

Bolschewistische Ordnung in Georgien: Der Große Terror in einer kleinen kaukasischen Republik

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Большевистский порядок в Грузии. Большой террор в маленькой кавказской республике

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BOLSHEVIK ORDER IN GEORGIA

Published in Two Volumes

Volume 1

The Great Terror in a Small Caucasian Republic

For the first time in the historiography of the Great Terror, all three key NKVD mass operations in Georgia are examined together: the operation under Order No. 00447 (the "kulak" operation), the operation targeting "national groups," and the social purge carried out by the "militia" troika. The study centres on the unique aspects of the terror in Georgia, where some of the repressive powers were delegated from the central authorities to local ones. This delegation manifested in the mass sentencing of elites by the troika of the Georgian SSR's NKVD, an extrajudicial body originally designed for the swift prosecution of ordinary Soviet citizens with no ties to power or its privileges. The research reveals a remarkable similarity between unconstitutional extrajudicial bodies (such as the troikas and dvojkas) and legitimate judicial institutions like the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR. Another distinguishing feature of the Great Terror in Georgia was the surprisingly "lenient" treatment of national diasporas, with the exception of Germans, by the so-called "national" troika of the Georgian SSR's NKVD. Six interviews with descendants of the Great Terror's victims from the village of Khashmi near Tbilisi shed light on the personal traumas and fears that the terror of 1937–1938 left behind, as large numbers of fathers, relatives, and loved ones were arrested in Khashmi, as they were throughout Georgia.

Chapter 5 – pp. 245-267

Translated from the Russian version

Social Status and Repressions: Abkhazians, Adjarians, Ossetians

In the late 16th century, Abkhazia fell under the influence of the Ottoman Empire, leading to widespread Islamisation of the Abkhazians. However, from 1810 to 1864, Abkhazia was gradually annexed by Russia, which provoked fierce resistance from the Abkhazians. During the annexation process and as a result of uprisings in 1866–1867 and 1877–1878, a large number of Abkhazians—muhajirs—were expelled by the Russian authorities and emigrated to the Ottoman Empire. Even today, Abkhazian diasporas exist in Turkey and Syria [95]. Many thousands of Abkhazians perished during their escape, as well as from poor supplies and epidemics that ravaged the Ottoman ports where they disembarked. Some Abkhazians had already migrated in the 16th and 17th centuries, even before the Ottoman conquest, to the northern side of the Caucasus Mountains, where their descendants still live in Russia, forming the ethnic group known as the Abazins [96]. The populations that remained in Abkhazia after the departure of the elites were generally socially weakened. As a result, they came under strong Russian and Georgian influence and were partially converted to the Orthodox faith, unless they were already Christian, as Abkhazia had been a Christian country long before Islamisation.

Due to the sparse population of Abkhazia, a significant number of migrants from Mingrelia (Western Georgia), Svaneti, as well as Armenia, Greece, Russia, and Ukraine settled in the region [97]. Around Sukhum, Estonian, German, and Moldovan villages also emerged. The Abkhaz language belongs to the Northwestern or Western Caucasian language group, along with two other languages—Circassian and Ubykh (the latter of which is now extinct) [98].

Following the civil war, some Abkhazians, who had fought against the Georgian Mensheviks, gained strong support from Moscow after the Sovietisation of Georgia in 1921. This was especially due to the good connections of Nestor Lakoba, the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Abkhazian SSR. Although in the 1920s Abkhazians made up only half of Abkhazia's population and their numbers continued to decrease due to the process of 'Mingrelisation'—which affected Orthodox Abkhazians in areas bordering Mingrelia—the majority of leadership positions in the autonomous republic's government were held by Abkhazians [99]. Thus, the Abkhazians quickly came to possess a relatively large group of party officials.

The republic acquired a special status after it was officially declared the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia in 1921, although in practice, it did not correspond to this status, as it was part of the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic, and therefore part of the Georgian SSR. As a result, in the 1924 Soviet Constitution, Abkhazia, along with Adjara, was listed as an “autonomous” republic. This anomaly or ambivalence—a Soviet Socialist Republic as a state within another Soviet Socialist Republic—was partially rectified in 1925 when the first downgrade of Abkhazia's 'union' status occurred, reducing it to that of a Treaty SSR, as enshrined in the republic's first constitution. The status of a Treaty SSR meant that it was a Soviet republic with special relations with Georgia, and the 1921 treaty remained in force, according to which Abkhazia, indirectly through Georgia, was part of the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic. However, this status, like the previous one, was unique, making Abkhazia the only 'Treaty' republic within the Soviet Union. It was only in 1931 that its status was downgraded to that of an autonomous republic (ASSR) [100].

Such a high specific status of Abkhazia from 1921 to 1931 was not merely symbolic; it actually provided better formal opportunities, enabling the leadership of Abkhazia to appeal directly to Moscow and pursue a political line that was either independent or, at the very least, deviated from the central authorities in Tbilisi. Soviet and post-Soviet Georgian historiography, along with works influenced by it, often—likely not without ulterior motives—sought to minimise this history of Abkhazia's special status. This was partly achieved by designating it as the Abkhaz ASSR starting from 1921. Soviet historiography fundamentally refused to acknowledge that in 1931 the status of the national administrative entity had been downgraded, as it was necessary to portray only elevations in status (a similar distortion was applied to the history of the Karelo-Finnish SSR from 1940–1955). Georgian historiography, meanwhile, yielded to the temptation of nationalism and did not aim to provide the Abkhazians with any arguments in favour of Abkhazia's independence [101].

In 1937, the Abkhazians, like the Turks, Greeks, Laz, Germans, and others, were considered a national diaspora in the sense that the majority of Abkhazians lived outside the USSR, primarily in Turkey, with a small group residing in the French Mandate territory of Syria. However, they differed from all of the aforementioned national groups in that their homeland was within the Soviet Union, while the majority of Abkhazians abroad had formed as a result of emigration from Abkhazia, predominantly in the 19th century, rather than the reverse.

