



**NOMEN EST OMEN? NAMING AND  
RENAMING OF PLACES IN MINORITY  
INHABITED AREAS IN GEORGIA**

María Diego Gordón

ECMI WORKING PAPER #103

December 2017



The European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) is a non-partisan institution founded in 1996 by the Governments of the Kingdom of Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany, and the German State of Schleswig-Holstein. ECMI was established in Flensburg, at the heart of the Danish-German border region, in order to draw from the encouraging example of peaceful coexistence between minorities and majorities achieved here. ECMI's aim is to promote interdisciplinary research on issues related to minorities and majorities in a European perspective and to contribute to the improvement of interethnic relations in those parts of Western and Eastern Europe where ethno-political tension and conflict prevail.

ECMI Working Papers are written either by the staff of ECMI or by outside authors commissioned by the Centre. As ECMI does not propagate opinions of its own, the views expressed in any of its publications are the sole responsibility of the author concerned.

**ECMI Working Paper # 103**

**European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI)**

**Director: Prof. Dr. Tove H. Malloy**

**© ECMI 2017**

ISSN 1435-9812; ISSN-Internet 2196-4890



# NOMEN EST OMEN? NAMING AND RE-NAMING OF PLACES IN MINORITY INHABITED AREAS IN GEORGIA

*Georgia is home for almost 490,000 members of different ethnic minority groups, people that are mostly inhabiting the Kvemo Kartli and Samkhtse-Javakheti regions. Since the beginning of the 1990's claims have been made by local activists and some NGOs regarding the renaming of their villages in these areas. It has long been discussed the pivotal role played by place-names in the formation of the collective memory of a country. Hence, even though these names are perceived as an unquestionable part of everyday landscape, they are a really valuable reflection of the different political tendencies that the governments and regimes are following, for example, regarding ethnic and national minorities. Firstly, the aim of this working paper is to provide a comprehensive overview of the changes that the topographical landscape in the minority inhabited areas in Georgia have experienced since 1921. Secondly, to explain and contextualize the reasons behind the very different regimes and governments to execute these changes.*

**María Diego Gordón**

**December 2017**

**ECMI Working Paper # 103**

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Year 1990. The inhabitants of the village of Kochulo woke up with a surprise waiting for them. The sign on the main road had been changed during the night. They now lived in Chapala. However, this was not the only case, since 1918 the same scenario has been lived in different villages spread all around the districts of the area until nowadays.

In July 2015, during the Dinamo Tbilisi - Gabala (Azerbaijani team) football game in Azerbaijan people carried banners in both English and Azerbaijani, claiming territory for their country as well as disputing place names: “Borchali is ancient Azerbaijan land”; “Sarvan no Marneuli”; “Bostandere No Rustavi”; and “ChorukGemerli! No Bolnisi!”<sup>1</sup>. In the context of these recent events, the issue of naming and re-naming places has once again come to the fore and the



discussion been reopened. A discussion involving a diverse variety of actors, whose opinions are extremely polarized<sup>2</sup>.

Many scholars have underlined the role of place-names as a tool in the formation of the collective memory of a country. As Derek H. Alderman recalled in his study, *Place naming and the Interpretation of Cultural Landscapes*, “Naming is a powerful vehicle for promoting identification with the past and locating oneself within wider networks of memory”<sup>3</sup>. Even though these names are perceived as an unquestionable part of everyday landscape, or perhaps because of this, toponyms are a reliable source to track the different national building processes that a country has been through, and the place of ethnic minorities in the configuration of the consequent national identification. In such an ethnically diverse state, where the 16% of the population consist of ethnic minorities<sup>4</sup>, (which makes it the most diverse one in the South Caucasus region) spotting a light in this issue could be a good indicator of those tendencies in Georgian soil.

This research analyzes the relation between the naming and re-naming of places and the changing political attitudes towards ethnic minorities since 1918. Therefore, the objective of this working paper, far from being the elucidation of which of the toponyms are the ones which hold the biggest historical value (if the ones used by ethnic minorities or the ones used for renaming them), is to show the way that toponyms (and their development) portrayed the relation between the Georgian state and the minorities inhabiting the territory, during the last century. Or in other words, have the Georgian authorities in different periods and regimes embraced their multi-ethnic history or have they tried to erase it

and replaced it by an ethnically Georgian exclusive one?

In order to accomplish this, the research focused on six of the municipalities of the Kvemo Kartli and Samkhtse Javakheti regions in Georgia, specifically the ones where ethnic minorities make up more than the 50% of the population.

Chapter 2 explores theoretical background of the naming and renaming processes, the role of the geographical landscape in social processes and in the integration or rejection of non-dominant groups (i.e. ethnic minorities) in nation building and identity construction as it is portrayed in social sciences.

Chapter 3 exposes an overview of every analyzed district and its ethnic demography, principally concentrating on dynamics and relationships within the diverse ethnic groups that have been populating the analyzed areas and the etymologic characteristics and development of their toponyms. In order to achieve that goal, it employs results of the quantitative research.

Chapter 4 describes and deepens into all the different big renaming processes that the region experienced since 1918 until nowadays, with the respective socio-political contextualization. Reference will also be made to the legal framework.

Eventually, chapter 5 presents the conclusions and main findings that this research has made.

The majority of the analyzed documents were in Russian and Georgian. This inconvenience made the search of post-soviet documents a titanic task, since all the official documents were written in the vernacular language (and not only, due to the fact that even not a derisory amount of the Soviet files kept in the National Archives were also edited in Georgian).



Furthermore, in Georgia there has been really little research specifically on this issue, confined to a couple of reports written by NGOs, which, although provided good hints and a first scenario to work on, were lacking accuracy. Moreover, facts and sources provided in these reports were not supported by official state documents - only by the opinion and memories of the local people and local activists.

Moreover, even though a new census was conducted in the year 2014, the results of the ethnic distribution of the population per province have not been released yet, that is why some of the quantitative data referring to the demography was based in the last published census, which is dated in 2002.

Research for this working paper was conducted between June and September 2015 and draws on both primary and secondary sources, from the last two centuries. The earliest document on place-names that has been consulted was a French map of the Russian Possessions in the Caucasus, published in 1840<sup>5</sup>. However, the first cartographic file that gives a more detailed picture of Georgian place-names is from 1903<sup>6</sup>. Even though in the case of toponyms in the Javakheti area the book *Gurjistan'is vilaet didi davt'ari*<sup>7</sup> showed a village relation of the Ninotsminda and Akhalkalaki districts, in the late 16th century.

In addition to these documents, official decrees about re-naming or re-distribution of territory issued by the Main Soviet Presidium of the Georgian SSR, covering the years 1926 to 1991, the *Kavkazski kalendar*<sup>8</sup> published in Tiflis by the Main Department of the Caucasian governor each year from 1845 to 1917 which collected statistics, references and address information on the Caucasus region.

The six volumes under the title *Administrative-Territorial Division of the Georgian SSR (1925-88)* had also been analyzed. Further on, fieldwork in the minority regions of Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti has been held. To expand the picture, meetings were conducted with representatives of minority organizations, ethnic minority NGO leaders, members of local self-governance and local authorities, students, teachers, and academic experts<sup>9</sup>.

## II. WHY PLACE NAMES?

### *2.1 The importance of toponymy in the formation of identity*

‘Nomen est ommen’ is one of the pieces of wisdom that the Roman Empire left to history. This idiom nowadays could be translated as this basic concept: names matter. Names define the reality around themselves. Simple ‘undifferentiated spaces’ become places after they are named<sup>10</sup>. Thus, toponyms are perceived as one of the most powerful and durable national symbols, playing a key role in the formation of the cultural landscape of a country.

The cultural landscape can be understood as everything which is not considered part of the so-called natural landscape. A man-made ‘paysage’, or ‘socialized nature’<sup>11</sup> which can be thought of as the auto-biography of a country, depicting the multitude of nation-building and collective memory construction processes that the territory has been through. This landscape can be considered “(to those who know how to read it all right) as the greatest historical record we possess”<sup>12</sup>.



As previously mentioned, toponyms are one of the main determinants of landscapes and the act of naming is an act of power. One who possesses the power of naming something holds control over it. Political elites have understood this for a long time. In fact, the process of place-naming has played a key role in the relations between territory and national and identity building politics since the end of the 18th century; the French Revolution was one of the first examples of the use of the landscape “for the purpose of political representation”<sup>13</sup>.

Since then, political regimes have usually tried to represent and manipulate landscapes in pursuance of endorsing their own ideological and political goals. All these acts were pursued for sake of validating their legitimacy, controlling the space and promoting their ideological norms<sup>14</sup>. The fact that the “spending of resources is involved” in this process, underlines the fact that self-interest is involved; political or economic agents that invest in these actions logically do not do it for nothing, but for a specific motivation or establishment of narratives which align with their own interests<sup>15</sup>.

However, what does the power of toponyms rely on? Peirce F. Lewis highlights that words underline what he considers a basic principle: that “all human landscape has cultural meaning, no matter how ordinary that landscape may be”. In turn, human landscape is not perceived as a social construction, but an inherent characteristic of the world surrounding us: “Toponyms permeate our daily vocabulary, both verbal and visual, appearing on road signs, addresses, advertising billboards and (of course) maps<sup>16</sup>”.

Names, their transformation and their misuse can be the “trigger for indignation and hostility. Inaccurate references; inappropriate use of

exonyms, with political or historical connotations; inaccurate spelling; lack of respect for international boundaries, or lack of recognition for name changes can certainly create a source of friction<sup>17</sup>”.

Toponyms are a source of legitimation for those entitled to inhabit, shape and control a land. Leaders and symbols that have been deposed witness all the eradication of their names from the face of the Earth and every map. When new states are born they take these maps as a canvas on which they will commemorate their heroes and condemn what does not belong to the new picture they are painting for the world.

In all this turmoil of domination and power relations, minority groups often have no control in the strategies related to naming and renaming places. However, sometimes aware of its importance, these non-dominant groups will use the issue as a political tool of resistance, as a way to show that they are a significant actor who has shaped the past and can continue to do so in the future.

Thus, place naming is not always appropriated by elites and dominant groups. It can also be orchestrated by marginalized communities who wish to inscribe a certain vision of the past into the landscape. This is what Alderman considers to be an act of “symbolic resistance”<sup>18</sup> (the example of the football game which served as the opening paragraphs of this work (members of the Azerbaijani community of Georgia asking for recognition of their Turkic toponyms in Kvemo Kartli), for instance could be a good example of symbolic resistance. The resistance can arise in different forms, such as the use of an unestablished or informal “system of geographical nomenclature rather than the authorized system of naming” or simply different



pronunciation for the official denominations. For example, we see African-American activists fighting to change toponyms which promote the memory of white supremacists or “purveyors of racial inequality”, and rename them to commemorate prominent black figures in history.

Emotions and commemoration are not the only motivation for the mobilization of minorities around toponyms. Pragmatic reasons also motivate the claims of inhabitants to baptize their lands. A mention on the map of a country can also reveal who controls it and who dominates it. According to the author of “Place Names as Ingredients of Space-Related Identity” Peter Jordan’s words, marginalized or non-dominant groups (such as ethnic minorities) are sometimes forbidden to manifest or express themselves in public spaces; therefore, they have to be reduced or isolated to less “prestigious places”<sup>19</sup>. For example, as the NGO Human Rights Monitoring Group of Ethnic Minorities reports<sup>20</sup> even though the population of the village of Khidiskuri (before known as Asankhojali/Hasanxocali) is entirely Muslim<sup>21</sup>, the village “has a mosque which needs repairs, but the regional authorities are not giving permission to repair it and are not repairing it themselves”. Meanwhile, the regional authorities or the Georgian patriarchate have installed a Christian cross in the village.

### III. GEOGRAPHIC FEATURES AND ETHNIC DEMOGRAPHY IN MINORITY INHABITED AREAS

The two provinces of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli are the only two of Georgia's ten regions (mkhareebi) in which members of national minorities make up a majority of the

population. According to the 2014 census, 59.21% of the total population of Georgia's minorities were concentrated in these two provinces, if exclude from calculations breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in which the census could not be carried out<sup>22</sup>.

Samtskhe-Javakheti is a region located in the South-East of Georgia and bordering both Armenia and Turkey, compactly settled with ethnic Armenians - the second largest national minority of Georgia. In total, 81,089 ethnic Armenians live in Samtskhe-Javakheti, the 48.24% out of the total Armenian population in the country. It consists of six municipalities or districts: Akhaltsikhe, Adigeni, Aspindza, Borjomi, Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda. Even though, you can find compact settlements of minorities in districts like Akhaltsikhe (where according to 2002 census, the 34% of the inhabitants are Armenian), for this research we will focus on Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda (collectively known as Javakheti) which makes up more than 90% of the population of the two districts. In addition, smaller groups of Russian Dukhobors, Greeks and Georgians are settled in this area.

Azerbaijanis essentially live compactly in various regions of Georgia; for example, Kakheti or Shida Kartli, but majority ethnic Azerbaijanis of Georgia is settled in Kvemo Kartli. Kvemo Kartli is situated in the southern part of Georgia and borders with Armenia and Azerbaijan. The region comprises six administrative districts: Gardabani, Marneuli, Bolnisi, Dmanisi, Tetrtskaro and Tsalka. In this region, minorities make the biggest part of the population, with a predominant role of the Azerbaijanis. According to the 2002 census, members of the Azeri



community constitute almost the half of the population (41.75%). Yet, in three of its districts they represent absolute majority: Marneuli (83.1%), Dmanisi (66.7%) and Bolnisi (66%).

In total, 233,000 ethnic Azerbaijani live in Georgia and the 77% of them in the five districts mentioned above (as it is shown in the latest population census). The origin of Georgia's Azeri population can be traced back to the eleventh century, when the first nomadic Turkic tribes entered the region. Their numbers swelled further by a subsequent wave of migration by the Iuruq and Qizilbash Turks in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries<sup>23</sup>.

On the contrary, the district of Tsalka is more heterogeneous. Here Armenians (making up around more than the half of the population) and (almost disappeared) Greeks are mainly concentrated, although communities of both nationalities can also be found in other districts. Both groups settled in the region in the first half of the nineteenth century after leaving the territory of the Ottoman Empire<sup>24</sup>. In the beginning of the 19th century as well, a community of German settlers will be established in the South Caucasus, in order to create agricultural colonies, being one of the main focal points of this group Kvemo Kartli. However, as it will further explained in the following chapter, after the deportations conducted by the Stalinist regime during World War II their presence in the area is insignificant.

