbaijan in the 1940s. Another interesting point is the fact that Mingrelian toponyms were also heavily targeted, despite being a Kartvel-speaking population. This coincided with the Mingrelian Affair, which led to the arrest of ethnic Mingrelians at the highest levels of the governmental leadership in 1951–1952.

Germans, Greeks, and Ahiska Turks had the lowest levels of ethnopolitical status in Soviet Georgia, according to this study. It would be incorrect to assume that the political establishment had the same attitude toward all three ethnic groups, though. The study permits us to make the conclusion that, while the Second World War had a huge role in the oppression of Germans and Greeks, the feeling of insecurity was more systemic and deeper in the case of Ahiska Turks. For example, the Soviet Georgian authorities permitted the deported Germans and Greeks to return in the post-war era, whereas Ahiska Turks were not given the same opportunity. Ahiska Turks have frequently requested Moscow to recognize their right to return, but Tbilisi has adamantly objected to this. It should be mentioned that more than 105,000 Ahiska Turks who were deported from the Meskheta region in 1944 have not been granted the right to return yet. Therefore, it can be presumed that the political authorities saw the return of Ahiska Turks — Muslims who were significantly more numerous than Germans and Greeks — to Georgia as an obstacle to the homogenization of the nation.

This study also outlines the means used by various ethnic groups to resist the toponymic cleansing attempts. The distinction between autonomies and non-autonomies becomes more obvious when the toponymic research is analyzed, particularly in the post-Stalin era. Along with the autonomous status, the relationships with the foreign center also had a specific positive impact on how well-suited it was for different ethnic communities to fend off toponymic cleansing. In particular, it is the post-Stalin era, when the previous “Georgianization” activities were reversed and Abkhaz, Ossetian nationalism was to some extent tolerated, when the relations of Abkhazia and South Ossetia with Moscow are noted more clearly. On the other hand, Soviet Azerbaijan and Armenia had traditionally provided the de facto protection for ethnic Azerbaijanis and Armenians, respectively. For those who did not have such advantages (autonomy, kin-state, etc.), the toponymy policy has manifested itself in a more antagonistic form.

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Appendix 1: Database sources

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Appendix 2: List of renamed toponyms

Borchaly

Bolnisi (2 renaming acts)

Year:	Previous name:	Changed name:
1921	Katharinenfeld	Liuksemburg
1944	Liuksemburg	Bolnisi

Gardabani (8 renaming acts)

Year	Previous name	Changed name
1940s	Gruntal	Ulyanovka
1940s	Rosenfeld	Sartichala
1943	Traunbensthal-Rosa	Anbartapa
1943	Goffungstal	Akhalsheni
1947	Garayazi	Gardabani
1953	Tatyanovka	Kalinino
1972	Satskhenhes	Saakadze
1973	Soghanlug	Ponichala

Dmanisi (18 renaming acts)

Year:	Previous name:	Changed name:
1921	Mis-meden	Jaraieri
1940s	Goyleyen	Kakliani
1943	Valdheim	Kirovisi
1947	Bashkechit	Dmanisi
1949	Ambarlo	Ganakhleba
1949	Kalamsha	Gantiadi
1949	Jaraieri	Gora

1949	Karakilsa	Vake
1949	Keivan-Bul-Asan	Velispiri
1949	Mamlosopeli	Mamula
1949	Gorunjuki	Mashavera
1949	Mahmudlo	Mtisdziri
1949	Armudlo	Pantiani
1949	Gashgatala	Sakire
1949	Demirbulag	Sarkineti
1949	Busugala	Kariani
1949	Mija	Javakhi
1959	Bogazkesen	Tkispiri

Marneuli (7 renaming acts)

Year	Previous name:	Changed name:
1925	Shulaver	Shaumiani
1929	Sarvan	Marneuli
1940s	Mirzoevka	Norgiughi
1940s	Gaya Khojaly	Enikendi
1944	Traubenberg	Tamarisi
1947	Borhcalo	Marneuli
1959	Gorarkhy	Algeti

Tsalka (5 renaming acts)

Year:	Previous name:	Changed name:
1921	Alexandrovka	Rosenberg
1932	Barmakhsyz	Tsalka
1940s	Rosenberg	Molotovo
1940s	Iakublo	Chapaevka
1950s	Molotovo	Trialeti