The situation was somewhat different for the Ossetians. The main areas of Ossetian settlement are north of the Caucasus Mountains (North Ossetia). In the far northwest of this region, Muslim Ossetians (Digors) live, while the majority of Ossetians are traditionally Orthodox Christians. This is especially true for Ossetians living in Georgia, among whom there are practically no Muslims. In the territories claimed by Georgia, Ossetians do not live in compact groups. In the South Ossetian Autonomous Region, created in 1921, Ossetians made up two-thirds of the population (around 70,000 out of 100,000), while an additional similar number of Ossetians lived outside the autonomous region, among the Georgian population in Kartli-Kakheti. The Ossetian language is an Indo-European language, part of the Iranian branch, and the Ossetians are descendants of the Iranian-speaking Alans, who played a significant role in the Middle Ages.

Ossetians in Georgia were traditionally peasants, and their places of residence were particularly underdeveloped areas with no large cities. Until 1921, Tskhinvali was not even a district centre. The small intelligentsia in the few Ossetian towns were, by nationality, Georgians, Armenians, and Jews, and the church language was Georgian. The Ossetian population had a low level of education, practically no native elite, and was initially poorly represented in the Communist Party. Like the Abkhazians, the Ossetians participated in the struggle against the Georgian Mensheviks in 1918–1921 on the side of the Red Army.

At the heart of the discussion regarding the history of repressions against the Abkhazians and Ossetians lies the aforementioned thesis of former Prime Minister of Abkhazia, Sergei Shamba, who argued that Abkhazia suffered more than any other region in Georgia during the "Stalin-Beria repressions." He views the following actions of the authorities as particularly egregious: the poisoning of Nestor Lakoba, Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Abkhaz ASSR, in December 1936; the Georgianisation of the Abkhaz Latin alphabet in May 1937; and the disproportionately extensive purging of ethnic Abkhazians from the state leadership in November 1937 [102].

However, Shamba's thesis will be tested here not so much based on the study of repressions against the elites, which the former Prime Minister of Abkhazia highlights, but, as was the case with the Laz, on the basis of databases of victims from the "*kulak*" and "*militia*" troikas. The "*national*" troika is excluded, as among its victims from September to November 1938, there were no Abkhazians. This is understandable since the Abkhazians in Turkey resided not in the eastern part of the country near the Georgian border, but in the west, around Istanbul. Therefore, the Georgian authorities did not have to concern themselves with the Abkhazians in the same way they did with the Laz, whose potential for crossing the border needed to be eliminated [103]. Comparative data is drawn from relevant statistics on the South Ossetian Autonomous Region. Additionally, information about repressions against Georgians, the titular nation of Georgia, is also used. Only at the very end of the analysis will the focus shift to the persecution of the elites. However, unlike Sergei Shamba, we will primarily rely on the results of studying repressions in Georgia based on the *Stalinist lists*, supported by data from the activities of the *Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR and the Supreme Court of the Georgian SSR*.

The largest number of representatives of the *semi-titular* nations, Abkhazians and Ossetians, were convicted in 1937–1938 by the "*kulak*" troika at the NKVD of the Georgian SSR. The total number of victims of the *kulak* operation under Order No. 00447 among Abkhazians and Ossetians amounted to 895 people, with significantly more than half of the repressed, about 62% (554 people), being ethnic Abkhazians. The combined share of Ossetians and Abkhazians out of the total number of those repressed by the "*kulak*" troika in Georgia in 1937–1938 was 4.2% (Abkhazians – 2.6%, Ossetians – 1.8%); in 1937, it was 3.8% (Abkhazians – 2.4%, Ossetians – 1.4%). In 1938, as in the case of the Laz (but unlike the Georgians), the number of victims increased, and the share of the total number of repressed grew by nearly a third in 1938, reaching 5.5% (Abkhazians – 3.2%, Ossetians – 2.3%), with a notable rise in the proportion of Ossetians.

If we examine the repressions against the Abkhazians separately, it becomes immediately apparent that, in relation to their population size within Georgia—55,409 people—the Abkhazians were subjected to disproportionately harsh repressions [104]. The repression rate stood at 1%, which is one-third higher than the corresponding rate for Georgians (0.63%) (a ratio of 1:0.6). Additionally, the rate of repressions involving the highest measure of punishment (capital punishment) was remarkably high. The proportion of death sentences in relation to the total Abkhaz population was 0.57%. When compared to the corresponding figure for Georgians, the rate for Abkhazians was almost twice as high (0.30%: 0.57%). Significantly more than half of all Abkhazians convicted during the "*kulak*" operation were sentenced to death [105].

When comparing the repressions of 1937 and 1938, it can be noted that by 1937, the Abkhazians, in comparison to Georgians, were already subjected to much more widespread persecution, with particularly harsh sentences being passed in their cases. In 1938, the trend of disproportionately high repressions against the Abkhazians persisted. However, that year, the use of capital punishment against Georgians caught up with the rate for Abkhazians, as the application of the highest measure of punishment for the titular nation also surged upwards [106].

However, it is perplexing that the degree of repression against the Abkhazians differs significantly from that of the Ossetians, even though both are considered *semi-titular* nations with their own autonomous republics or regions within Georgia. As noted earlier, the absolute number of repressed Ossetians was smaller than the number of Abkhazian victims. If we calculate the degree of repression against the Ossetians, i.e., the ratio of victims to the total Ossetian population in Georgia, the difference becomes even more pronounced. According to the 1937 census, there were 143,604 Ossetians in this Caucasian republic [107]. Thus, the degree of repression against the Ossetians during the *kulak* operation amounted to "only" 0.24%. This is almost a quarter of the corresponding figure for the Abkhazians (0.24% : 1% = 0.2 : 1). Strikingly, the Ossetians were repressed less intensely not only compared to the Abkhazians but also in comparison to the titular nation—the Georgians—where the ratio was 0.4:1 (0.24% : 0.63%). As for the application of the death penalty, in the case of the Ossetians, it did not differ significantly from that of the Abkhazians and Georgians: more than half of the convicted Ossetians were sentenced to death (0.24% overall repression rate, 0.13% repression rate related to the death penalty, i.e., the ratio of Ossetians sentenced to death to the total Ossetian population in Georgia) [108].