The demographic characteristics in both the city of Rustavi and in Tetrtsqaro rayon in Kvemo Kartli, have no significant differences from the rest of Georgia and the same could be underlined for the districts of Adigeni, Aspindza and Borjomi in Samkhtse-Javakheti. Therefore, these places will not be discussed in this report. The

districts of Gardabani and Akhaltshikhe were also excluded from the research since the ethnic minorities do not make up majority of its population.

The following chapter presents how are the ethnic minority groups portrayed in the cultural landscape of the lands where they account to dominant or majority position in Georgia, through the analysis of the development that the toponyms had or had not suffered and their relationship with the number of members of its ethnic group inhabiting the different districts.

### *3.1 Akhalkalaki*<sup>25</sup>

The district of Akhalkalaki is one of the six municipalities that form the Samtskhe Javakheti region, part of the so-called Javakheti area. The first graphic represents the number of members of its ethnic group inhabiting the 'mkhare'.

In this district the large majority of the population consist of ethnic Armenian, making up the 92.9% of the totality of the people living in the district. Just the 5.27% of the population of Akhalkalaki district is ethnic Georgian. And there is practically no Azeri neighbors (according to the 2002 census, just three Azeri live in the rayon). The remaining ethnic minorities such as Russians or Greeks they do not even make the 1% of the population.

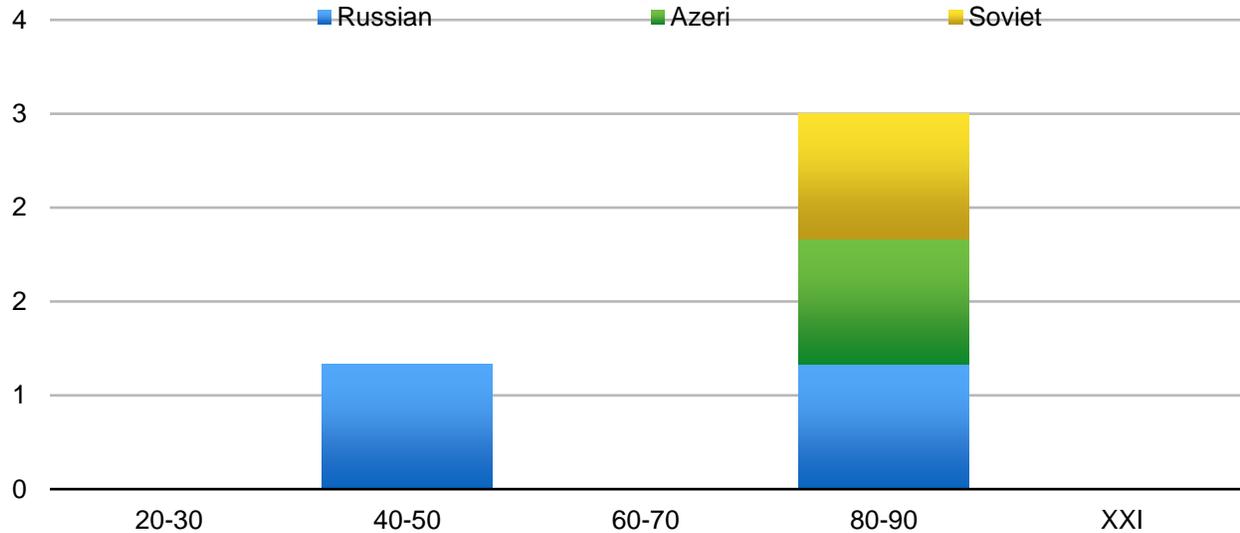
Indeed, in this municipality 51 out of the 61 villages with election precincts are ethnic Armenian, while seven are Georgian (Gogasheni, Apnia, Kotelia, Okami, Azmana, Ptena, Chunchkha), two are mixed Georgian-Armenian (Baraleti and Murjakheti) and one is mixed Armenian, Georgian and Greek (Khospio).



In the case of Akhalkalaki district no renaming has been made since the year 1918. Therefore, no figure will be exposed to this matter.

mixed Armenian and Russian Dukhobor (Gorelovka).

Chart 1: Renamed villages in Ninotsminda



### 3.2 Ninotsminda

The district of Ninotsminda is one of the six districts located in the Southern part of Samtskhe Javakheti, and the other municipality part of the so-called Javakheti area. In the first figure, the inhabitants of the Ninotsminda district will be represented, divided by ethnic origins.

In Ninotsminda, the 95% of the totality of the people living in the district are Armenian. 1.39% are Georgian while the ethnic Azeri community, as in the case of Akhlakalaki, is absent in this district. Actually, the third ethnic group with mayor representation in the mkhare is the Russians, since it is where the Russian ethno-religious group known as Dukhobor has traditionally lived since the 1840s. In this rayon 29 of the 31 villages with election precincts are Armenian, while one village (Spasovka) is mainly inhabited by Georgians resettled from Ajara in the beginning of the 1990s and one is

Concerning the renaming of place names in this rayon, six geographical points had their denominations changed since 1918. These acts took place in two different periods: The Stalinist period and Zviad Gamsakhurdia’s presidency, right after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The chart above highlights not just the period when the renaming acts were held, as it has already been discussed but also the etymologic origins of those place names. The total number of the renamed locations were either Russian place-names or toponyms with Soviet connotations, no Azeri or Armenian denominations have been changed.

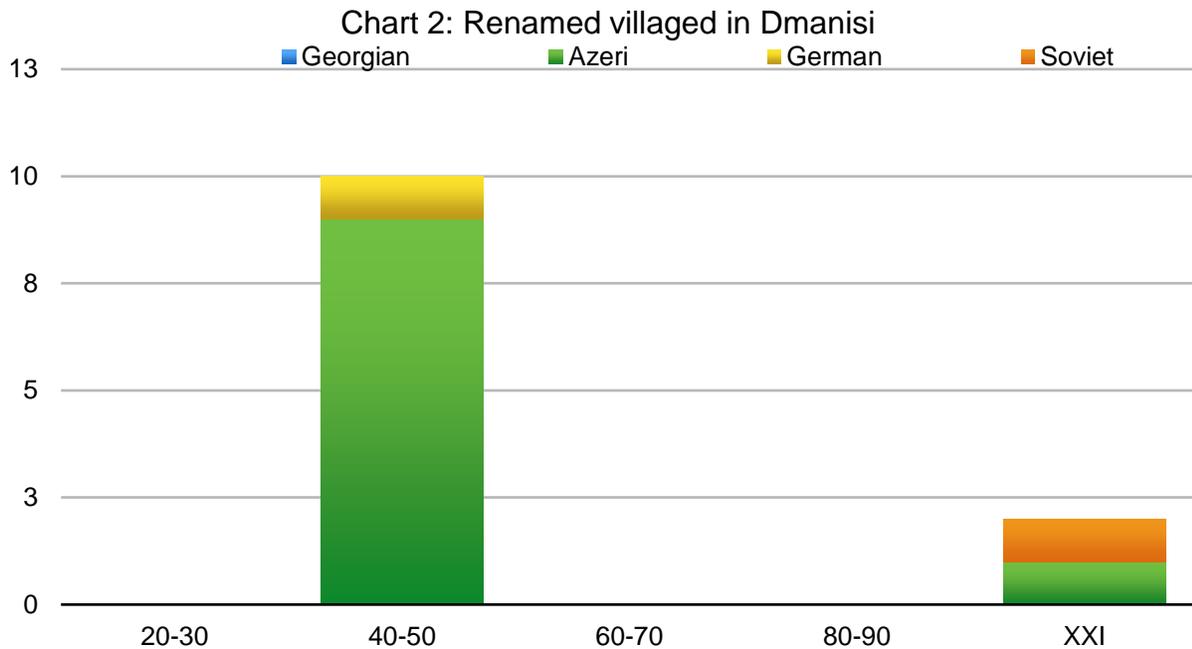
The first renamed village was a Russian one in the period of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, most probably because of its religious connotation. The name of the village was ‘Troitskoe’, which in English would be translated as trinity. This toponym was replaced by the socialist-sounding ‘Kalinino’.



Thereafter, during the historical restoration process that followed the declaration of independence of the Republic of Georgia, where Soviet symbols were replaced for new Georgians one, the village of Kalinino (previously known as Troitskoe, as it was mentioned above) turned to be Sameba (which is the Georgian word for trinity).

from the 2002 census. As it can be confirmed in the graphic, the Azeri people are the biggest ethnic group inhabiting the area with a 66.7%, followed by the Georgians with a 31% and Armenians, with a 5%. Meanwhile, members of other ethnic groups such as Greeks and Russians make up less than the 2%.

Chart 2 shows the renamed places since 1918



The other non-Soviet location which was renamed was the administrative center of the region, Bogdanovka, coinciding the renaming of the district, also known as Bogdanovka for the Georgian sounding one: Ninotsminda, during Zviad Gamsakhurdia's presidency. At the time when this change happened, all the non-Georgian sounding administrative centers and districts were being georgianized, as it will be explained in chapter 4.

### 3.3 Dmanisi

The district of Dmanisi is located in the Southern part of Kvemo Kartli. The latest official data is

classified by etymologic origins. The total of renaming acts in this district was twelve. Out of these, the 83% of them were Azeri villages. In the analyzed period, there were just two replacements made where non-Azeri toponymy was involved. At first, the village of Waldheim was re-named Kirovisi by the Soviet authorities in 1943. Later, the Soviet denomination Kirovisi will take the name of Ipnari.

The graphic above exposes many interesting facts. The main major process of renaming in Dmanisi was held on the period between the late 40's and the early 50's, when 9 Azeri locations had their designations removed and replaced by Georgian ones<sup>26</sup>.

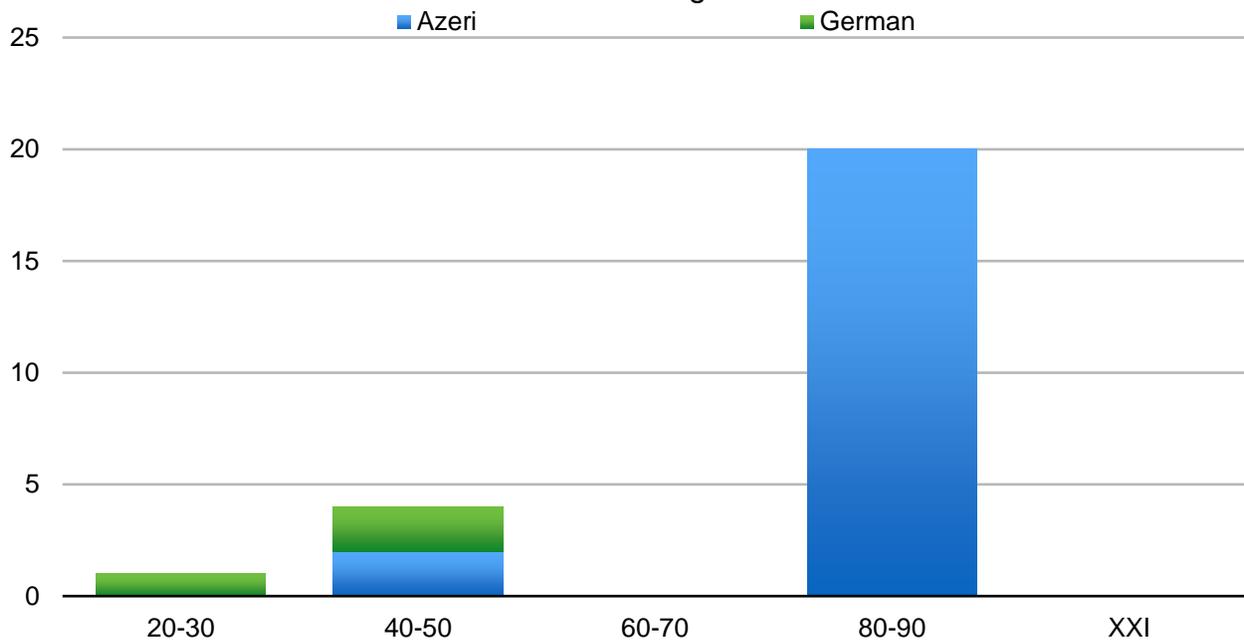


The only remaining German village in the rayon, known as Waldheim, was changed during World War II, specifically in the year 1943. Since then, no toponymy in the district was renamed until nowadays, when again for historical restoration reasons the socialist sounding village of Kirovisi was renamed Ipnari, as it has been pointed out in the paragraph above.

the German place names, which started to be renamed in 1921, with the Soviet uprising and ended up with the World War II, when the surviving German toponymy was eradicated from the map.