Tetritskaro (3 renaming acts)

Year:	Previous name:	Changed name:
1940	Aghbulag	Tetritskaro
1941	Elizabetal	Asureti
1947	Goristavi	Gudarekhi

Meskheta and Javakheti**Akhalkalaki (6 renaming acts)**

Year:	Previous name:	Changed name:
1920s	Patara Kartsakh	Filipovka
1920s	Janchga	Bejano
1920s	Burnashen	Burnasheti
1920s	Gom	Gomani
1920s	Kuridadesh	Dadeshi
1930s	Zres	Kirovakan

Bogdanovka (2 renaming acts)

Year:	Previous name:	Changed name:
1930s	Ezhovakan	Zhdanovka
1930s	Troitskoe	Kalinino

Abkhazia

Gagra (38 renaming acts)

Year:	Previous name:	Changed name:
1930	Bzibi-Khevi	Bzipta
1935	Asabulei	Kultuchastok
1940s	Adjiryuara	Somkhur-Kheoba
1940s	Gruzinskoe ushelie	Sakartvelos Kheoba
1940s	Sredne Kovalovskoe	Imerkhevi
1944	Yermolov	Gantiadi
1948	Yermolovsk	Leselidze
1948	Manakluk	Kldekari
1948	Abgaborta	Bzipi
1948	Somkhur-Kheoba	Ipnari
1948	Mekhadir	Nakaduli
1948	Rogozhino	Vashlovani
1948	Evdokimovka	Zegani
1948	Otluk	Kldiani
1948	Vosemtskoe	Mukhnari
1948	Gopili Kazarma	Salkhino
1948	Demerche-Gyughi	Psouskhevi
1948	Troitskoe	Chanchkeri
1948	Alpiyskoe	Alpuri
1948	Shurinovka	Chodniskari
1948	Goshendak-Derekei	Tsablani
1948	Kovalovskoe	Vake
1948	Ermolovka	Kheivani
1948	Kultuchastok	Kultubani
1948	Baranovo	Tsalkoti
1948	Orehovo	Kakliani
1948	Khristophorova	Baghnari

1949	Bzipta	Bzibiskhevi
1952	Lidzava	Ldzani
1955	Bzibiskhevi	Bzibta
1955	Kakliani	Orekhovo
1955	Psouskhevi	Demerchents
1955	Alpuri	Alpiyskoe
1955	Ldzani	Lidzava
1955	Sakartvelos Kheoba	Gruzinskoe ushelie
1956	Shafranova	Tsinevala
1960s	Osechko	Atsijkva
1967	Nakaduli	Mekhadiri

Gudauti (23 renaming acts)

Year:	Previous name:	Changed name:
1925	Petropavlovskoe	Primorskoe
1943	Ashitsra	Akhalsopeli
1948	Psirtskha	Akhali Afon
1948	Ladari-Arhabla	Abgharkhuki
1948	Kavakluk	Agaraki
1948	Mesame Karkhana	Arsauli
1948	Primorskoe	Gogitskari
1948	Armyanskoe Ushelie	Bziskhevi
1948	Tvana	Tvaanarkhu
1948	Anukhva-Armyanskiy	Meore Anukhva
1948	Chobanluk	Sadjoge
1948	Tretiy Zavod	Gogirdtskhali
1948	Kalmut	Bambukovani
1948	Sanaptsagyugh Atnaptsagyugh	Kvemo Mtsara
1948	Mingrelskoe Grecheskoe	Tsitrusovani

1948	Artinusta Kochkanyanovka Papastsesgyugh Khactur	Shuamta
1948	Tsentrалnoe Komsomolskoe Krasnoe	Ptsirkha
1948	Oktyabrskoe	Oktomberi
1952	Baklanovka	Aatsi
1955	Axali Afon	Noviy Afon
1955	Salkhino	Veisolvka
1955	Bziskhevi	Armyanskoe Ushelie
1967	Gogitskari	Arsaul

Sukhumi (21 renaming acts)