What, then, are the reasons for this different treatment of these two *semi-titular* nations? Could it be that the Orthodox Ossetians received some sort of "*religious bonus*"? Our working thesis is that alongside ethnicity, the different political and social status of certain ethnic groups played a decisive role in the repression. To rephrase: ethnicities with a low social status were persecuted to a lesser extent, while those with a high status were persecuted much more severely. This thesis should be considered both in relation to the past (social background) and the current status (social standing at the time of arrest). To test this thesis concerning the *kulak* operation, we have data on the social background of the victims (e.g., *kulak*, officer of the tsarist or White army, employee of the tsarist punitive organs, nobleman), information on social status at the time of arrest (such as worker, employee, peasant), and their level of education (higher, secondary, primary, illiterate). However, these data are far from complete. Regarding the Abkhazians, information about their social background is available for 68% (371 people) of the total number of those convicted by the troika (548 people). For social status, this figure is even lower—50% (274 people). The level of education is recorded in 62% of cases (339 people). For the Ossetians, the data on social background is even less complete, yet it can still be considered representative: social background is provided in the troika protocols for 27% of the convicted (148 people), social status for 51% (195 people), and the level of education for 57% (219 people) [109].

The very fact of the scant data on the social background of convicted Ossetians in the troika session protocols can be interpreted to mean that the social standing of the Ossetians before the revolution was low. Thus, in 1937, far fewer negative labels (e.g., *kulak*, officer, nobleman, gendarme, policeman) could be attached to them compared to the Abkhazians. Moreover, it is likely that NKVD officers, who prepared the troika protocols, were not generally interested in using neutral, non-damaging information about the defendants' "*peasant background*" and transferring it from the investigative files into the troika protocols. This is evidently why the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs database on the *kulak* operation, which is largely based on information from the troika protocols, suffers from incompleteness in this regard [110]. On the other hand, clearly "*negative*" information about social background, such as *kulak*, officer, nobleman, policeman, etc., should be regarded as

complete, since the Chekists would, in any case, transfer this into the troika protocol to strengthen the charges.

If we proceed from the last assumption and consider the data on negative social backgrounds as entirely reliable, then it follows that NKVD officers identified compromising social roots in 27% (132 people) of the convicted Abkhazians, but in only 11% of the cases (43 people) among the Ossetians—i.e., half as much in relative terms. Information on the severity of the sentences imposed on the Ossetians and Abkhazians with "dark" social pasts further demonstrates that even these "compromised" Ossetians were perceived by the Chekists as less dangerous than the Abkhazians. As a result, out of the 132 Abkhazians, 90 were sentenced to the highest measure of punishment (death) (68%), whereas out of the 43 Ossetians, 24 were sentenced to death (56%)—a difference of 12%. The fact that among the Ossetians, individuals with lower status were more likely to be arrested, and despite their "negative" social past, were clearly "less qualified" as candidates for the death penalty, is further evidenced by the distribution of this category of victims across various subcategories. Among the Ossetians, the share of "kulaks" sentenced to death amounted to about half the total number of former nobles, petty bourgeois, officers, merchants, and employees of the punitive organs who were executed (0.5:1). It should be noted that individuals classified as "kulaks" were generally less likely to face the death penalty compared to other groups of "former" categories. In the case of the Abkhazians, this ratio was 0.3:1. Thus, among the Abkhazians sentenced to death, the proportion of those who held a higher status at the time of arrest was significantly higher than among the Ossetians.

At the same time, when comparing all the parameters of repression, it is essential to bear in mind that all the defendants were generally sentenced by the same *troika*, meaning that the difference in sentences cannot be explained by a change in "judges".

However, serious doubts about the formulated working thesis (that lower social status results in less severe repression, while higher social status leads to harsher repression) arise when we turn to the next set of statistical data, namely information about the actual social status of the victims at the time of arrest and their level of education. At first glance, this data does not support the earlier conclusions drawn from the information on the victims' social backgrounds. On the contrary, the statistics indicate that the actual social status of the repressed Ossetians was higher than that of the Abkhazians, yet the Ossetians were subjected to repression to a lesser degree. For example, out of the 195 Ossetians for whom such data is available, 80% were workers and employees at the time of arrest (2 workers and 154 employees, respectively), and "only" 20% (39 people) were peasants, whose social status should be considered low due to their limited access to political, social, and economic resources. Among the convicted Abkhazians, despite the high rate of repression, "only" 55% (6 workers and 146 employees, respectively) fell into the "worker" and "employee" categories. By contrast, the "peasant" category, which accounted for 45% of the victims (122 people), represented a significantly larger group compared to the analogous category among the Ossetians. A similar picture emerges when looking at the educational level of the victims. Among the convicted Ossetians, 31% had higher and secondary education (29 with higher and 40 with secondary education), and 69% (134 with lower and 16 illiterate) had lower education or were illiterate. On the other hand, among the Abkhazians, the proportion of those with higher and secondary education was only 16% (22 with higher and 34 with secondary), which is about half of the corresponding figure for the Ossetians. The majority of

the convicted Abkhazians—84% (228 with lower education and 55 illiterate)—had lower education or were illiterate, 15% more than the Ossetians.

Upon closer examination and broadening of the research perspective, however, it becomes possible to attempt to resolve the contradiction whereby, in the case of the Abkhazians—who as a national group were subjected to disproportionately high repressions—and in the case of the Ossetians—an ethnic group repressed "*below average*", the empirical model "*low social status—less severe repression, high social status—more severe repression*" functions here only concerning the past, i.e., from the standpoint of "*social background*", while in the case of current social status, it appears to reverse itself.

To address this, we must first recall the main "*target*" of the *kulak* operation, even though initially this might reduce the contradiction unilaterally, only in relation to the Ossetians. The primary objective of the *kulak* operation across the entire Soviet Union was the purging of (potentially) disloyal peasants, as well as ordinary, socially and politically unprivileged populations. Among the victims of the *kulak* operation in Georgia, for whom we have relevant data on their social status at the time of arrest—11,048 people—27% (3,031 people) were peasants, 5% (532 people) were workers, and 68% (7,485) were employees [111]. In the case of the Ossetians, "*only*" 20% of the convicted were peasants (39 people), which was significantly below the average "*all-Georgian*" indicator, even though, as previously explained, the real number of peasants among the Ossetian victims was likely somewhat higher. At the same time, the share of convicted employees among the Ossetians was a high 79%, which is 11% above the average indicator. The share of worker victims was only 1%, five times lower than the average figure for Georgia.