In the case of Azeri place names, on the contrary, the acts of renaming began in the aftermaths of World War II and, since then, they have been prolonged until nowadays, with the

Chart 3: Renamed villages in Bolnisi



### 3.4 Bolnisi

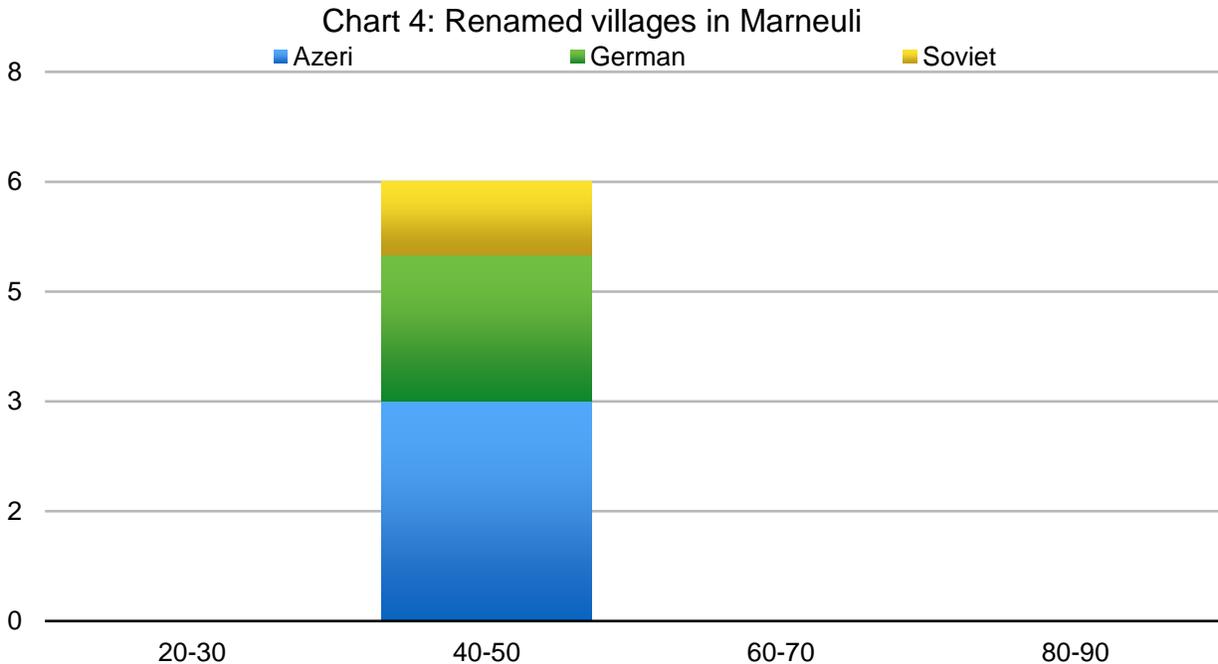
When it comes to the the ethnic composition of the district at the year 2002 in Bolnisi municipality, the Azeri community makes the majority of the population in the area, with the 65.98%. The second group is the Georgian, which makes the 26.82% of it, followed by the Armenian community, which conforms the 5.61% of the population.

The main ethnic community affected by the renaming in the Bolnisi district was the Azeri minority, since the 90% of the renamed geographical points in Bolnisi since 1918 were of Azeri origins. The remaining 10% corresponds to

highest pick in the 90's, while Zviad Gamsakhurdia was in the office. Actually, 31 out of 46 villages have been renamed since 1918 in the Bolnisi district.

### 3.5 Marneuli

The Marneuli rayon is one of the six districts that comprehend the Kvemo Kartli region. The ethnic minority with the largest presence in the district is the Azeri one, with an 83%. The ethnic Georgian community, on the other hand, plays a more vestigial role in the demographics in comparison to other districts such as Dmanisi or



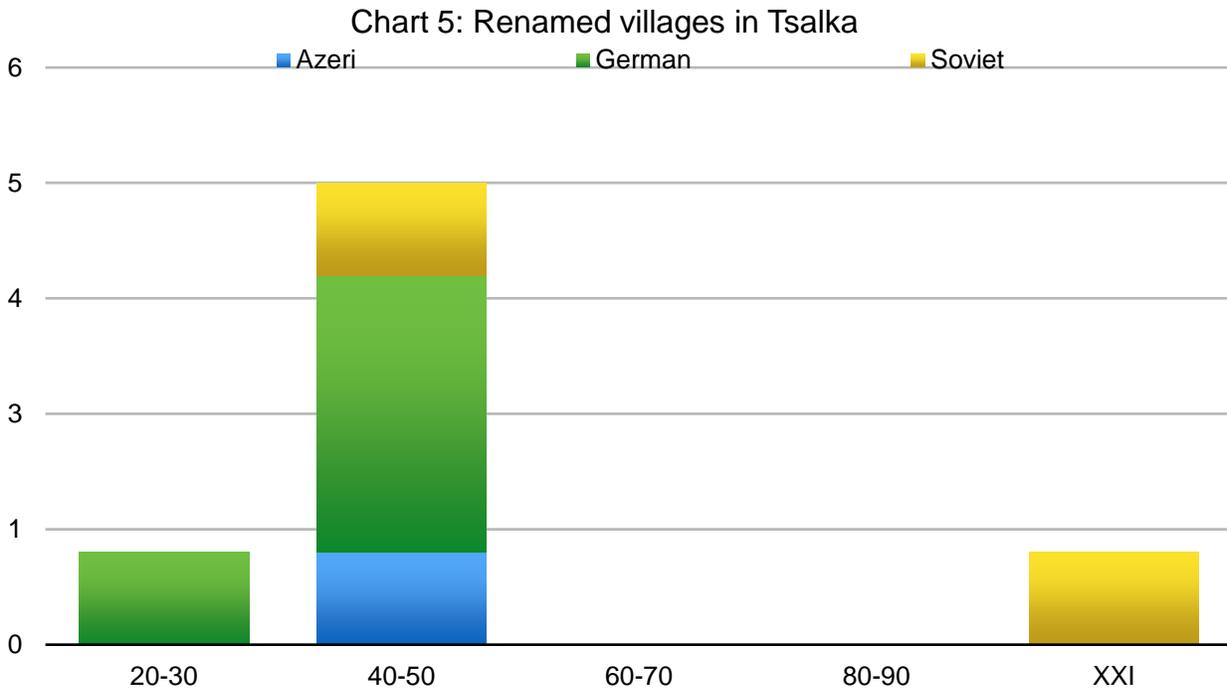
Bolnisi. Eventually, the Armenians make up the 8% of the population, just like Georgians.

Chart 4 focuses on the renaming acts that the district experienced since 1918. It is worth to highlight that there has been almost no name changes in this particular district. Most of the renaming occurred in the period between World War II and the late 50's. The preponderance of replacements of Azeri toponymy is clear. Besides, the German village of Traubenberg, renamed Tamarisi in 1943 and the Soviet village of Mirzoevka. In the latter case, both denominations (the Socialist, Mirzoevka and the Azeri, Norguiuli) had official status until the late 50's when they finally disappeared from official records. The same as in the case of Mamai, now known as Kirovka, which hold co-official status from the early 20's until the 21st century, when Kirovka replaced Mamai in the official documents. Eventually, at the year 2011 the village called Orjonikidze after the Georgian Bolshevik leader was renamed Saimerlo, in order to establish historical justice.

### 3.6 Tsalka

According to the 2002 census, despite Tsalka was considered to be the traditional territory populated by Pontic Greeks in Georgia (whose mother tongue is not Greek but Turkish), a majority of the population of Tsalka district was Armenian (54.98%), as most Greeks have left the district to resettle in either Russia or Greece. Instead, a large number of Georgian eco-migrants from Adjara and Svaneti have been arriving to replace them. The migrational wave is still going on, therefore the numbers shown in the 2002 census that represents the Greek and Georgian population, may not be that accurate.

Actually, according to a census carried out by the Municipality of Tsalka in the year 2014<sup>27</sup>, there is around 2000 Greeks living in the Tsalka district, which make up the 8% of the population. The Georgian community is nowadays the largest ethnic group in the district, with the 46% of the total population, due to the immigration trend that has already been mentioned above.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, only the village of Rekha is originally ethnic Georgian.



The second biggest group is formed by Armenian people (36%). Azeri people, on the contrary, make up the 9% of it.

As it can be observed in chart 5, two main periods for the renaming can be highlighted. On the one hand, the renaming of German place names that like in other districts of the Kvemo Kartli region began to be enacted with the uprising of the Bolshevik regime and came to an end with World War II.

On the other hand, the renaming of Azeri place names which started with the adoption of the Korenizatsiya policies during Stalinist time (when the administrative center of the district, Barmaskiz, was replaced by the Georgian-sounding Tsalka) and went on until the 21st century, with the renaming of 12 villages between the years 2010 and 2011.

Ultimately, the renaming of geographical points with Socialist connotations after the fall from grace of Stalin and his ‘devotees’ (the case of the village of Molotovo, renamed Trialeti in the late 50’s) and the disappearance of Soviet

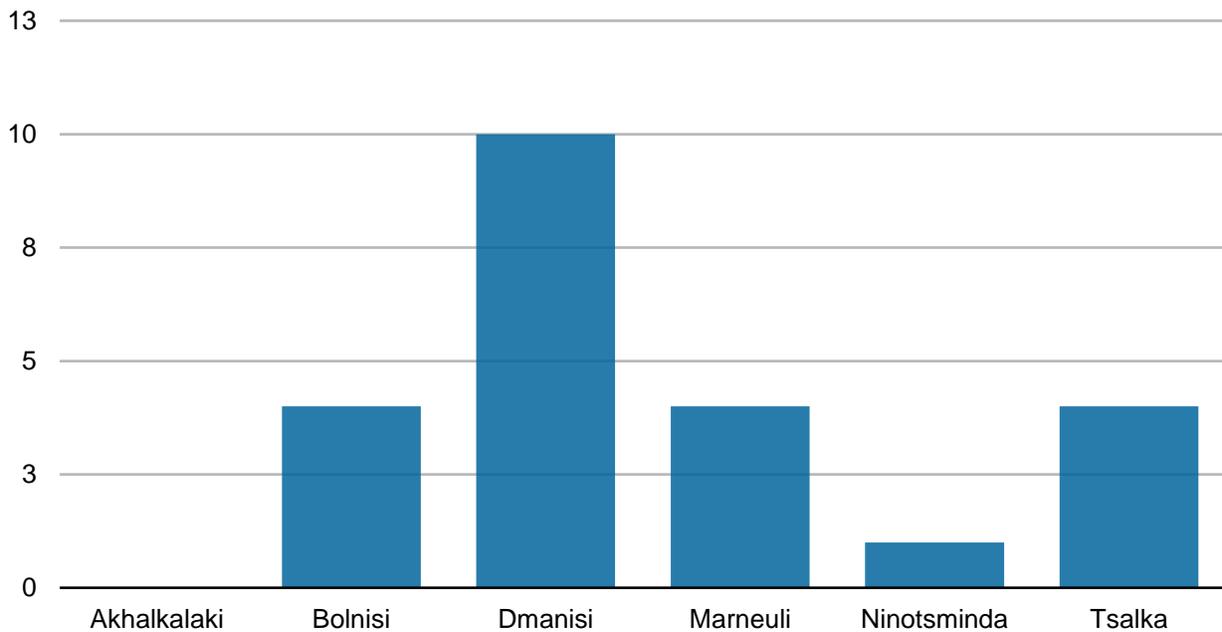
symbols that followed the creation of the Republic of Georgia (the village of Chapaevka, renamed Kavta).

#### IV. RENAMING VILLAGES UNDER KORENIZATSYYA IN THE GSSR

When talking about the policies of the Soviet Union, there is a general tendency to confer upon the Soviet state an internationalist character, which denies or at least ignores ethnicity and nationalism. However, the reality could not be more different. The national policies implemented first under Lenin’s leadership (while Stalin was occupying his position as the Bolshevik Commissar of Nationalities) and afterwards with Stalin, led to the creation and strengthening of local ethnic identities. These policies were pursued in order to build loyalties that would ensure the “stability of the empire” on the peripheries and at the core of the empire,



Chart 6: Renamed villages in Stalinist period per district



among cross border nationals or ethnic diasporas<sup>29</sup>.

The empowerment of local ethnic identities resulted in the weakening of the Soviet Union's capacity to integrate populations in the 1940's and early 50's and the decline of its ideology of Soviet Communism. Meanwhile, the process of ethno-national self-determination gained momentum in its constituent republics.

These nationalist trends were reflected in the landscape, since the boundaries of all of the major territorial units in Kvemo Kartli (among other regions) were being re-designated. Even though this research is focused on villages and their toponyms, the denomination of the districts themselves cannot be ignored when studying attitudes towards minority groups in the region. During this 1930s, the administrative territorial distribution of the Socialist Republic of Georgia was modified, according to the process of 'georganization'. During the decade of 1920, the authorities divided the 'oblasts', rearranged their

borders<sup>30</sup> and created smaller territorial units: the *mkhare*. These *mkhares* or rayons will get new denominations that would be finally replaced in the 1940s for Georgian sounding ones.

Names with Azeri origins were replaced: for instance Aghbulaki was replaced by Tetrtskaro; Bashchecit by Dmanisi; the district of Karaiazi renamed Gardabani; and the Borchalo rayon, Marneuli. The same happened with district names with other etymologic roots, like Luksemburgi which was renamed Bolnisi in 1943. In contrast to this, no district name in Samkhtse Javakheti was renamed.

The figures presented in the previous chapter show that the first renaming process in the Kvemo Kartli and the Samkhtse Javakheti regions after 1918 took place during the last years of the 'Stalinist era'<sup>31</sup>.

During this time, 26 place names were changed. The first graphic shows the number of villages that were renamed in each of the districts included in the research, during the late Stalinist

years. The district of Dmanisi had the most villages renamed in the period, followed by Marneuli, Bolnisi and Tsalka, which each contained four villages that were renamed. Finally, Ninotsminda in the Samkhtse Javakheti region experienced only one act of renaming. In contrast to this (as was addressed in the previous chapter) no places in the Akhalkalaki district experienced name changes.

The research shows that the majority of the place names that were changed, were of Turkic origin (17 in total). All of them took place in the districts of the Kvemo Kartli region; more than half of them in the Dmanisi district (nine).

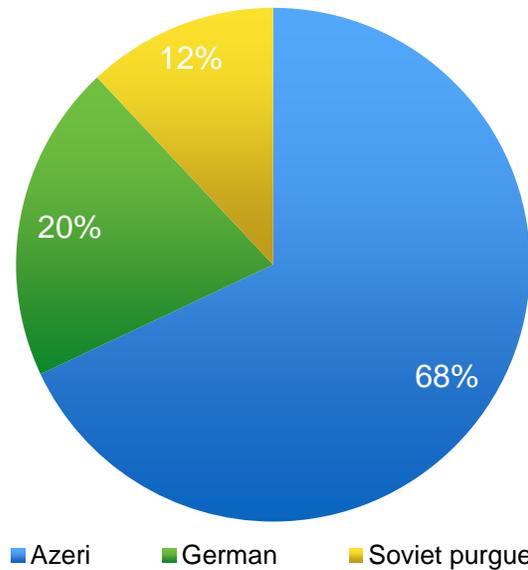
Five German village names were renamed at the height of World War II: two in Tsalka; one in Dmanisi; and two in Bolnisi. These had represented the only remaining German toponyms in the Kvemo Kartli region<sup>32</sup>. The Javakheti area was excluded from the process, since it included no German toponyms at the time.

Eventually, two Soviet-related place names were replaced, due to the purges carried out by Stalin’s regime and the de-Stalinization process which followed the Soviet leader’s death: The village of Molotovo, before Iakublo, now Trialeti (in Tsalka district) and Mirzoevka, now known as Marneuli<sup>33</sup>.