Year:	Previous name:	Changed name:
1936	Sukhum	Sukhumi
1943	Naidorf	Akhalsopeli
1943	Mikhailovka	Shroma
1943	Beshkardash	Mtisubani
1943	Ekaterinovka	Kelasuri
1944	Andreevka	Akhalsheni
1944	Konstantinovskoe	Odishi
1948	Derekei	Mtiskalta
1948	Reper	Satave
1948	Kestaneluk	Ochubure
1948	Chevizluk	Tbeti
1948	Abazadag	Kvaloni
1948	Semenli	Tskurgili
1948	Marinskoe	Lekukhone
1948	Yurievka	Zegani
1948	Tsiperanto	Chegola

1948	Askerovka	Amzara
1948	Tsugoravka	Gorana
1948	Arka Makhale Tskhara Shubara Khetina	Imertskali
1953	Imertskali	Shubara
1953	Jirtskali	Adzybjava

Gulripshi (29 renaming acts)

Year:	Previous name:	Changed name:
1920s	Kats	Konsovkhov
1940s	Konsovkhov	Otoriani
1943	Vladimirovka	Kodori
1948	Estonka	Baghnasheni
1948	Lemsa	Tskaro
1948	Chemberg	Kadari
1948	Poltavo-Kelasuri	Kelasuri
1948	Yaikinluk Ivterluk	Goriani
1948	Ivanovo-Aleekseevka Ordu Kuchuk Stambul Nakhalovka	Parnauti
1948	Kominternovskoe Kesyanovka	Mziseuli
1948	Bazar Khactur Megrelovka	Tesebelda
1948	Suli	Kirnati
1948	Nijniy Fundukluk	Kvemo Tkhilovani
1948	Verkhniy Fundukluk	Zemo Tkhilovani

1948	Gruzinskoe Poltava	Marani
1948	Bolshoy Kraevich	Shuamta
1948	Maliy Kraevich	Tsiplovani
1948	Dandaut	Kaklivni
1948	Naa-Armyanskoe	Naa
1948	Khizarukha	Nedzona
1948	Verkhnyaya Bebutovka	Zenobani
1948	Nijnaya Bebutovka	Kvenobani
1948	Nikolaevka	Chala
1948	Zamayskoe	Maisi
1948	Bogaz	Veli
1948	Asliangiar	Mtiani
1948	Krasnitskoe	Tsatskhvni
1955	Kodori	Vladimirovka
1955	Baghnasheni	Estonka

Ochamchire (5 renaming acts)

Year	Previous name	Changed name
1948	Nabjou	Atara
1948	Atara Armyanskaya	Meore Atara
1948	Armyanskaya Naa	Naa
1948	Kyrkluk	Otoronjia
1955	Meore Atara	Atara Armyanskaya

Gali (5 renaming acts)

Year:	Previous name:	Changed name:
1925	Bedia	Vtoraya Bedia
1952	Marchkhaponi	Ganakhleba
1952	Vtoraya Bedia	Maore Bedia
1952	Gabar	Nabakevi

1952	Didi Tsipuri	Etseri
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South Ossetia

Leningor (86 renaming acts)

Year:	Previous name:	Changed name:
1934	Akhalgori	Leningor
1934	Bazoantkari	Bazoant
1934	Bezantkari	Bezante
1934	Tsikhis sopeli (I)	Khokhrabyn
1934	Delkani	Dalvaz
1934	Dzeglevi	Dzegleu
1934	Javris-Ubani	Karoinag
1934	Garubani	Addagsykh
1934	Gekhavi	Jekhau
1934	Gorgasheni	Dallag-kau
1934	Ikoti	Ikot
1934	Kvemo-Boli	Dallag-Bol
1934	Zemo Boli	Uallag-Bol
1934	Lomiskhevi	Lomiskheu
1934	Morbedaantkari	Morbedant
1934	Nagomevi	Tijita
1934	Pichnari	Kuldim
1934	Khanchaveti	Abana
1934	Sarbieli	Zang
1934	Tsikhis Sopeli (II)	Khubiate
1934	Vashlovani	Fatkujin
1934	Chorchokhi	Ualvaz
1934	Khubaani	Khubiate
1934	Abrevi	Raydzast
1934	Balis-khidi	Faskakhir