The repression figures for the rural population of Abkhazia, however, were quite different. Here, in contrast to the Ossetians, the average Georgian figure was significantly exceeded. At the time of arrest, 45% of repressed Abkhazians (122 people) fell into the "*peasant*" category, which was 18% higher than the average for Georgia. Compared to the Ossetians, this represents an extreme excess of 25%. If we shift to the "*high-status*" group of workers and employees, the picture changes, though, as already repeatedly emphasised, in absolute terms, the Abkhazians "*demonstrate*" a very high degree of repression. Thus, compared to the average figure for Georgia, the share of employees among the total number of repressed Abkhazians (53%) was 15% lower, and in comparison to the Ossetians, it was even 26% lower.

The situation becomes even more contradictory when we consider the "*severity*" of the repressions related to the actual social status of *kulak* operation victims among the Abkhazians and Ossetians. Ossetian peasants were not only less affected, but they were also sentenced less harshly than Abkhazian peasants. The death sentence was handed down to "*only*" 28% of Ossetian peasants (11 people), whereas the share of Abkhazian peasants sentenced to the highest measure of punishment "*led*" with a significant excess of 17% (45%, 55 people), even though Abkhazian peasants were also considered a low-status group. The average rate of death sentences among convicted peasants in Georgia was "*only*" 33%. The corresponding data on the application of the death penalty among employees also reveals contradictions. Ossetian employees were sentenced much more harshly than Abkhazian employees: while 67% of Ossetian employees (103 people) were sentenced to death, among the Abkhazians, it was 57% (83 people), 10% lower. However,

when these percentage figures are compared to the average indicator for Georgia, the results are not as straightforward. The share of Abkhazian employees sentenced to death was "only" 4% below the corresponding Georgian average of 61% (4,589 people).

In our attempt to resolve the established contradiction, Georgia's specific characteristics play a central role. For this Caucasian republic, we have already identified a significant distinguishing feature compared to other republics, territories, and regions of the Soviet Union: the high proportion of repressed elites within the framework of the *kulak* operation [112]. This particular feature directly explains the high share of repressed employees among both "semi-titular" nations. However, the 10% and 11% difference between the executed employees—members of the Abkhazian, Ossetian, and Georgian "elites", respectively—contradicts the formulated working thesis [113]. The reason for this lies in the fact that the Abkhazian elites, particularly their upper echelon, had already been "thinned out" before the *kulak* operation; starting in 1936, they had already been subjected to increased repression, as is clearly evident from the *Stalinist lists*. The relatively small number of Abkhazians—members of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)—repressed during the *kulak* operation (62 people, 11% of the total number of victims) is direct evidence of this connection. The comparatively lower share of executed Abkhazian employees further confirms that the first wave of repression had already mowed through the Abkhazian elite before the *kulak* operation, leaving those remaining free as less prominent figures, and therefore, they were likely to be sentenced less harshly. Meanwhile, the lower-status Ossetian elites, including the upper echelon, evidently "truly" fell into the gears of terror only during the *kulak* operation. This is confirmed by the more than threefold increase in the proportion of repressed Ossetian members of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) (132 people, 35%).

This is confirmed by the more than threefold increase in the proportion of repressed Ossetian members of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) (132 people, 35%) compared to the corresponding proportion of "party members" among the Abkhazians. Theoretically, the Ossetian elites should have been subjected to particularly harsh repressions starting in the summer of 1937, as from the perspective of the punitive bureaucracy, there was some need to "compensate for the delay" in the case of the upper echelons of the elites. Nevertheless, the number of death sentences for the Ossetians remained within the "midfield", further evidence that even the highest echelons of the Ossetian elites in Georgia were regarded by the state's punitive organs as a secondary threat that would not significantly hinder the national homogenisation of the republic or resist other state measures, such as collectivisation or industrialisation.

Another empirically supported argument suggesting that the Abkhazian elites suffered severely even before the start of the *kulak* operation, i.e., before the summer of 1937, even in comparison to the Georgian elites, while the Ossetian elites at that time remained largely untouched, comes from the study of the *Stalinist lists*. From May 1937 to 6 October 1937, according to these lists, the *Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR* sentenced 28 Abkhazians, representatives of Soviet party-state elites, in the Georgian SSR, while during 1937–1938, a total of 76 Abkhazians from the elite were repressed and included in the *Stalinist lists*. In the case of the Ossetians, the number of people sentenced by the *Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR* was "only" five out of 54 [114].

The contradictory picture is indirectly supplemented by the data from the *militia* troika. Here, the results differ sharply from those of the *kulak* troika: in the case of the Abkhazians, the degree of repression was 0.03%, which matches the degree of repression for the Georgians, who serve here as a median value. From this, it can be concluded that socially motivated repressions played a subordinate role in the case of the Abkhazians (and the Georgians). In the case of the Ossetians, considering their repression rate of 0.02%, this conclusion also seems justified. Nevertheless, against the backdrop of the relatively modest rates of Ossetian persecution during the *kulak* operation, these data (0.02% and 0.03%) hold up to comparison and no longer seem so insignificant. From this perspective, socially motivated repressions against the Ossetians appear far more significant than in the case of the Abkhazians, which seems logical given the overall lower social status of the Ossetians in Georgia. One could even derive the following empirical formula: in the case of the Ossetians, against the backdrop of generally low repression rates, the division of labour between the punitive organs was as follows: the *militia* troika traditionally carried out repressions against individuals with low social status, while the *kulak* troika judged individuals with medium and high political and social status.