#### 4.1 The renaming of Azeri/Turkic places

As was previously mentioned, the policies aiming to create and promote the local ethnic identities were lunched in the early 1920s, with Joseph Stalin as Bolshevik Commissar of Nationalities. This nationalities policy was known as ‘korenisatsya’ or korenization, which can be translated as "nativization" or “indigenization”.

Chart 7: Nature of the renamed places



Diametrically opposed to the forced russification process carried out under the Russian empire, this policy aimed to reconcile the relationship between the constituent nations of the Soviet Union appealing to the wide masses of the local peoples in the ethnically non-Russian areas.

In practical terms, this meant the introduction of the local languages into all spheres of public life and the wide usage of these local languages, particularly in the spheres of education, publishing, culture, and importantly government and in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the policies promoted local cultures by supporting non-Russian schools<sup>34</sup>, newspapers, journals, book publishers, libraries, museums, and theaters.

The main policy consisted of promoting the local cadre of titular nations of Soviet republics and national minorities on lower levels of the administrative subdivision of the state (i.e. Abkhazian or Ossetian elites in the respective Autonomous Republics), into local government, management, bureaucracy and nomenklatura in



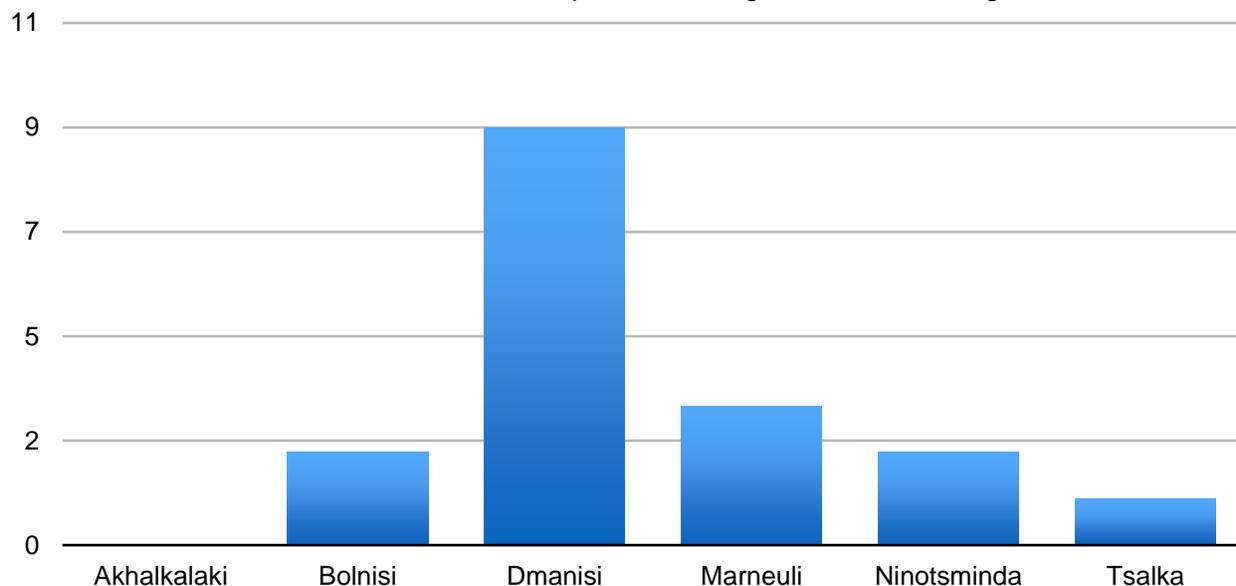
the corresponding national entities. Even prior to implementing the promotion of the native population to positions of responsibility in local governments, the Soviet state determined the borders of its territories on an ethnic basis. Thus, “ethnic differences between Soviet citizens were consolidated on a territorial basis”<sup>35</sup>.

Prior to the adoption of this policy, the ethnic groups of the Northern Caucasus perceived

decision of which ethnic groups had the right to “a land of their own” depended entirely on the Party.

At the same time, these ethnic policies were encouraging the creation of the ethnically mixed settlements, either by dividing ethnic groups with artificial borders or by combining different ethnic groups within a single ethnic territory. This contrasted with the widely held notions of ethnic

Chart 8: Renamed Turkic places during the Stalinist Regime



themselves first as members of clans, and then as members of a bigger ethnic society of North Caucasian peoples. However, with the adoption of the “One territory-One Nation” rule, national identification was promoted, even in areas where ethnic identity had not yet emerged. Within the emergence of these identities, the dominant ethnic minorities of territories designated as national republics, autonomous regions within national republics, or even an ethnically constructed district, felt a special entitlement. In turn, these dominant ethnic groups developed the idea of “collective” (or “national,” in its highest manifestation) ownership of those territories. The

exclusivity of peoples within “their own territories” that the policy promoted. Members of non-dominant ethnicities were left feeling like guests in their own lands, in the soil where they grew up. In other words, “national autonomy in Georgia had come to mean (...) the exercise of local power against the unrepresented local minorities”<sup>36</sup>. It was at this time that Azeri place-names began to disappear from the Georgian map.

As it has already been highlighted, the 1940’s and early 50’s saw the first large scale re-naming process in the Kvemo Kartli region (the Javakheti area). Places with Azeri/Turkic etymologic



origins were the main targets (as well as German ones, as it will be discussed in the following pages). In the chart above, the renamed Azeri/Turkic places are exposed by district. The Dmanisi district contained the largest number of name changes; more than the half of the renaming took place there (nine out of the 17). The renaming in Dmanisi had two main focus areas. Three of them are located in the Northern part of the Dmanisi district, close to the border with Tsalka. All of them are situated on the main road that connects the Municipality of Dmanisi with the town of Bediani in the Tsalka district. The remaining renamed villages surround the centre of the municipality (the name of which was changed from Baschecit to Dmanisi)<sup>37</sup>.

In Marneuli, three Azeri place names were changed; two of them during the 1940's and one of them in the year 1959<sup>38</sup>. Bolnisi experienced another two; one in the 1940's and one in the 50's. The town of Tsalka (the administrative center of the municipality), which at the time responded to the Azeri sounding name Barmaqsziz, was the only place renamed in the district. As previously stated, during this period all the district names in Kvemo Kartli were 'georgianized', a process that can be traced back to the administrative center of each of the constituent rayons of the region. After the renaming of the town of Barmaqsziz, nowadays Tsalka, Baskicheti, now Dmanisi, and Liuksemburgi, now Bolnisi, the seven main cities in Kvemo Kartli (including the non analyzed districts of Gardabani and Tetrtsqaro and the city of Rustavi) held etymologic Georgian names.

However, if the main reason for the renaming was the 'georgianization' wave which appeared as a consequence of national policies, why just

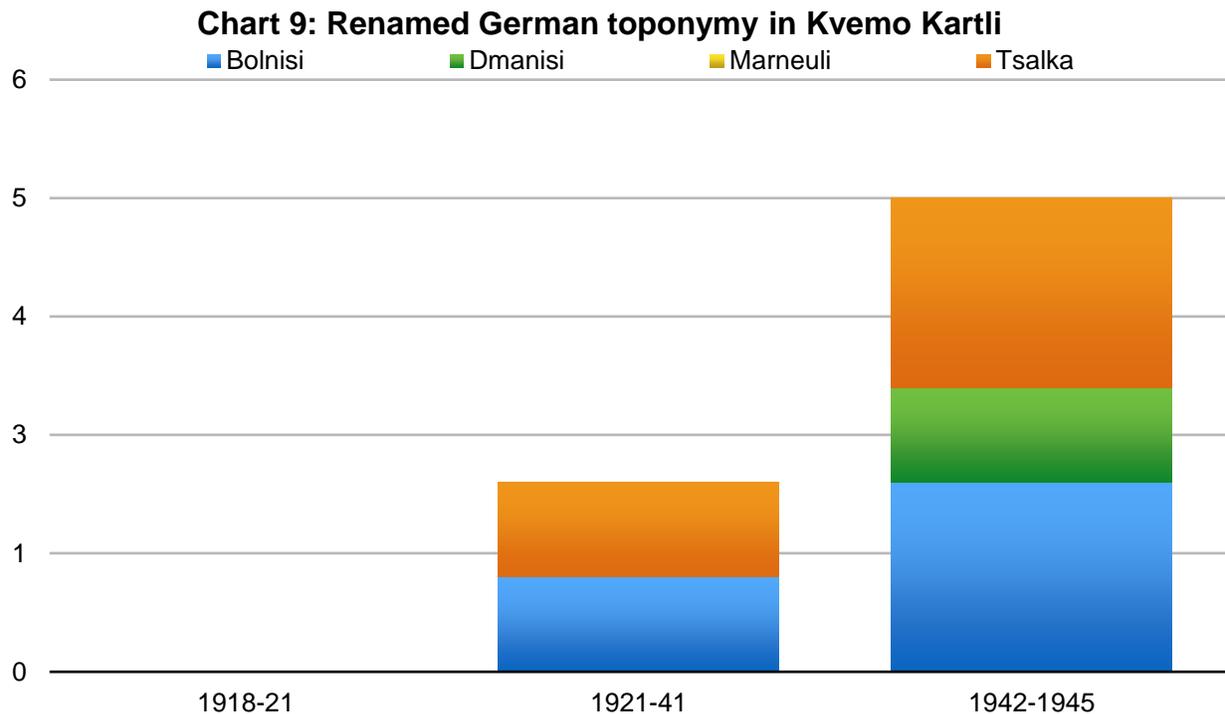
target Azeri/Turkic place-names and not any other etymologically non-Georgian toponyms?

According to professor Giorgi Gogsadze<sup>39</sup>, Stalin, who was aware of the difficulty in erasing the shadow of nationalism, used it in his own favor. When war came, the internationalist Soviet man was not strong enough to mobilize the population. Therefore, he called everyone to fight for their nation and its dignity. After all, as Benedict Anderson said: "Nationalism is the new religion". Yet, Germans were not perceived as a threat by Georgians. Therefore, there was no reason to fight against them or traces of their culture. Thus the Stalinist regime attempted to engage its people through a common ancestral enemy: Turkey, the neighbor that had conquered Georgian lands on multiple occasions. In the event of Nazi defeat their ancestral foe, Turkey, as an ally of the Nazis, would consequently suffer the same fate. People in Georgia were even hoping that if Germany lost, their own army would be able to get their historical lands back from Turkey (as did the Armenians)<sup>40</sup>.

The mechanisms of State anti-Turkish propaganda were activated. In an apparent move to encourage Georgian nationalism and gain the loyalty of the population during the war with Germany, Stalin himself was involved in supervising the script for an epic film, by the Georgian film director Mikheil Chiaureli in 1942-1943. In the movie, the main character is presented as the hero who battled the Turk/Persian hordes to free the Georgian people. This explains the reasons for the renaming of Azeri villages just after World War II when the consequences of both Stalin's nationality policies and the anti-Turkish propaganda had been promoted in the Georgian mindset.



#### 4.2 The re-naming of German places



\* The three chosen periods for the figure respond to the time of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, the pre World War II Soviet Georgia and the time of the so-called Great Patriotic War, respectively

The process of replacing German toponymy in Kvemo Kartli (there was no place in Samkhtse Javakheti that responded to a German denomination at the time) started to take place in the early 1920's, with the arrival of the bolsheviks to the Georgian government and it was completed during World War II.

As the following graphic shows, the changing of German place-names was enforced in two distinct phases. The first, following the dissolution of the First Democratic Republic of Georgia and the advent of the Soviet regime. At this time, the town of Ekaterinfeld (now Bolnisi) was renamed to Luxemburg after the German communist Rosa Luxemburg. In addition, the town nowadays known as Trialeti (in Tsalka rayon), Alexandrov named after the Russian Tsar Alexander I, was renamed Rozenberg.

The second period of this course of action was executed in the year 1943, when all german sounding remaining locations in Kvemo Kartli were replaced. As already mentioned, Luxemburg was replaced by Bolnisi and the Tsalka-located town of Rosenberg was called Molotov, in honor of the Soviet politician and diplomat Vyacheslav Mikhailovich Molotov. In the Tsalka district, the denomination Iakublo was removed and substituted by Chapaevka, which commemorated the celebrated Red Army commander, Vasily Chapaev. Again in Bolnisi, the village of Traubenberg was renamed Tamarisi after the Main Soviet Presidium of the Georgian CCP issued a decree in 1943<sup>41</sup>. Finally, Waldheim (nowadays known as Ipnari, in the Dmanisi district) was renamed Kirovka, in honor



of the prominent bolshevik leader, Serguéi Mirónovich Kírov.

Thus, all German denominations were replaced by those commemorating prominent Soviet or communist personalities, except for the case of Traubenberg, which was changed by the Georgian Tamarisi. It also has to be underlined that even though Rosenberg or Luxembourg were enhancing notorious communist characters, they were still removed by the authorities at the time because of their German connotations.

These renaming is an inheritance that goes back further in time. On 21 September 1818, the first German communities settled in the South Caucasus, after the Russian emperor 'Alexander I' arranged for their settlement in Tiflis (Tbilisi) suburbs to create agricultural colonies. The first of these colonies was founded by a group of Swabian Germans on the way to Kakhetia (now part of Sartichala): Marienfeld. A few months later another group of pioneers established another colony and called Elisabeththal, after the Emperor's wife Elisabeth Alexeievna (now Asureti in Kvemo Kartli). Within the next lustrum, more settlements were established in the capital, such as New Tiflis (now part of Davit Aghmashenebeli Avenue in Tbilisi) and Alexandersdorf (now Akaki Tsereteli Avenue in Tbilisi). Near Marienfeld (now part of Sartichala) a colony called Petersdorf was established as was Katharinenfeld (now Bolnisi) that was previously mentioned. Aside from this, three other colonies could be found in Abkhazia: Neudorf; Gnadenberg; and Lindau. By the year 1918 Germans lived in more than 20 towns<sup>42</sup>.

In February 1921 the Red Army of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic entered the country and ended the three years of independence that the Democratic Republic of

Georgia had enjoyed. In March of the same year Georgia became a Soviet Republic. This is when the first stage of the German village renaming took place.