1934	Tsinagari	Amdzarin
1934	Dzumatikau	Dzukate
1934	Gduleti	Bibilte
1934	Berijvari	Karon
1934	Metesman	Khussar
1934	Kedigora	Ualbil
1934	Gugitikau	Gudite
1934	Mskhlebi	Ualvaz
1934	Nijniy Bagebi	Dallag Dirgjin
1934	Nijniy Kitriuli	Tuate
1934	Orchosani	Zilakhar
1934	Sagoreti	Daran
1934	Sataguri	Kubpite
1934	Ugeltekhi	Sargau
1934	Verkhniy Kitriuli	Nalikte
1934	Verkhniy Bagebi	Uallaq Dirgjin
1934	Zemokuri	Kusan
1934	Dzamar	Dzimir
1934	Nijniy Bagina	Dallaq Bajin
1934	Verkhniy Bagina	Uallaq Bajin
1934	Kareltkari	Karelt
1934	Kenkaantkari	Kenkaant
1934	Kvemo Okhiri	Kadisar
1934	Lomis	Khussar
1934	Midelantkari	Midelant
1934	Pavliantkari	Pavliant
1934	Tinikantkari	Tinikant
1934	Zemo Okhiri	Komisar
1934	Karchokhi	Karchokh
1934	Korinta	Shroma
1934	Alevi Kvemo	Dallag Aleu
1934	Alevi Shua	Akhsaynag Aleu

1934	Kochiantkari	Shroma
1934	Metekhi	Tsagat
1934	Chrdilo	Tsariate
1934	Monasteri	Duarau
1934	Ukanmkhare	Fazran
1934	Khromitskharo	Karkuste
1934	Monasteri	Dongaron
1934	Chandari	Chandar
1934	Tsikhis-Sopeli	Betrete
1934	Boselta	Rasan
1934	Dudantkari	Dudayte
1934	Skhilonis Gorga	Kadgaron
1934	Nijniy Tskhiloni	Antonikau
1934	Verkniy Tskhiloni	Tskhilon
1934	Urtkhliani	Zazjin
1934	Veluri	Velur
1934	Chanchkharo	Arduz
1934	Chachamuri	Sabpte
1934	Balovani	Baljin
1934	Iketi	Chertkote
1934	Nadaburi	Nog Dzimir
1934	Kvemo Zakori	Dallag Zakor
1934	Shua-Zakori	Astaukkag Zakor
1934	Zemo-Zakori	Uallag Zakor
1934	Jortisi	Komrabin
1934	Kutskhoeti	Suadon
1934	Sabarkleti	Tapanrag
1934	Kvitkiri	Rabin
1934	Chkhuneti	Skunet

Tskhinvali (68 renaming acts)

Year:	Previous name:	Changed name:
1934	Tskhinvali	Stalinir
1934	Albiri	Tsutjin
1934	Akho	Arduz
1934	Bazantkari	Badzoyte
1934	Eltura	Adagjin
1934	Inauri	Rokhte
1934	Kvemo-Sotsi	Dallag Sotsi
1934	Zemo-Sotsi	Uallag Sotsi
1934	Lachauri	Rakasan
1934	Pachuri	Kartite
1934	Rekhvi	Rikhan
1934	Khubta	Barz
1934	Sakanapo	Ganzay
1934	Samtsikhro	Khasanuat
1934	Vanuri	Jigolate
1934	Shuatskhviri	Ragaudon
1934	Siata	Fugadjin
1934	Shambieti	Nazuat
1934	Shualauri	Kusan
1934	Taratkau	Tarate
1934	Chaparukhi	Razdaran
1934	Akhalisa	Naujita
1934	Tskhlebi	Donuat
1934	Nishi	Kusgau
1934	Nijniy Bikhari	Dallag Bikar
1934	Tba	Tsadiuat
1934	Kharuli	Bolatate
1934	Chalisubani	Ataga
1934	Rustavi	Rustau