In statistical terms, the *militia* troika sentenced 100% of Ossetians with low or no education—“*socially dangerous elements*”, those not engaged in “*socially useful labour*”, beggars, the unemployed, petty criminals, and horse or cattle thieves. As for the *kulak* troika, 64% of Ossetians (25 out of a sample of 39 people) had some form of education, and only one of them was a criminal; all the others were convicted under “*political*” charges. Even among the uneducated victims of the *kulak* troika, only 50% of Ossetians (7 out of 14 people) could be classified as belonging to a criminal-gangster environment. Thus, 82% (32 people) of the Ossetians convicted during the *kulak* operation were charged exclusively with political crimes [117]. When it came to socially motivated repressions, both punitive institutions primarily targeted agricultural regions and their inhabitants. The most common criminal offenses were horse and cattle theft. Only the *kulak* troika convicted six horse and cattle thieves.

A typical case of socially motivated repression against Ossetians can be found in the case of Alexey Georgievich Gogichashvili, who was sentenced in January 1938 by the *militia* troika to five years in a labour camp. He was a semi-literate resident of the village of Mgebriani in the Gori district. According to the indictment, he was a “*recidivist thief*” and “*criminally declassed element*”, with “*convictions and several arrests for cattle theft and hooliganism*”. He was arrested and convicted as a socially harmful element (SVE) [118].

A curious aspect of the Ossetian cases sentenced by the *militia* troika is that 10% were given sentences for being former Mensheviks. Apparently, some reminder came from Moscow that the Ossetians had not always consistently fought on the side of the Bolsheviks against “*Menshevik Georgia*” [119].

The puzzle in the case of the Abkhazians is why the number of individuals convicted by the *militia* troika is not as high as in the case of the *kulak* troika, which specifically repressed ordinary Abkhazians. Therefore, in the case of the Abkhazians, socially motivated repressions should have taken precedence.

To explain the phenomenon of the especially high degree of repression against Abkhazian peasants during the *kulak* operation and the strikingly low conviction rates of Abkhazians by the *militia* troika, which was responsible for repressing the "social lower strata", we must turn to theories of nation-building and nationalism. This will allow us to examine the broader context of repressions against the Abkhazians. The high degree of repression against the Abkhazian "peasant" category can be interpreted as an indicator of the nation-building process, which had progressed significantly further among the Abkhazians by the late 1930s than among the Ossetians. If we refer to Miroslav Hroch's three-stage model of national identity formation for small nations, the Abkhazians had already reached the third stage—this process had already captured broad segments of the Abkhazian population of the autonomous republic, including the peasants [120]. The catalyst for this process of national consciousness formation was the decisive social and economic changes, as well as changes in education policy in Abkhazia. In 1937, a massive colonisation of Abkhazia began, spurred by its favourable climate, advantageous transport and technical location (sea ports), and fertile soils. That same year, the Georgian centralised state organised the mass resettlement of Mingrelians into Abkhazia [121]. In Ossetia, which lacked such fertile soils, was often overpopulated, and was less developed, there was no comparable colonisation policy by the late 1930s, although in some ways it could be compared to Abkhazia.

In May 1937, the decision to transition all Caucasian languages from Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet was revoked. This transition, much like in the case of the Laz people, had been viewed by linguists as a rational move and was accepted by the Abkhazians. However, instead of the Latin script, the Georgian alphabet was introduced, a political decision that also affected the Ossetians. Yet, according to the absurdity of the situation, the Georgian alphabet was only implemented in South Ossetia. Ossetians living in North Ossetia, i.e., outside "Georgian" territory, were required to return to Cyrillic. The introduction of the Georgian alphabet led to an increased presence of the Georgian language at the expense of "native languages" in the schools of South Ossetia and Abkhazia [122]. Consequently, conflicts stemming from this issue were inevitable, and though rare, they found their way into the minutes of the *kulak* troika sessions. For instance, Nikolai Ivanovich Siukaev, head of the communal department of the Gori city council, was accused of inciting nationalism among both Georgians and Ossetians when he was a teacher in the village of Akhalsopeli in the Gori district. He allegedly told Ossetian peasants: "Why should we Ossetians write and speak in Georgian when the Georgians are our enemies?" Siukaev forbade the entire population from speaking and writing in Georgian and instructed all teachers to conduct lessons exclusively in Ossetian. He also prohibited Ossetians from using Georgian forms of surnames, instead converting them into Ossetian forms. On 21 April 1938, his case was referred to the Special Collegium of the Supreme Court of the Georgian SSR, which possibly saved his life [123].

Language policy sheds light on the direction of the primary effort to hinder the formation of an Abkhaz nation, as another ethnic group—the Ossetians—ultimately received two alphabets: one, Cyrillic, as part of the general national policy in the USSR, and the other, Georgian, as part of Georgian nationalism.

The Georgian central leadership's strategy to slow down the process of nation-building specifically among the Abkhazians becomes apparent when examining individual sentences [124]. In the case of the *kulak* troika, 13% (10 people from a sample of 76) were directly

accused of engaging in nationalist activities [125]. The conviction of participants in the 1931 Gudauta uprising was of particular significance, as the struggle against Abkhaz autonomy is placed here in a broader and more prolonged context. As previously mentioned, on 11 February 1931, the official downgrading of Abkhazia's status occurred: it was transformed from a Treaty SSR into an Autonomous SSR. Simultaneously, collectivisation in Abkhazia, which had previously progressed slowly, began to be implemented intensively [126]. In response to the measures taken by Tiflis, which provoked an extremely negative reaction among the Abkhaz population—both for economic reasons and due to national motives (the preservation of the Abkhaz way of life)—an uprising broke out in Gudauta, a centre of the Abkhaz national movement to this day. At that time, the Georgian authorities were already demonstrating their keen interest in downplaying the national causes of the uprising, i.e., the Abkhaz-Georgian contradictions, by emphasising socio-economic reasons and portraying the events in Gudauta solely as anti-collectivisation [127]. From the perspective of the Georgian centre, this was also important because in 1921, during a similar uprising against Menshevik Georgia, the Abkhazians had assisted the Red Army. Now this *"template"* of events had to be consigned to oblivion: the narrative of *"Abkhazians who fight against Tiflis and Georgia"* was to be replaced by *"Abkhazians who fight against Moscow and the Russians"* [128]. Documents from the punitive organs of 1937–1938 provide evidence of this covert tactic. In the protocols of the *kulak* troika of the Georgian SSR, through reproductions of anti-Georgian statements and various hints, attempts were made to portray the Abkhazians as a minority rebelling not against Tiflis but against Moscow, in 10.5% of cases (8 out of 76). Out of these eight people, four Abkhazians were convicted as former Mensheviks [129]. The other four Abkhazians were accused of *"anti-Russian"* sentiments. For example, the troika protocol quoted the statement of the accused Shmata Kablokhovich Leiba: *"Hey you, Russian, what do you want from us in Abkhazia?"* He allegedly also declared that on 1 January 1938, the collective farms would be dissolved in any case [130]. Only one Abkhaz out of 76 (1.3%) was accused of *"anti-Russian"* statements. Furthermore, a strong class context was present in all these cases.