In his paper, *The Deportation and Destruction of the German Minority in the USSR*, J. Otto Pohl<sup>43</sup> talks about "the long-standing anti-German prejudice of extreme Russian nationalism". According to the author, during the second half of the 19th century, segments of the Russian population began developing anti-German sentiments. The economic prosperity of the German agricultural settlements combined with "special privileges such as exemption from the draft created envy and resentment among some Slavs". In addition to this, the increasing number of Russian nationalists in the late 19th century aggravated prejudice against the German communities.

This text could possibly explain why German names became the first target for the Soviet authorities in power. In both cases, (the renaming of the towns of Ekaterinfeld and Alexandrov that took place in the early 1920's) the denominations were replaced by Soviet related toponyms. Therefore, Soviet actions can be seen as a sovietization of the landscape, while they achieved the erasing of their "mortal enemy" of Germany from the map.

In 1926, the total number of ethnic Germans living in The Socialist Soviet Republic of Georgia was still 12,074<sup>44</sup>. In the All Union Population Census of 1939 the number increased to 20,527. By this time, almost one quarter of the German population in Georgia was living in Bolnisi (4874), followed by a significant community in Tsalka district (1426), some in Dmanisi district (482), and few in Marneuli district (188). Thus, the areas with the largest



German populations were precisely where the main German villages such as Luxemburg or Traubenberg were located.

World War II triggered a massive decrease of the number of ethnic Germans living in Georgian land. On 8 October 1941, the USSR State Defense Committee signed an order to deport 23,580 Germans to Kazakhstan<sup>45</sup>.

This situation was repeated across the territory of the Soviet Union. Between 3 September 1941 and 1 January 1942, the NKVD (Peoples Commissariat of Internal Affairs) deported 799,459 so-called *Russlanddeutschen* (Germans living in the Russian empire, and then Soviet Union) on charges of treason and aiding the enemy. They were transferred to “special settlements” - confined areas of internal exile in the USSR. After these forced deportations, the Soviet regime condemned many of the German exiles to labor battalions and colonies collectively known as the *trudarmiia* under similar conditions to those of the Gulag prisoners, which led to “tens of thousands of uncounted deaths during World War II”<sup>46</sup>.

The official Soviet justification for the mass expulsion of the ethnic Germans was the threat of them becoming a potential fifth column of “spies and saboteurs” loyal to the Third Reich.

As Pohl points out, the Soviet government “employed a combination of physical liquidation and forced assimilation into the dominant (...) culture to accomplish this goal”<sup>47</sup>. World War II provided the regime with the perfect pretext to “solve the long-standing perceived problem of German minorities in the USSR”<sup>48</sup>. In this context, it becomes clear why the process of renaming villages in Kvemo Kartli was reactivated, ultimately leading to the destruction of a German presence, once at all.

### *4.3 Building the Post -Soviet Georgia: ‘Georgianizing’ the landscape*

1990 was one of the most decisive years in the history of Georgia. The Soviet Union took its last breath opening the door to the formation of a new independent State of Georgia. The Soviet farewell did not just finish with seven decades of communist rule, but also brought a nation-building process based on a ‘Georganization’ of the territory, where Georgian ethnicity and values were included and other ethnic groups were just performing a banal position. At this time, nationalism became a great source of legitimation of the political discourse, with Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the first President of independent Georgia, as the main sponsor of it.

However, it could be said that even though the Communist Party was officially in office until autumn 1990, the de facto situation was rather different. Due to the fact that after April 1989 the legitimacy of Soviet authorities in Georgia was over, and the agenda was being completely and definitely set by the nationalist movement way before<sup>49</sup>.

In the course of these events, the administrative territorial distribution of the Soviet Republic which was giving its last throes retook the big process of ‘georgianization’ that was started during the Stalinist regime. At this time, the authorities renamed all the rayons that survived to the georgianization of the 40’s. As a proof of the new tendencies that the country was experiencing, a decree with the first acts of re-naming signed by Gamsakhurdia as the President of the Soviet Supreme Council of Georgia. The decree “about the re-naming of some regions, cities and municipalities, signed at the 27th February, 1991”<sup>50</sup> decided that the region and the



city of Bogdanovka, Znauri and Tsiteltskaro had to be re-named Ninotsminda, Kornisi and Dedoplitskaro, respectively. Therefore, the last of the six districts analyzed in this working paper (Bogdanovka) adopted a new etymologic Georgian designation: Ninotsminda.

However, this national awakening of the ethnic Georgian citizens did not just affected the renaming of the main territorial units of the Republics (and its administrative centers) yet, it also opened the field for a new world with negative conditions for the Azeri inhabitants of Kvemo Kartli. For example, the process of land distribution of the sovkhozes and kolkhozes - the soviet time collective farms. Lacking all kind of transparency and having corruption as the main guarantor of the process, most of the land that had formerly belonged to the state “was rented by “local notables”, typically former sovkhoz or kolkhoz directors or individuals with close personal links to members of the local administration. Most—although not all—of these individuals were Georgians”<sup>51</sup>.

In the late 1980s, around 800 families that had been living in the city of Bolnisi were kicked out from their homes<sup>52</sup>. Thus, Bolnisi became an ethnically homogeneous Georgian city. Simultaneously, most Azeris holding top (or even minor) positions in local power structures and state administration as directors of agricultural or industrial companies were removed or dismissed from their posts and replaced by Georgians. The local Azeri leaders were offered lower ranking posts in return for their loyalty to Kvemo Kartli’s powerful governor, Levan Mamaladze, were allowed to engage in corruption. Due to this fact, there were no many chances or mechanisms left for the local Azeri population to express their critics and rifts<sup>53</sup>.

It was during those days, when 20 villages with Azeri/Turkic sounding names the same woke up with a different denomination: They were all renamed. One of the inhabitants of the village explained that the process was not transparent at all. According to his words, no one who lived in the village was never asked about the issue. Instead, the one who occupied the post of director of the ‘sovkhoz’ signed the document which allowed the re-naming to be performed. When people started to protest and asked for some kind of clarification they were taken to the local governance building and threaten with prison if they would not stop asking questions. Since then, they admit that they were too scared to carry out any kind of actions to recover the old toponyms. (Anyway, conforming to what people from Kochulo, now known as Chapala, admitted few months after the renaming took place, the director of the ‘sovkhoz’, who was ethnic Georgian, was murdered as a “revenge for his decision”).

The same situation was lived in other villages (for example, in Asankhodjalo, now Khidiskhuri), where none of the inhabitants was ever questioned about their willingness to rename the territory. Without previous notification from the designated authorities, they noticed the new denomination when the sign at the entrance of the town was changed. One of the main complains by the inhabitants it is based on the fact that they do not have any channel to make themselves heard, no way to complain.

On the contrary, this issue was brought up to the local authorities of the village nowadays called Nakhiduri (although the neighbors still referred to it as Arukhlo). A meeting was celebrated to carry out the vote against the replacement of the Turkic/Azeri name Arukhlo. 16 of the 17 deputies voted against the resolution



of renaming the village. Nevertheless, according to the testimony of one of the deputies at the time of the happening, the designated bodies did not take into consideration the results of the vote and they proceeded with their renaming plans.

However, this time the population reacted in a more violent manner. In order to show their disagreement, they broke the sign which indicated the new Georgian designation (at that time, Kakliani, it would not become Nakhiduri until some weeks later) and replaced it for the previous one. After this incident, the inhabitants of Arukhlo stated that the authorities brought back a new sign and threaten the population with retaliations if they would not stop with the protests.

An organization which was formed in 1990 with the idea of establishing a kind of “popular front” for the Azeri population called Geirat, organized a meeting in 1995 between Georgian and Azerbaijani authorities (including the President Edvard Shevernadze) and the people from the Bolnisi district. For this occasion, 27.000 signatures were collected against the renaming of Azeri villages in Bolnisi. At this meeting, two promises were made by the Georgian government: First of all, to rebuild the road that connected Marneuli. Second, to restore the old toponyms.

In the founder of Geirat, Alibala Askerov’s perspective, the whole plan of renaming the Azeri geographical names in Kvemo Kartli was orchestrated by an organization called after the Georgian national hero Merab Kostava. The responsible wrote a report about the importance of toponyms in the aftermath’s of the construction of a new country. Years later, when Shevernadze was already in power the issue was brought back to the forum and discussed at the

highest levels. Two of the Azerbaijani members of the Parliament at the moment Mr. Mashov and Ms. Shengenaya stood against the renaming. No legal-binding decision was ever made. However, the names were never restored.

Furthermore, during the first decade of the 21st century other six villages were re-named<sup>54</sup>. Thus, compare the number of Azerbaijani origin designations in Bolnisi in 1925 and in 2015, it seems clear that the tendency is to gradually eradicate the presence of Azeri toponyms in the landscape and the establishment of a purely Georgian space in the district, which does not reflect the demographic reality.

After considering the findings, one inevitable question raises up: what is the reason for this renaming happening so specifically in Bolnisi? As it has already been mentioned, a new mood of ethnic nationalism had swept Georgian land since the late 80’s. The harsh political environment and its consequent discriminatory policy of the ruling authorities that had come to power in Georgia, that could be summed up in the slogan which was popularized among the public “Georgia for the Georgians” became popular among the public, terminated with the members of ethnic minorities gaining a “guest” status”, provoking mass migration, mainly of the Azeri community in Kvemo Kartli.

If under the data of 1989 population census ethnic minorities constituted 30% of the country’s population, 2002 census demonstrated that this number in Georgia (excluding territories of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region) decreased to 16%<sup>55</sup>. However, the district of Bolnisi was still home to a large number of Azeri people. According to the inhabitants of Nakhiduri (also known by the locals as Kochulo), the only places that were re-named were the ones where



the majority of the population was Azeri. The logic behind the strategy was simple: The populated areas where ethnic Georgians constitute a majority, or no relevant number of Azeri people where left could be presented to future generations as historically Georgian villages. Meanwhile, if the villages where the inhabitants are essentially Azeri lose their Azeri designation in exchange of a Georgian one, again that territory will be able to be claim as historically Georgian, no matter who is living there.

The re-naming in Bolnisi was fulfilled gradually during the 1990-91 period. However, in 1992 the process was interrupted with the abrupt blastoff of the coup d'état that started the civil war. Like under Stalinist regime, it seems like this would have been one phase of a wilder process to show the exclusive ethnic dominance of Georgian people among their territory. Process that had already started with the replacement of Azeri toponyms in other districts of the Kvemo Kartli region, such as in Dmanisi where nine locations had their names changed, as it has been discussed in the previous chapter, and whose last trashing tails can still be followed nowadays.

#### *4.4 Renaming of places in the XXIst century*

In April 2011, the Marneuli based NGO 'Tolerance' was conducting a research on Cultural monuments in various locations. When they were trying to find the location of one of the villages on the website of the State Registry of Georgia<sup>56</sup> they came across the fact that maps with new names for Azerbaijani villages had appeared. Zenphira Azizbekova, one of the activists that made the discovery, revealed that 19

villages were re-named in Marneuli (even though, at the time of the research, none re-naming was registered in this municipality) and other 12 in Tsalka. When asked about the purpose of just re-naming some of them, and not all, Azizbekova resolved that the re-named places were all located around the main road, as if it was just the first phase of a larger process.

These facts could not be confirmed since at the time of the research was conducted, the toponyms in Marneuli municipality remained with no alteration. According to what the activist says, the pressure of diverse NGOs and the Azerbaijani media<sup>57</sup> made them back up and leave the old ones untouched. In Azizbekova's perspective, this retraction would not have happened if it was not due to the up-coming elections. As different publications point out, ethnic minorities usually tend to vote for the governing political party<sup>58</sup>.

In an interview with the Azerbaijani newspaper *Region plus*<sup>59</sup>, the head of the Georgian Public State Registry Agency, Sergo Tsikarishvili, justified the incident as "an annoying error on the website of the agency, about which employees of the organization learnt just recently". Tsikarishvili pointed out that it is not legally binding. Thus, he claimed that "there can be no talk of changing Turkic toponyms to Georgian ones," attributing the alterations to a mistake made by the private company who was in charge of the cadastre registration of the country's territorial sections at the request of the Georgian Public Registry Agency. According to the head, these names were adopted in Soviet times and reanimated as part of a confusion. However, none allusion to the new designations could be found in none of the consulted sources between 1925 and 1989.

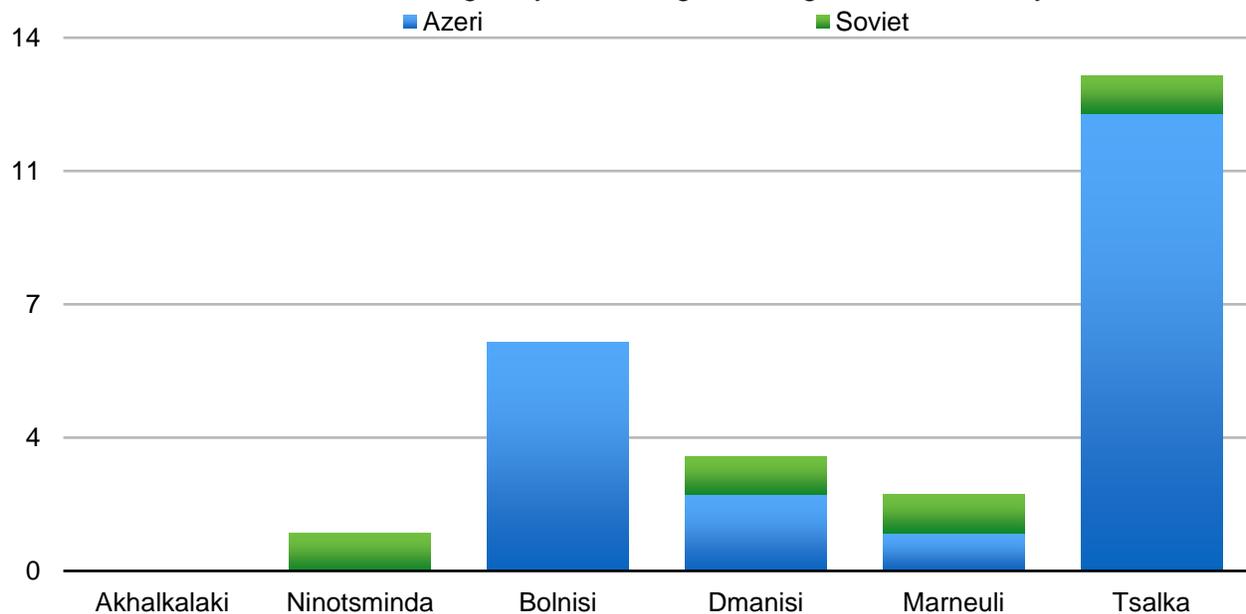


Simultaneously, they also found out that other 12 villages were re-named in the municipality of Tsalka. The case of Tsalka rayon was a far cry from the example above. In this case, the toponymy of 12 geographical objects never returned to their condition before the 2011 re-naming. Elbrus Mammedov, Director of the Human Rights Monitoring Group of Ethnic Minorities, argues that the most plausible reasoning for this is that unlike the situation in the Municipality of Marneuli, in Tsalka no NGO has enough will or resources to reverse these acts.