1934	Jvareti	Ualvaz
1934	Ivreti	Tuate
1934	Kvirika	Khussayrag
1934	Maliy Grom	Chisil Grom
1934	Nakalakevi	Sakharuat
1934	Sabua	Rabin
1934	Sakhvireti	Sidan
1934	Telagina	Siviljin
1934	Goreti	Urssuadon
1934	Verkhnee Klivana	Uallag Ursdon
1934	Valiantkari	Ualite
1934	Khezneuli	Talajin
1934	Andisi	Falgasan
1934	Kvemo Achabeti	Dallag Achabet
1934	Monasteri	Farsag
1934	Zemo Achabeti	Uallag Achabet
1934	Tamarasheni	Tamares
1934	Satikhari	Nogtsardy
1934	Berijvari	Ragon
1934	Gogiant-kari	Gojite
1934	Naniauri	Rukhs
1934	Verkhniy Korkula	Uallag Ursadag
1934	Kheyti Prisi	Besat
1934	Nijniy Korkula	Dallag Ursadag
1934	Zemo Kere	Barkad
1934	Kvasatali	Duraftau
1934	Tbeti	Tbet
1934	Maraleti	Masig
1934	Gvria	Tsakhmar
1934	Marmazeti	Faszang
1934	Niparet	Tassarte
1934	Ortevi	Divaz

1934	Srednee Gudisi	Akhsaynag Gudis
1934	Sheleuri	Lasanuut
1934	Tliakana	Kugom
1934	Uallag Orteu	Jinuut
1934	Vanati	Vanati
1934	Tskhaltsminda	Sigdegon
1961	Stalinir	Tskhinvali

Dzau (28 renaming acts)

Year:	Previous name:	Changed name:
1934	Java	Dzau
1934	Bagati-kau	Mitbadan
1934	Biteti-kau	Biteta
1934	Shadi-kau	Khampalgom
1934	Khugati-kau	Khugate
1934	Bezanti-Kau	Bezante
1934	Didi Gupta	Styr Gufta
1934	Patara Gupta	Chisil Gufta
1934	Jidziti-kau	Dzidzoyte
1934	Shikhanturi	Rivaddon
1934	Shushuti-Kau	Tsutsite
1934	Tontobeti	Fidiuag
1934	Gulianti	Tebloyte
1934	Nadarvazi	Khadzaruut
1934	Chasavali	Nykkasan
1934	Matskhara	Kozate
1934	Nakrepa	Nanit
1934	Javistavi	Saridtate
1934	Demeti-kau	Demete
1934	Magkau	Mag
1934	Khakheti	Bazat

1934	Elbakiant-kari	Elbachi
1934	Keshelta	Cheselti
1934	Zemo Sba	Midaggag Sba
1934	Kvemo Sba	Dallag Sba
1934	Jalabet	Sandatte
1934	Ursdzuar	Bakarte
1934	Damtsvara	Sikhdte

Znaur (36 renaming acts)

Year:	Previous name:	Changed name:
1929	Mavda	Malda
1934	Okonia	Znauri
1934	Arkneti	Tokhuat
1934	Avnevis Tiliani	Durbin
1934	Didmujha	Stirtuldz
1934	Dvanis Tiliani	Lanchite
1934	Gvertevi	Kumau
1934	Kvemo Samtskharo	Gabarate
1934	Miminoskhevi	Dotsite
1934	Prinevi	Kostaykau
1934	Chorbauli	Dauon
1934	Tsnelisi	Khaznadur
1934	Gvirgvina	Didinagjin
1934	Metekhi	Lopan
1934	Patkneti	Tsadbin
1934	Churiskhevi	Durgom
1934	Tetri-Mindori	Radzakhte
1934	Albiri	Baron
1934	Georgitsminda	Isachchikau
1934	Mugrisi	Labirdte
1934	Ojora	Rindz

1934	Telagina	Sivildzjin
1934	Tikhisubani	Znaurkau
1934	Khundisubani	Azat
1934	Garistavi	Donisar
1934	Vakhtana	Raydzast
1934	Chdileti	Khubetste
1934	Akhalisopeli	Nogkau
1934	Bekmari	Fadison
1934	Gviagina	Akhsaljgin
1934	Sajvare	Ulafan
1934	Tormaneuli	Kharisjin
1934	Chesiag	Aliguat
1934	Kvatettri	Ursdur
1934	Lashe	Dallag Ursdur
1934	Khorogi	Ivaron