A more detailed description is warranted for the case of Ezet Semenovitch Gabdia [131]. According to the investigative materials, he was born in 1905 in the village of Lykhny, near the town of Gudauta. He was an Abkhaz, with no specific profession, working as a civil servant. At the time of his arrest, he was not a party member, married, with a low level of education, and a former candidate for the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), from which he had been expelled for *"connections with enemies of the people"*. The accusation emphasised that the defendant was a chauvinist. For example, *"in relation to Russians"*, he allegedly stated: *"All Russian people are vile."* This *"for example"*, one might assume, was meant to obscure the possibility that Gabdia may have been particularly hostile towards Georgians, though an anti-Russian quote fit the accusation's narrative better.

The accused, Djigus Mektodovich Ashuba, had gone to study in Moscow in 1934 but allegedly continued to maintain connections with *"right-wing counter-revolutionaries"* in Abkhazia. After his return in 1937, he was said to have organised an Abkhaz bureau of a counter-revolutionary organisation and developed a program of subversive activities against Soviet power. At the time of his arrest, Ashuba was working as an assistant in the mathematics department at the Pedagogical Institute in Sukhum [132].

Aslan Remshitovich Kvachal-ipa, a nominee of Lakoba in the Central Executive Committee of Abkhazia and a "counter-revolutionary" associated with G.L. Pyatakov, Lakoba, and others, was ultimately accused of (and here we approach the terrifying "fairy tales" of the show trials) "attempting to lace mandarins sent to Moscow in 1936, intended for the Kremlin, with a powerful poison" [133]. Notably, the "poisoned mandarins" were supposedly sent to Moscow, to the Kremlin, and not to Tiflis. The fact that the accusation was fabricated is beyond doubt: in the case of a real terrorist attempt with poisoned fruit, the time between the act and the arrest of the accused would hardly have spanned an entire year. Mezhdit Redzhebovich Bagash, by contrast, was accused of making anti-Georgian statements: "Ah, Lakoba is dead, everything is lost, Georgia has taken everything into its own hands, and the Georgians are [a bad] people." He allegedly "quoted an Abkhaz proverb of a chauvinistic nature" [134]. However, these anti-Georgian statements were "linked" to his defense of the "enemy of the people Lakoba" and his "pro-Trotskyite" declarations.

Thus, the Abkhaz-Georgian confrontation is present, but only in a form that portrays Abkhaz resistance in the most unfavourable light for Moscow. Since the materials from the extrajudicial punitive organs were sent to Moscow for review by the central NKVD apparatus, in 17% of cases (13 out of 76), it was additionally, as if by a mantra, emphasised that the death of Lakoba, formerly a trusted figure of Moscow, was by no means a loss. On the contrary, he was closely associated with Trotskyists, right-wing elements, and even criminal elements, conducting anti-Soviet and anti-Georgian policies. The protocols of the troika also contain indirect references to the aspirations of the Abkhazians and Lakoba to form an anti-Georgian bloc, as they report the condemnation of Abkhaz intermediaries and contacts with the Turks and Laz, leading to the severing of "Turkish" and "Laz" connections of the Abkhaz "conspirators" (3%, or 2 out of 76 cases) [135].

Another strategy aimed at discrediting the Abkhazians was to disproportionately associate them, compared to other ethnic groups, with the criminal underworld and accuse them of combining criminal and anti-Soviet political activities. As a result, criminals made up an unusually high proportion of the Abkhazians convicted by the *kulak* troika (14%, or 11 out of 76 cases). Given the crimes attributed to them, they were sentenced with unjustifiable harshness: of the 11, nine were petty recidivist thieves or "socially harmful elements" (SVE), involved in past and present cattle and horse theft, burglary, and embezzlement. In addition, they maintained connections with "criminal" elements. Four of them were sentenced to 10 years in labour camps, one to eight years, and three were even sentenced to death. In reality, only three out of the 11 individuals, one of whom committed murder for robbery, while the other two attempted to attack a bus and also robbed an airfield and a collective farm—if the extrajudicial proceedings of the troika can even be considered lawful—could be characterised as dangerous criminals. Two of them were ultimately sentenced to death, and one to 10 years in labour camps.

Based on formal guidelines, most cases of this kind involving other nationalities were typically handled by the *militia* troika, rather than the *kulak* troika. For example, cattle and horse thieves among Azerbaijanis (Turks) were traditionally convicted by the *militia* troika.

Additionally, 25% of Abkhazians (19 out of 76) were repressed on charges of robbery and cattle and horse theft, combined with embezzlement of collective farm property, as well as anti-Soviet and anti-collective farm agitation [136].

Even in the case of the *militia* troika, through which "only" 18 Abkhazians were convicted, political accusations still played a role, specifically in 11% of cases (2 out of 18). No similar pattern was observed for other ethnic groups (with the exception of Ossetians, where the *militia* troika convicted *Mensheviks*). For example, in the case of Palach Khjadzhievich Smur, born in 1888, the initial charges, documented in bureaucratic jargon, stated that he was an individual farmer, an Abkhaz, with two prior convictions for cattle theft in 1934. In 1938, he was convicted for residing in Abkhazia without the authorities' permission. After being released from a labour camp in 1937, he failed to engage in socially useful labour and instead resumed cattle theft. Then, quite suddenly, the accusation was added that he had also maintained contacts with enemies of the people. In this instance, this designation was political and clearly pointed to a group in Abkhazia associated with Nestor Lakoba [137]. Another form of social deviance (87.5%, or 16 out of 18 people) was directly linked to the passport law and its interpretation, which prohibited previously convicted Abkhazians from returning to their homeland. After being released from prison or exile, they were denied the documents needed to live in Abkhazia. Nevertheless, since they still returned—Abkhazians had few alternatives—they were again expelled from the republic, this time by the *militia* troika [138].