In one way or another, if everything was just a matter of an error, the Georgian Public Registry Agency could have rectify in the past four years,

Therefore, even though the local population was never consulted about the decision, according to the current legislation, these actions are cannot be considered illegal. Due to the restoration of historical justice, the procedure to replace the names of villages “does not provide for any vertical decision, by order from the top”<sup>62</sup>. The proposals to change the names of villages are the prerogative of the local population and municipalities. Later, they go through the commission of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Regional Development and are endorsed by the president of Georgia. And in this case, as it has already been discussed the proposal came from the Municipality of Tsalka.

Chart 10: Renamed villages by ethnic origins during the XXlst century



like they did in the case of the Marneuli Municipality. However, this was not the case. The 28th December, 2009 the sakrebulo issued a decree ordering the renaming of the villages of Bashkoi and Oliangi<sup>60</sup>. The process will be finished 22nd October, 2010 with another decree ordering the renaming of 10 more villages<sup>61</sup>.

Henceforth, these facts conduces us to the consequent obvious question: Why 2011? Why taking such a risk when since Independence, and specially in the aftermaths of the Rose Revolution, the official discourse of the country has been moving forward to a more profound



civic based nationalism, letting behind all trace of ethnic motivated nationalistic claims?

This assertion can be confirmed by the words of other Georgian scholar when he says that “analyses of the four presidential speeches of Georgia since its independence (the early 1990s) demonstrate that the processes of building a civic society and a democratic state on the one hand, and the secularization policy, on the other, went parallel to each other and these moves were seen as a truly European transformation of the state in its internal political life, with the spirit of acknowledgement of the rights of national minorities”<sup>63</sup>.

Actually, at the time when the re-naming of places in Tsalka happened, the man who declared that “The strength of a unified Georgia is its diversity”, Mikhail Saakashvili, was still in office. At that moment, the following statement could be read in the Georgian national tourism board:

“Not quite Asian and certainly not really Middle Eastern, yet not fully European either, Georgia is an exotic mixture of influences not seen anywhere else... To be sure, we Georgians are neither Russian nor Slavic, and our language is much older and from a different linguistic family”<sup>64</sup>.

As it can be inferred from this, the former president’s discourse has been less and less focused on the ethnic approach and more inclined to what is considered to be the traditionally western reading of nationalism, ergo, a more civic-based, secular one. In regards of Georgian identity, Shaakasvili and his government has “sought to take a stance of promoting a civic nation, based on citizenship and loyalty toward common institutions, and to publicly underline

the belonging of all resident ethnic groups as citizens of the Georgian nation”<sup>65</sup>.

It could be said that even though the state’s official position towards the issue it was more and more inclusive, the de facto diversity was not that obvious, and ethno-nationalism is still permeating Georgian society. As one activist for the rights of ethnic minorities pointed out, minorities in Georgia do not feel entitle to complain about what they consider to be against their rights. In a conference when she addressed the lack of fundings from public institutions to rebuild muslim temples, the Georgian attendants reacted answering the following words: “You should be content, since we still let you keep your Mosques”<sup>66</sup>.

These complains are seen as “unappreciative” since minorities up to certain extend they are still considered at one level of consciousness as “guests” on Georgian soil, and complaining in the country of hospitality it is considered an outrageous act<sup>67</sup>.

In Elbrus Mammedov’s words, during the period 2009-2010 there was a big campaign against the NGOs and different Human Rights organizations which ended up with the cease of their activities. Therefore, the Georgian government would have used this weakening of civil society, since they would not have to fear any kind of confrontation with the local population. This theory is also supported by other scholars, by the assertion that in the period comprehended between 2005-2006, the central government began increasing its influence undermining the control that local authorities have hold<sup>68</sup>.

However, the Head of the Tsalka Municipality, Ilya Sabadze, explained that the decision to rename the places during this time it



is connected to the renovation of the main road. The 12 renamed villages are located around the main road and since the signs that occupied the way had to be renovated anyway, the economic cost would not be that high. “Our country is moving towards Europe, why should we have Turkic names? Who feels identified with them? For us, Georgians, they mean nothing, we can not relate to these Turkish sounding places”<sup>69</sup>.

Not even the local population of the villages. All the villages that were renamed at this time, were inhabited by ethnic Greeks until they decided to emigrate and resettle in either Russia or Greece. It is important to underline that Greeks of south-central Georgia speak a Turkic language called Urum, and not Greek. The so-called Pontic Greek community came from what is now northeastern Turkey, “a prosperous and highly cultured Byzantine successor state” which lived its greatest splendor from the early 13th century until the mid 15th century as the Empire of Trebizond. After the Ottoman conquest of Trebizond in 1641, some of its Greek residents abandoned Greek for Turkic dialects, even though they maintained their Greek and Christian identity<sup>70</sup>. That is why most of the 25 villages populated by the Greek community in the past had Turkic toponyms<sup>71</sup>.

Thus, nowadays the population of those geographical points is formed by a large number of Georgian eco-migrants from Adjara and Svaneti that have been arriving to replace the Greeks. Therefore, according to Sabadze they were never complains coming from the local population. The only complains they have ever received were coming from former inhabitants who now live in abroad. As Stalin’s maxim claims: “No people, no problem”. Or, in other words, if the local population is not strong enough

or that aware of their rights and situation, they are not an obstacle. Anyway, to cause no inconveniences to the former citizens, nowadays, the administration decided to use both designations (the old and the new toponyms) in every official document they issue.

In his believe, all the names except for Berta<sup>72</sup> are the real historical names of the villages. Apparently, they based this statement in a map dated in 1918, which existence could not be proofed by the author of this research. In fact, in cases like the geographical point now known as Chirdilisubani, references to the previous Azeri name ‘Shipiak’ can be found in maps dated on 1840. The same happens with the village known as Artsivani, where its old denomination ‘Dskinifs’ or ‘Jinifi’ can be tracked up to 1842. Not to mention all the Soviet documents that have been analyzed.

As shown in the figures in chapter 3, since 2002 many Azeri villages have been renamed besides the 12 in the Tsalka district. Two in Dmanisi and six in Bolnisi, over and above the 18 that had supposedly been renamed in the Marneuli district. Thus, it can be concluded that these are not just isolated cases, but part of a process that has been ongoing since Stalinist time, gradually, and with different halts but with a clear continuing legacy. As a consequence of the “Soviet system of Union Republics that gave constitutional and political privileges to the titular group and identified the republic as the groups’ historic homeland”<sup>73</sup>.

Still, this does not through light upon the political reasons which motivated the re-naming in the second decade of the 21st century. In Professor Giorgi Gogsadze’s opinion, in such a complicated region as the one we are focusing now on, with so many un-solved conflicts,



territorial disputes, separatist movements and different ethnic groups claiming for their piece of land, even if it is not justified, it is understandable that the Georgian authorities fear that these toponyms could be used as a political tool or as some sort of source of territorial claims by their neighboring countries<sup>74</sup>. Instead of the recognition of the people who inhabited those lands, as a recognition of the historical ownership of the territory.

## V. MAIN FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

### 5.1 THE ETYMOLOGIC DIVERSITY OF THE TOPONYMS IN THE REGION

As it has been shown in the figures presented in the previous chapter, since 1918 repeated processes of place renaming have taken place in the Kvemo Kartli region and the Javakheti area, processes with a continuing legacy in the present day. Nonetheless, it has to be underlined that the area is still really rich when it comes to its toponyms, with a very diverse etymology.

Proof of this fact, is that in every analyzed rayon, (excluding the case of Bolnisi, where in the last century the 63% of its territory has been renamed) more than the half of the toponymy, relates to non dominant ethnic groups of Georgia (in some cases even making up more than the 75%). Thus, nowadays it is not difficult to come across with names with Turkic origins such as “Useinkendi” or “Salamaleiki” (in Dmanisi district); Armenian, like, Varevani or Vachiani (Akhalkalaki district) and Russian, for example, Tambovka and Vladimirovka (Ninotsminda district).

#### 5.1.1 Renaming of the main territorial units.

However, when it comes to the main territorial units of Georgia, the landscape has a much less

heterogeneous character. Even though, traces of the existence of different ethnic groups can be proven through the toponyms of the villages, the regions and the districts in Georgia have been all renamed to designations with ‘Georgian connotations’. As it has been discussed in chapter 4, the process of ‘georgianization’ of Georgia started during Stalinist time, when all the main territorial units were given a Georgian sounding name (like in the case of the districts in Kvemo Kartli, where by the end of the 1940’s all the administrative centers had new non-Turkic names). This process finished in the early 1990’s, when the only municipalities that were not renamed during the Stalinist period, obtained Georgian sounding names. A really good example is the case of the Ninotsminda district. If we exclude the toponyms with Soviet connotations, only one geographical point was ever renamed in this municipality, its administrative center: Bogdanovka, changed to Ninotsminda. Thus, at a first glimpse the Georgian map is purely Georgian.

5.1.2 ‘Georgianization’ of toponyms. Withal, it has also had to be taken into consideration, that, if not renamed, most of the toponymy has suffered a georgianization process, where elements of the place-denominations have been adapted to the needs of the Georgian language.

1. Acquisition of the Georgian suffix -i: Most of the toponyms, as the years passed by, had acquired the classic Georgian ending ‘-i’, as you can see in the following examples:

- Darvaz —> Darbazi (Bolnisi District)
- Ormashen —> Ormasheni (Dmanisi district)
- Abul —> Abuli (Akhalkalaki district)
- Burnashet —> Burnasheti (Tsalka district)

2. Translation of the toponym or its constitutive elements: Another form of ‘georgianization’ of the toponyms consists of translating the name of the village like in the case of Sameba in the Ninotsminda district. Before being renamed to Kalinino in the late 1940’s it was known as Troitskoe, the Russian



translation of the Georgian Sameba ('Trinity' in English).

More frequent than the translation of the full name of a village is the translation of some elements from the original name. This is the case of often used words in the formation of toponyms such as 'Didi' (Big), 'Patara' (Small), Zemo (Upper), Kvemo,... For example, Iukhari Saral in Marneuli, which after the 1940's started to be called Zemo Sarali.

3. Phonetical development: Some of the villages as time went by had suffered a phonetical development.

- Kumurdo in Akhalkalaki district, which was previously known as Gumburdo
- Didi and Patara Kondura (in Ninotsminda district) which are now called Didi and Patara Gondrio.
- Iakhublo (in the Dmanisi Municipality) was known as Iagublo.

4. Misspelling in the transcription of documents: Variations of originally non-Georgian toponyms can also be found, due to the misspelling caused by the variety of alphabets used for the transcription or the ignorance of the authorities elaborating the documents where they were mentioned.

- The town of Gorelovka (in Ninotsminda municipality) was called Goreloe or Gorelov.
- The village of Kurtliar (in Marneuli district) is nowadays known as Kurtlari.
- Gelakdar (in Dmanisi district) is after 1930's known as Gedagdagi
- Takalo (in Marneuli district) was Takialo until the 1930's and Tekali until nowadays in all the official documents.

#### 5.1.3 Use of non-official toponyms by the local population.

In many cases, the local population of villages in Kvemo Kartli employs its own version of the toponyms. Some of these unofficial denomination have been proven to be the designations used previously to refer to the same exact geographical point before its renaming, like Abdalo for Javshaniani (in the Bolnisi district) or Khadik for Tbeti (in the Tsalka district). Sometimes, the use of the old or the new toponyms depends on the language that is being

used by the speaker. For example, the Armenian community in Samkhtse Javakheti will refer to Ninotsminda when talking in Georgian and to Bogdanovka when expressing in Armenian language. Nevertheless, other examples resulted quite divergent. In spite of the general believe of some places being renamed, when going through the official files it is demonstrated that the supposedly old and the new denomination were co-existing.

For example, in the Administrative-territorial division of the Georgian SSR 1930, the population of both - the village of Sarvan and Marneuli is shown. The same as in the case of Churuk-khamarlo (which is considerate to be the historical name of Bolnisi, before Liukseburgi, for the Azeri population) which appeared in the Administrative-territorial division of the Georgian SSR of the years 1925 and 1930. Simultaneously, the name Luksemburgi can be read. The most presumable explanation is that, actually, Marneuli was never Sarvan but another village that most likely had already disappeared, the same as Churuk-khamarlo. However, before running to conclusions other possibilities should be explored.

#### 5.1.4 Administrative redistribution as a way of renaming.

The administrative redistribution as a way of renaming has been common practice by the different Georgian authorities in charge during the last century. During Soviet time, for example, villages were constantly included or deleted from larger territorial units.

The case of the village of Arukhlo, renamed Nakhiduri is really enlightening as a matter of effect. Arukhlo was a town, 10kms away from another geographical point that was hosting a church, Nakhiduri, but with no inhabitants. When the renaming in the early 90's took place, the competent authorities pretending they were the same village, they merged them and gave the new geographical object the name of Nakhiduri (after having renamed it Kakliani, first). A similar situation happened in recent days with the town of Guguti, in the Dmanisi district. The territory which is now considered to be part of Guguti



it used to be the location of two Azeri villages: Patara Muganlo and Saatlo. After the Azeri population left the village, they merged into a sole one creating a new territorial unit called Guguti. Thus, Sarvan could have been absorbed by the Marneuli municipality and been converted into a simple neighborhood.

As it has been pointed out in different occasions, the renamed villages were most of the time located either around the administrative center of the district, or surrounding a main road. Therefore, it could be said that when it comes to renaming usually authorities' first targets are the locations that are less hidden to the people.

It is also remarkable that, despite the local population thought that some villages were renamed in the 90's in the official documents they were renamed long before, like the village of Kapachki which was renamed Kvemo Bolnisi (in the Bolnisi district) in the late 40's. In some occasions, there is no even records of these supposedly Azeri historical designations even before 1918. A clear example of this occurring is Dzveli Kveshi (in the Bolnisi mkhare). Even though the local population claims that its historical name is Zol Goyach no proof of this has been found. The same as in the case of the village of Potskheveriani, where no trace of the apparently historical Azeri name Babakishiler was ever mentioned in any analyzed file.

5.1.5 Co-official denominations. In other cases, villages had had co-official denominations, for a really long period until they adopted just one official designation. One of the examples which illustrates better the situation is the village of Kirovka, in the Marneuli district, was presented with both designations Mamai and Kirovka, until the 21st century, when the Azeri place name was finally banished from the bureaucracy and administration. Further examples can also be found in the Ninotsminda rayon (Paravani-Rodionovka, now Rodionovka) or in Bolnisi (Chatakh-Poladauri, since the 50's, nowadays Poladauri).

Abandoned villages such as Tapan located in the Bolnisi district (claimed to be renamed Disbeli)

disappeared from all the official files and census. Therefore, it becomes really complicated to verify if these locations adopted new Georgian names or they just disappeared.

5.1.6 Differences between the Azerbaijani and Armenian communities in Georgia. The renaming processes which took place in Kvemo Kartli also shows, once again, there is a difference between ethnic Azerbaijanis and Armenians in this regard (this is also the case in terms of the street names in the main cities of the regions). Unlike the Azeri/Turkic<sup>75</sup> toponyms, the Armenians have managed to maintain during the years without suffering any remarkable modifications.

One of the main reasons that different Georgian scholars<sup>76</sup> embrace to give a plausible explanation to the acts of renaming, specially the ones made nowadays, is the chronicle fear of the ethnic Georgian citizens to the loose of their territorial integrity. After the trauma produced by the lost of Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) and Abkhazia, any national claims on behalf of minority groups will be perceived as an open door for separatist movements. As it has already been repeatedly mention in chapter 2, the toponymy can qualify as a source of legitimation for territorial claims. In this case if the adjacent lands with Armenia and Azerbaijan respond to Armenian or Azeri denominations, it could mislead to the assumption that these territories historically were not under Georgian rule but these countries'.

Yet, even though Samtskhe-Javakheti, is often considered as a potential conflict zone and has been a region of major concern for the government since Georgia's independence in 1991, no renaming has ever been made in the Javakheti area, which is mainly populated by the Armenian community (excluding Soviet villages and the administrative center of Ninotsminda, before known as Bogdanovka). The renaming acts which took place in Tsalka, the other concentration point of ethnic Armenian population in the area never involved Armenian toponymy.



On the contrary, the Turkic place-names are the ones that had suffered the biggest number of changes since 1918, with 59 acts in the four districts of Kvemo Kartli and the Ninotsminda district, in Samkhtse - Javakheti.

- Renaming of places with “Turkic connotations”: 57
- Renaming of places with “German connotations”: 8
- Renaming of places with “Socialist connotations”: 7
- Renaming of places with “Russian connotations”: 1

According to Elbrus Mammedov’s words, the cause for the divergent treatment of Azeri and Armenian minority in this matter could be the strength of the Armenian civil society of Samkhtse-Javakheti, in comparison to the Azeri civil society in Kvemo Kartli. The influence of local actors in those areas of Samtskhe-Javakheti where the Armenian minority is concentrated it is much bigger than the one exercised by local actors where the Azeri minority is concentrated (such as Marneuli, Dmanisi and Bolnisi districts). “Compared with Javakheti there are far fewer influential local actors, given the tendency noted above for the central authorities to be far more involved in the day-to-day management of the region and not to co-opt leaders of the minority community to run local affairs in the same way as they do in Javakheti”<sup>77</sup>. Today, the Armenian community is politically mobilized in Georgia while Azeris are not<sup>78</sup>.

### 5.1.7 Sovietization of the German toponymy.

It is really interesting to see the development experienced by the German villages in Kvemo Kartli. As it can be appreciated in the Annex II, all the German toponyms were replaced by Socialist ones, with just one exception: The town of Traubenberg (located in the Bolnisi district, at that time Liukseburgi) which was renamed Tamarisi. These are some examples: Waldheim (Dmanisi district) would be known as Kirovisi, Rozenberg as Molotovo (Tsalka district) and Ekaterinfeld (in the Bolnisi district) Lyukseburg.

Nevertheless, nowadays all of the Soviet toponyms that replaced the German ones have been renamed with Georgian names.

5.1.8 New names: Historical names? Another explanatory argument for the renaming of places, specially the ones that took place in Bolnisi during Gamsakhurdia’s presidency, is based on the supposed historical character of the names with Georgian connotations. Despite the fact that the scope of this research does not go as far as to elucidate which of the given denominations is the “most historical one”, and the oldest information that has been collected for the sake of this research dates in the mid 19th century, certain concerns on this matter should be exposed.

As it has already been pointed out, some of the Soviet population records showed two different designations for some of the places. In some cases, there is a match with the new Georgian toponymy. This is the case of Osmalyar in the Bolnisi district which was renamed Mtskhneti. In the Territorial-Administrative distribution of the Georgian SSR of 1930 the name ‘Tskhneti’ is mentioned just next to the Azeri homonym Osmalyar. The same as in the case of Demur-Gasan in the Marneuli district, renamed Kapanakh during Stalin’s regime. The old co-relation of people and villages of the Georgian SSR confirms the previous existence of the Georgian toponymy.

However, in most of the samples that these files provide the reality could not be more different. The village of Neokhareba, located in the Tsalka municipality, was renamed Chirdilsubani in the year 2011. Nevertheless, as the Territorial-Administrative distribution of the Georgian SSR shows the co-official name of Neokhareba was Engikoi and not Chirdilsubani. Again, the little town of the Bolnisi municipality, Siskala, nowadays called Balakauri (after its renaming in the early 90’s), was mentioned next to the name ‘Rtsikhila’. Instead, no mention of the designation ‘Balakauri’ could be found.

It is well known that after the collapse of the Soviet regime, the corrupt state machinery based on old stereotypes of thought and action, as well as bribery and nepotism remained. For example, according to Transparency International, before the Rose Revolution, out of 133 countries surveyed, only six had a worse Corruption Perception Index than Georgia



in 2003<sup>79</sup>. Similar indices were published by other international organizations like The World Bank or Quality of Growth<sup>80</sup>. If this statement is true it would not be to brave to assume that the committees in charge of taking these decisions were not composed with the best experts on their fields (such as linguists or historians), as the incongruences discussed in the lines above demonstrate. In addition, the decisions taken in the different decrees were never supported by any kind of argumentation explaining the reasons why one name was given to certain geographic object and not other.

## VI. CONCLUSION

“Since only communities established in a place for generations have developed own place names for the features in their surroundings, they regard the public presentation of their geographical names also as an acknowledgment of their presence for generations, as recognition of the fact that their group has helped to

shape culture and cultural landscape”<sup>81</sup>. And as Astrid Erll reminded in her work *Memory in Culture* “recognizing minorities includes giving voice to their versions of the past”<sup>82</sup>.

The richness of the landscape and the etymologic variety of its toponymy demonstrate that the different versions of the past recalled by minorities are not neglected or disregarded, but, on the contrary, embraced and acknowledged as a result of the multi-cultural character and history of Georgia. However, the very various acts of renaming that had persisted up to our times are a reminiscence of that mindset of ethnic territorial exclusivity inherited from those nationality policies cooked in the Soviet ovens. Since then, “titular groups are now rapidly constructing history to prove their case”<sup>83</sup>.

A dangerous consequence is that those members of non-dominant groups or ethnic minorities are often ignored. Thus, “the national identity constructed will therefore not be an identity which allows for conflicting interpretations of history but will be based on a largely hegemonic version of history”<sup>84</sup>.



## Annex 1 - Interviews

Mariam Chkhatirsvili - Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University

Giorgi Gogsadze - Head of Human Geography Department, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University

Tamar Makharoblidze - expert in Sociolinguistics, Ilia State University

Oliver Reisner - Ilia State University

Nair Iridzyan - Head of Akhalkalaki Municipality

Ilya Sabadze - Head of Tsalka Municipality

Elshad Aliyev - Charity Organisation Garapapag

Alibala Askerov - Geirag Organisation

Zemphira Azizbekova - Civil Society organization "Tolerance"/ Youth organization "Union"

Elbrus Mamedov - Monitoring Group Human Rights for Minority Rights

## Annex 2 – Renamed Villages

BOLNISI

PERIOD OF THE RENAMING	PREVIOUS DESIGNATION	NEW DESIGNATION
1921	Ekaterinfeld	Lyuksemburg
Stalinist Period	Liuksemburg	Bolnisi
Stalinist Period	Traubenberg	Tamarisi
Stalinist Period	Khapanach	Kvemo Bolnisi
Stalinist Period	Chatakhi	Poladauri
Gamsakhurdia's presidency	Siskala	Balakauri
Gamsakhurdia's presidency	Kochulo	Chapala
Gamsakhurdia's presidency	Zemo Gulaveri	Geta
Gamsakhurdia's presidency	Karadashi	Itsria
Gamsakhurdia's presidency	Assankhodjalo	Khidiskuri
Gamsakhurdia's presidency	Molla Akhmedlo	Khataveti
Gamsakhurdia's presidency	Deirlo	Khakhaldzoari
Gamsakhurdia's presidency	Kvemo Koshalkilisi	Kvemo Arkevani
Gamsakhurdia's presidency	Asmalari	Mtskeneti



PERIOD OF THE RENAMING	PREVIOUS DESIGNATION	NEW DESIGNATION
Gamsakhurdia's presidency	Arukhlo	Nakhiduri
Gamsakhurdia's presidency	Karatikani	Sabereti
Gamsakhurdia's presidency	Japarlo	Samtredo
Gamsakhurdia's presidency	Imirgasan	Savaneti
Gamsakhurdia's presidency	Andzaoglu	Shua Bolnisi
Gamsakhurdia's presidency	Fakhralo	Talaveri
Gamsakhurdia's presidency	Sarachlo	Tspori
Gamsakhurdia's presidency	Kvemo Gulaveri	Mamkhuti
Gamsakhurdia's presidency	Saralar	Zvareti
Gamsakhurdia's presidency	Zemo Koshakilisi	Zemo Arkevani
Gamsakhurdia's presidency	Migirlo	Vanati
XXIst century	Patara Muganlo	Farisi
XXIst century	Abdalo	Javshaniani
XXIst century	Tashtikulari	Mukhrana
XXIst century	Kolagiri	Surtavi
XXIst century	Arakeli	Tsedzavnariani
XXIst century	Kipirjiki	Tseresi

**DMANISI**

PERIOD OF THE RENAMING	PREVIOUS DESIGNATION	NEW DESIGNATION
Stalinist Period	Baskicheti	Dmanisi
Stalinist Period	Ambarlo	Ganakhleba
Stalinist Period	Kalamsha	Gantiadi
Stalinist Period	Valdgeim	Kirovisi
Stalinist Period	Armatlo	Pantiani
Stalinist Period	Koshkatala	Sakire
Stalinist Period	Demurbulakh	Sarkineti



PERIOD OF THE RENAMING	PREVIOUS DESIGNATION	NEW DESIGNATION
Stalinist Period	Karaklo	Vake
Stalinist Period	Keivan Bul-Asan	Velispiri
Stalinist Period	Bolas Kesan	Tkispiri
XXIst century	Muganlo	Guguti
XXIst century	Saatlo	Guguti
XXIst century	Kirovisi	Ipinari

MARNEULI

PERIOD OF THE RENAMING	PREVIOUS DESIGNATION	NEW DESIGNATION
Stalinist Period	Kaia Khodzali	Enikendi
Stalinist Period	Mirzoevka	Norgiuli
Stalinist Period	Traubenberg	Tamarisi
Stalinist Period	Sarvan	Tazakendi
Khrushov	Giurakhi	Algeti
XXIst century	Kirovka	Mamai
XXIst century	Orjonikiadze	Saimerlo

NINOTSMINDA

PERIOD OF THE RENAMING	PREVIOUS DESIGNATION	NEW DESIGNATION
Stalinist Period	Troitskoe	Kalinino
Gamsakhurdia's presidency	Bogdanovka	Ninotsminda
XXIst century	Kalinino	Sameba
XXIst century	Paravani	Rodionovka



TSALKA

PERIOD OF THE RENAMING	PREVIOUS DESIGNATION	NEW DESIGNATION
1921	Alexandrov	Rozenberg
Stalinist Period	Iakublo	Chapaevka
Stalinist Period	Rozenberg	Molotovo
Stalinist Period	Barmakiz	Tsalka
Krushov	Molotovo	Trialeti
XXIst century	Kariak	Akhalsheni
XXIst century	Jinisi	Artsivani
XXIst century	Bashkoi	Bareti
XXIst century	Oliang	Berta
XXIst century	Shipiak	Chirdilisubani
XXIst century	Tikilisa	Gantiadi
XXIst century	Chapaevka	Kavta
XXIst century	Akhalik	Kokhta
XXIst century	Karakom	Sabechisi
XXIst century	Eddi-kilisa	Sakdrioni
XXIst century	Shua Kharaba	Samadlo
XXIst century	Gunia-kala	Sameba
XXIst century	Khadik	Tbeti



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> “Азербайджанские болельщики ответили грузинам – ФОТО” [Azeri Fans responded to the Georgians – A Photo], News.Az., at <<http://ru.oxu.az/sport/83725>>

<sup>2</sup> In collision with the claims raised by members of ethnic minority groups, the position of the Georgian Government is divergent as it is shown in the paragraph D of the Resolution of the Parliament of Georgia: On the ratification of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities: “In conformity with article 11.3 of the Convention, situations concerning the use of street names and other topographical indications in Georgian and in minority languages in regions traditionally inhabited by a significant number of representatives of national minorities are settled by internal legislation. Georgia does not consider this right granted to national minorities as obliging the State to change existing names of territorial units and considers it inappropriate to sign further international treaties on the above-mentioned issue”. (‘Towards Ratification’: Conference on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities 19 September 2005 in Tbilisi By Tom Trier & Eleonora Sambasile). The opinions of ethnic Georgian population do not coincide with the ethnic Azerbaijani claims pointed out at the beginning of the introduction either, as the scholar Jonathan Wheatley refers in this words: “The continuing use of minority languages in Georgia is somehow seen by the Georgian majority as an aberration that needs to be corrected. This also dovetails with the notion that national minorities somehow represent a ‘third column’, whose loyalty to the state can never be guaranteed”. (Jonathan Weatley, “Georgia and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages”, ECMI Working Paper Series 42, June 2009, 4, at <[http://www.ecmcaucasus.org/upload/publications/working\\_paper\\_42\\_en.pdf](http://www.ecmcaucasus.org/upload/publications/working_paper_42_en.pdf)>

<sup>3</sup> Derek Alderman, *Place, Naming, and the Interpretation of Cultural Landscapes* (Ashgate Press, Aldershot, UK, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> The General Population Census of Georgia of 2014, National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat), at <[http://census.ge/files/results/Census\\_release\\_ENG.pdf](http://census.ge/files/results/Census_release_ENG.pdf)>

<sup>5</sup> Map of the Russian Possessions in the Caucasus showing the current Russian, Turkish and Persian borders addressed in the official documents of the year 1840.