Thus, against the backdrop of the corresponding language policies and colonisation measures in Abkhazia, repressions against both *semi-titular* nations, though in very different forms, were used to "hollow out" their autonomy, gradually transforming it into an increasingly symbolic sphere, which facilitated the homogenisation of Georgia under the aegis of the Georgian nation. These interests of the Georgian centre are especially clearly, including statistically, reflected in the results of the *kulak* operation, as it was inherent in the very nature of Order No. 00447 of 30 July 1937 that the central authority in Moscow largely ceded a portion of its punitive powers to the periphery. This, in turn, made it significantly easier for local authorities to punish "disloyal" national minorities.

Thus, the assessments of former Abkhazian Prime Minister Sergei Shamba are lacking and, at least with regard to his focus on the party elites, remain at the level of anti-Stalinist propaganda from the Khrushchev era. In reality, during the Great Terror, beginning in the summer of 1937, it was not the Abkhaz party-Soviet elite that suffered the most, but the ordinary Abkhaz population. The latter was also more heavily affected by repressions compared to similar groups of other nationalities in the Georgian SSR. This specificity is explained by the dynamics of the nation-building process, which by that time had advanced significantly further among the Abkhazians than among other ethnic groups in Georgia, also encompassing broad circles of the peasant population.

According to our conclusion, the Georgian punitive organs, consciously or unconsciously, responded to this phenomenon specifically during the *kulak* operation. The intensifying process of Abkhaz nation-building was perceived as an attempt to resist the pressure exerted on Abkhazia by the central state and party organs of Georgia. After all, more than any other region of the republic, Abkhazia kindled the appetites of the republican authorities due to its favourable economic, demographic, geographic, and climatic conditions. Following the mass exodus of Muslim Abkhazians in the 19th century, Abkhazia remained a sparsely populated country with fertile soils, making it far more attractive as a target for colonisation than the mountainous regions of Ossetia. Although both the Abkhazians and the Ossetians fought against the hegemony of Georgian *Mensheviks* in 1918–1920, the contradictions

between the Ossetians and the Georgians were weaker, and the tendency toward territorial separation among the Ossetians was only just beginning to emerge. Most Ossetians did not live in South Ossetia, an autonomous region without a historical tradition, created hastily in 1920–1921, but around South Ossetia, intermixed with Georgians. In South Ossetia itself, Ossetians formed an undisputed majority—70% of the population—so they did not perceive any immediate need for defensive reactions against Georgian majoritarianism. Moreover, the Ossetians belonged to the Georgian Orthodox Church, while the Abkhazians were predominantly Muslim or religiously indifferent.

The high number of victims among the ordinary Abkhaz population and the intensity of the repressions against them can be explained by another factor. Since, under the Tsarist regime, the Abkhazians generally held a higher social status than the Ossetians, the punitive organs were inclined to "*attribute*" a negative social past even to the "*average*" Abkhaz population.

If we look at the persecution of the Abkhaz elites, by the time of the Great Terror, starting in the summer of 1937, they were already in decline. As the *Stalinist lists* and other documents and eyewitness accounts demonstrate, the repressions against Abkhazia's ruling elites peaked in 1936 and the first half of 1937. The Ossetian elites, who had historically and currently held lower social status, mostly came under the NKVD's scrutiny only during the *kulak* operation.

Thus, in analysing such an aspect of mass repression in Georgia as the persecution of the Abkhazians and Ossetians, it is important not only to consider the particular punitive institution, social background, and current social status of the victims, but also the moment or time period during which the repressions against a specific ethnic group or population occurred. The political-historical context of the repressions should not be forgotten either. Our initial thesis—that nations with lower social status were subjected to less persecution, while those with higher status faced harsher repression—must be revised and expanded to account for these factors.

As for the important question of whether, in the case of the Abkhazians, there was a strict correlation between the high absolute numbers of repressions and their intensity on the one hand, and the geopolitical factor—the strategic location of Abkhazia with its access to the sea, important harbours, and long history of naval invasions—on the other hand, the answer must be a clear *no*. The Abkhazians were not repressed due to their proximity to the external border, but for internal political reasons. Accusations of espionage and relations with Turkey played virtually no role here.

The third and final *semi-titular* nationality in Georgia were the Adjarians. This national group had its own autonomous Soviet socialist republic. The special status of the Adjarians was largely due to the peaceful treaties of the RSFSR with Turkey, according to which Nakhichevan and the area around Batumi were ceded to the Soviet side only on the condition that autonomous republics with predominantly Muslim populations were created. In Nakhichevan, the Azerbaijani population was sufficient to form a majority in the autonomy, while in Batumi/Adjaria, which was mostly inhabited by Georgian Christians, the Muslim sub ethnic group of the Adjarians served as the "*state-forming*" people. Even in the 1937 All-Union Census, the Adjarians were counted separately [139]. According to the census,

there were 88,217 Adjarians living in Georgia [140]. The census materials indicated that nearly all Adjarians lived in the Adjarian ASSR. The 1926 census had recorded a similar situation, with 71,390 Adjarians in Adjaria and only 562 outside of it. However, it is likely that the 1926 census significantly undercounted the number of Adjarians, favouring the classification of "pure" Georgians in Batumi [141]: 15,414 Georgians and only 2,046 Adjarians were recorded. In reality, the ratio should have been the opposite, or at the very least, the number of Georgians was clearly inflated, and the number of Adjarians underestimated [142]. Given the general trend of population growth, it can be assumed that by 1937 there were approximately 90,000–100,000 Adjarians living in Adjaria, which would have represented around 75% of the total population of the Adjarian ASSR (128,839 people) [143].