<sup>6</sup> Составлена и литографирована военно топографическомь отдѣль кавказского военного округа 1903 года, Тифлисъ. (Map of the Military and Topographical Division of the Caucasus Military District, 1903, Tiflis.)

<sup>7</sup> Sergi Jikia, *გურჯისტანის ვოლაიეთის დიდი დავთარი [A Great Registry Of The Gurjistan Area]* (საქართველოს სსრ მეცნიერებათა აკადემიის გამომცემლობა, Tbilisi, 1941-58).

<sup>8</sup> *Кавказский календарь [Caucasian Calendar]*, Tbilisi, 1846-1917.

<sup>9</sup> Annex 1

<sup>10</sup> Yi Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1977), 6.

<sup>11</sup> J. Kolen & J. Renes, *Landscape Biographies: Key Issues* (Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2015), 35.

<sup>12</sup> William G. Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape* (Folio Society, London, 2005), 14.

<sup>13</sup> Azaryahu in Alderman, *ibid.*, 2.

<sup>14</sup> Horsman (2006), 279 as cited in Adrian Koopman, “The post-colonial identity of Durban” in B. Helleland, C.-E. Ore & S. Wikstrøm (eds.), *Names and Identities* (4(2) Oslo Studies in Language, Oslo, 2012), 133–159), at 134.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Groote and Tialda Haarsten: *The communication of Heritage: Creating Place Identities* (Ashgate Press, Aldershot, UK, 2012), 181.

<sup>16</sup> Peirce F. Lewis in Alderman, *ibid.*, 2.

<sup>17</sup> Helen Kerfoot, *Geographical names - maps, identity and the United Nations*, Full text of presentation to the Plenary Session of the International Cartographic Conference, Santiago Chile, 2009), 1.

<sup>18</sup> Alderman, *ibid.*, 6.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Jordan, “Place Names as Ingredients of Space-Related Identity in Helleland”, in C.-E. Ore & S. Wikstrøm (eds.) *Names and Identities*, (4(2) Oslo Studies in Language, Oslo, 2012, at 120.

<sup>20</sup> HRMG, “Monitoring report on Bolnisi District of Kvemo Kartli Region, Georgia”, HRMG reports, 2011, Tbilisi, 16.

<sup>21</sup> According to the 2002 census, just the 10% of the population profess this faith in Georgia, thus could be considered as a non-dominant group.

<sup>22</sup> “The General Population Census of Georgia of 2014”, National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat), at <[http://census.ge/files/results/Census\\_release\\_ENG.pdf](http://census.ge/files/results/Census_release_ENG.pdf)>



<sup>23</sup> George Sanikidze and Edward W. Walker, *Islam and Islamic Practices in Georgia*. Seen in Jonathan Wheatley, “Obstacles Impeding the Regional Integration of the Kvemo Kartli Region of Georgia”, ECMI Working Paper Series 23, February 2005, 5, <[at http://www.ecmi.de/uploads/tx\\_lfpubdb/working\\_paper\\_23.pdf](http://www.ecmi.de/uploads/tx_lfpubdb/working_paper_23.pdf)>

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Due to the fact that the Georgian government has not released the whole information regarding the 2014 census yet, all the demographic information concerning the six analyzed districts from now on refers to the results of the First National Population Census of Georgia of the year 2002; State Statistics Department of Georgia. (State Statistical Department of Georgia, LTD “Informational Publishing Centre”, Book I, (Tbilisi, 2003)).

<sup>26</sup> Annex 2: Re-named villages.

<sup>27</sup> Information provided by the Tsalka Municipality

<sup>28</sup> Wheatley, 2005, *ibid.*, 6.

<sup>29</sup> David Matsaberidze, “The Role of Civic Nationalism in Transformation of Internal Ethnic Politics of the Post-Soviet Georgia”, ECMI Working Paper Series 83, 2014, 46, at <[http://www.ecmi.de/uploads/tx\\_lfpubdb/ECMI\\_Working\\_Paper\\_83.pdf](http://www.ecmi.de/uploads/tx_lfpubdb/ECMI_Working_Paper_83.pdf)>

<sup>30</sup> For example, the villages of Tsalka district were part of the Tbilisi oblast, not in Borchalo, which is were most of the villages of Kvemo Kartli were located at that time.

<sup>31</sup> There are two exceptions to this: the two German villages replaced by communist denominations just after the bolsheviks took over Georgian land. This will be further discussed in the following pages.

<sup>32</sup> Two other villages with German names had already been renamed in 1921.

<sup>33</sup> These acts of renaming are not included in this research since they are not connected with the treatment of ethnic minorities.

<sup>34</sup> During this process, schools in the native language of the titular nation were being promoted.

<sup>35</sup> Sergei Markedonov, “Stalin’s national policy helped Soviet demise, Russia Beyond the Headlines”, at <[http://rbth.com/opinion/2013/03/18/stalins\\_national\\_policy\\_helped\\_soviet\\_demise\\_23977.html](http://rbth.com/opinion/2013/03/18/stalins_national_policy_helped_soviet_demise_23977.html)>

<sup>36</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, 1994), 305.

<sup>37</sup> Annex 2: Renamed villages

<sup>38</sup> Decree on the renaming of the town Giaurarkhi to Algeti issued by the Main Soviet Presidium of the Georgian SSR in 03.08.1959, consulted on 01.07.2015

<sup>39</sup> Annex 1: Interview.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Decree on the Renaming of some Geographical Points, signed 06.07.1943 by the he Main Soviet Presidium of the Georgian CCP. National Archives of Georgia. Case: 1165.8.29

<sup>42</sup> Tamara Gumbatova, “Немцы в семье Сталина“ [Germans in the Family of Stalin], ECHO, № 173(1413) (19 September 2006), at <[http://www.echo-az.com/archive/2006\\_09/1413/istoriya01.shtml](http://www.echo-az.com/archive/2006_09/1413/istoriya01.shtml)>

<sup>43</sup> J. Otto Pohl, “The Deportation and Destruction of the German Minority in the USSR”, Personal Dissertation, Otto J.Pohl Publishing (2004), 1, at <

[https://www.norkarussia.info/uploads/3/7/7/9/37792067/deportation\\_and\\_destruction\\_soviet\\_germans.pdf](https://www.norkarussia.info/uploads/3/7/7/9/37792067/deportation_and_destruction_soviet_germans.pdf) >

<sup>44</sup> The All Union Population Census of 1926, at <[http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng\\_nac\\_26.php?reg=2330](http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_26.php?reg=2330)>

<sup>45</sup> Mamuka Komakhia, *ქონოსები საქართველოში* [*Ethnic Groups in Georgia*] (The Georgian Public Defender’s Library, Tbilisi, 2008).

<sup>46</sup> Pohl, *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Ghia Nodia *Dynamics of State-Building in Georgia* (John F. Kennedy School of Government, Cambridge, 1996), 25.

<sup>50</sup> Decree on the Renaming of some Regions, Cities and Municipalities, signed 27.02.1991 by the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian Socialist Republic. Consulted 26.06.2015 in the National Archives of Georgia.

<sup>51</sup> Jonathan Wheatley, “The Status of Minority Languages in Georgia and the Relevance of Models from Other European States”, ECMI Working Paper series 26, March, 2006, 12, at <

[http://www.ecmi.de/uploads/tx\\_lfpubdb/working\\_paper\\_26.pdf](http://www.ecmi.de/uploads/tx_lfpubdb/working_paper_26.pdf)> .

<sup>52</sup> *Id.*, 2005, 13.

<sup>53</sup> *Id.*, *The Integration of National Minorities in the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli provinces of Georgia. Five Years into the Presidency of Mikheil Saakashvili*, ECMI Working Paper Series 44, September 2009, 12, at <[http://www.ecmi.de/uploads/tx\\_lfpubdb/working\\_paper\\_26.pdf](http://www.ecmi.de/uploads/tx_lfpubdb/working_paper_26.pdf)>



- <sup>54</sup> After comparing the official records of the administrative territorial distribution of the Bolnisi municipality of 2015, with the information extracted from the 2002 census.
- <sup>55</sup> Mamuka Komakhia and Revaz Bakhtadze, *Policy Analysis of Civil Integration of Ethnic Minorities in Georgia*, (BTTK Policy Research Group Ethnic Minorities Program, Tbilisi, 2008), at 7.
- <sup>56</sup> At <[www.reestri.gov.ge](http://www.reestri.gov.ge)>
- <sup>57</sup> Namiq Mailov, “Error Slips in Unnoticeably”, Region Plus, at <<http://regionplus.az/en/articles/view/3283>>
- <sup>58</sup> Ghia Nodia and Alvaro Pinto Scholtbach, *The Political Landscape of Georgia. Political Parties: Achievements, Challenges and Reforms* (Eburon Academic Publishers, The Netherlands, 2006), 67.
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.
- <sup>60</sup> Resolution regarding the renaming of the villages Oliangi and Bashqoi, in the Tsalka district with the Historical Toponyms Berta and Bareti, State Committee for the Protection of Use, Changing, Registration, Normalization and Protection of Geographical Objects № 7, 28.12.2009.
- <sup>61</sup> Resolution regarding the renaming of various Geographical Objects in Georgia, State Committee for the Protection of Use, Changing, Registration, Normalization and Protection of Geographical Objects № 2, 22.10.2010
- <sup>62</sup> Ceyhun Nacafov, “The Map No One Knew About”, Region Plus, at <<http://regionplus.az/en/articles/view/3282>>
- <sup>63</sup> Matsaberidze, *ibid.*, 12.
- <sup>64</sup> At <<http://georgia.travel/culture/>>
- <sup>65</sup> Niklas Nilsson and Johanna Popjanevski, *State Building Dilemmas: The Process of National Integration in Post Revolutionary Georgia* (Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 2009), 66.
- <sup>66</sup> Annex 1: Interview with the activist
- <sup>67</sup> Laurence Broers, *Filling the Void: Ethnic Politics and Nationalities Policy in Post-Conflict Georgia* (Association for the Study of Nationalities, 2008), 288.
- <sup>68</sup> Wheatley, 2009, *ibid.*, 21.
- <sup>69</sup> Annex 1: Interview 24.11.2015
- <sup>70</sup> Martin W. Lewis, “The Turkic-Speaking Greek Community of Georgia—and Its Demise GeoCurrents”, (<http://www.geocurrents.info/cultural-geography/linguistic-geography/the-turkic-speaking-greek-community-of-georgia-and-its-demise#ixzz3xaNTdgiB>)
- <sup>71</sup> Livadi and Imera are the only etymologic Greek names in the district. Fatima.A. Eloyeva, “Ethnic Greek Group of Tsalka and Tetrtskaro” in Irene Philippaki-Warburton, Katerina Nicolaidis and Maria Sifianou (eds.), *Themes in Greek Linguistics* (John Benjamins Publishing Co., Amsterdam and Philadelphia, 1994), at 460.
- <sup>72</sup> Instead of giving Oliang its ‘real historical toponym’ (supposedly ‘Matsvta’), the authorities decided to rename the village ‘Berta’ after the monastery that was build few kilometers away.
- <sup>73</sup> Stephen F. Jones, *Old Ghosts and New Chains: Ethnicity and Memory in the Georgian Republic*, (School of American Research Press, Santa Fe, 1994), 163.
- <sup>74</sup> Annex 1. Interviews.
- <sup>75</sup> It is also important to remark that the Turkic village names also apply to the Greek ethnic minority in Tsalka, since as explained in the previous chapter the language that they used is Turkish and not Greek.
- <sup>76</sup> Annex 1: Interview
- <sup>77</sup> Wheatley, *ibid.*
- <sup>78</sup> Scott Radnitz, *National Narratives and Ethnic Relations in Georgia* (University of Washington, Washington D.C, 2011), 2.
- <sup>79</sup> “Civil Society Against Corruption”, Report, 2010, 8.
- <sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>81</sup> Peter Jordan, *The Meaning of Bilingual Naming in Public Space for the Cultural Identity of Linguistic Minorities* (Austrian Academy of Sciences, Viena, 2014), 23.
- <sup>82</sup> Astrid Erll, “Why Memory?” in Astrid Erll (ed.), *Memory in Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2011), at 4.
- <sup>83</sup> Stephen F. Jones, *Old Ghosts and New Chains: Ethnicity and Memory in the Georgian Republic* (School of American Research Press, Santa Fe, 1994), at 163.
- <sup>84</sup> Mia Swart, “Name Changes as Symbolic Reparation after Transition: the Examples of Germany and South Africa”, *German Law Journal* (2008), at 121.



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**María Diego Gordón**

\*Contact: [mdgordon12@gmail.com](mailto:mdgordon12@gmail.com)

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION SEE**

**EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR MINORITY ISSUES (ECMI)**

Schiffbruecke 12 (Kompagnietor) D-24939 Flensburg

☎ +49-(0)461-14 14 9-0 \* fax +49-(0)461-14 14 9-19

\* E-Mail: [info@ecmi.de](mailto:info@ecmi.de) \* Internet: <http://www.ecmi.de>