In the case of the Adjarians, it can be said that the campaign was personally overseen by the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of the Georgian SSR, L.P. Beria. The campaign was conducted in conjunction with the January 1937 census, with the goal of having the Adjarians classified as Georgians. Beria's position was as follows: *"The Adjarians are united with the Georgian nation by a common language, territory, economic life, and culture. The Adjarians are simply Georgians who were Islamised in the past"* [144]. By doing so, Beria skillfully rephrased and concretised the definition of a nation given by Stalin in 1913: *"A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological makeup manifested in a common culture"* [145].

Beria's primary task was to support the position closely aligned with his own, adopted by the Commission of the Academy of Sciences for the Study of the Tribal Composition of the Population of the USSR. This Commission, which first convened in 1920 in Petrograd, dealt directly with national questions and had published significant scholarly works [146]. In 1937, during the All-Union census, its activities received renewed momentum. Like all scientific institutions in the USSR, the Commission was guided by Stalinist policies, but it stood out by particularly emphasising the "unifying" aspects of national construction.[147] The opposing position was represented by the Institute of Language and Thought and the Institute of Anthropology, also part of the USSR Academy of Sciences. These institutions identified the Adjarians as a distinct people, significantly different from the Georgians, a view that Beria, in his letter to Stalin, characterised as an expression of "great-power chauvinism", that is, an example of outdated Tsarist imperial thinking in the "divide and rule" style, aimed primarily against the Georgian nation.

The fact that signals from Tbilisi, accompanied by repressive policies in Adjaria, had their effect is confirmed by the following letter from the House of Party Education of the Adjarian Regional and City Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Georgia to the *that the Adjarians are simply Georgians. We are interested to know: if the Adjarians are not a separate nationality but Georgians, then by what criteria do they have autonomy in government, and why do Adjarians appear as a separate nationality in the documents of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, with their own elected representatives in the Council of Nationalities? Is it correct to deny the Adjarians as a separate nationality and consider them Georgians? In my opinion, it is not...* [148]

On 31 October 1938, the Secretariat of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR responded to the authors: "*Your inquiry has been forwarded to the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Georgia.*" [149] The further fate of the letter's authors remains unknown.

The classification of the Adjarians as Georgians, a position Beria supported, has a long tradition, dating back at least to the time of Prince Vakhushti (17th century). Conversely, in 1877–1878, many Adjarians emigrated to the Ottoman Empire when Batumi and its surrounding areas were ceded to Russia. Even in late 1914 and early 1915, the Ottomans, both competing with and cooperating with the Germans, who were forming the "*Georgian Legion*", successfully mobilised the Adjarians and Laz living on the Russian side of the border to fight against Russia [150].

Beria's attempt to administratively incorporate the Adjarians into the Georgian nation continues to cast a "*long shadow*" on the present. An analysis of the repression of the Adjarians during the Great Terror of 1937–1938 has shown that only recently have Adjarians begun to be accounted for separately in the Georgian Interior Ministry's database of victims of the *kulak* operation. They were included among the 13,102 repressed Georgians, even though their nationality was listed as "*Adjarian*" in the documents. Since revising the nationality of all those classified as repressed Georgians would be a time-consuming task, only a selective review was conducted as part of this study. The aim was to establish at least a certain trend. As a result, the files of the first 451 repressed individuals classified as "*Georgians*" in the database were reviewed, and 22 Adjarians were identified among them. Although this number must be taken with caution, it was extrapolated from the total number of repressed "*Georgians*", resulting in an estimate of 750 repressed Adjarians (600 in the first category; 150 in the second category) [151]. Thus, the degree of repression against the Adjarians (the percentage of repressed individuals of this nationality relative to their total population) was a disproportionate 1.87% (compared to 0.63% for Georgians). As for death sentences, the degree of repression among the Adjarians was relatively low, at 1.2% (compared to 0.45% for Georgians). With some caution, it can be concluded that the repressions hit the Adjarians harder than the Georgians.

NOTES

[95] Today, the Abkhaz diaspora primarily resides in Turkey and Syria, where, until 1967, the Abkhaz mostly settled in the Golan Heights. For more on the issue of the Abkhaz exodus from Abkhazia, see: Dzidzaria, G.A., *Makhajirstvo i problemy istorii Abkhazii v XIX stoletii* [Mukhajirism and Problems of Abkhazia's History in the 19th Century]. Sukhum, 1982. During the Syrian Civil War of 2011–2013, hundreds of people of Abkhaz origin were "repatriated" from Syria to Abkhazia.

[96] See, for example: Lomtadze, K.V., *Abazinsky Yazyk* [The Abazin Language] // *Yazyki Narodov SSSR* [Languages of the Peoples of the USSR]. Vol. 4, Iberian-Caucasian Languages / Bokarev, E.A. (Ed.), Moscow, 1967, pp. 123–144. In recent Georgian historiography, the vector of Abkhaz migration has been reversed 180 degrees (here, we are speaking not of the emigration of Abkhaz from Abkhazia, but of their immigration into Abkhazia); however, this position has not gained support outside Georgia. Leaving aside the close interconnection between historical and linguistic questions, the considerable importance attached today to the ancestral right to disputed territory while delegitimising competing claims as the pretensions of "late settlers" appears highly questionable (this is similar to the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh).

[97] The term "migrants from Western Georgia," i.e. "Western Georgians," refers here to speakers of the western Georgian dialects (Imeretians, Gurians, etc.). In Georgian historiography, this designation also extends geographically to include Mingrelians, Svans, and Adjarians, whom we treat separately in this context.

[98] Dzidzariya G.A. *Makhadjirstvo i problemy istorii Abkhazii v XIX stoletii* [The Makhadjirship and Problems of the History of Abkhazia in the 19th Century]. Sukhum, 1982.

[99] Blauvelt T.R. *Resistance and Accommodation in the Stalinist Periphery. A Peasant Uprising in Abkhazia // Ab Imperio*, 2012, No. 13, pp. 78–108, here p. 108. The author distinguishes between ethnic Abkhazians and Abkhazians as residents of the Abkhaz ASSR. On the one hand, this distinction is valid and even useful; on the other hand, it is inapplicable to documentary sources. In documents, the term "*Abkhazets*" appears as a synonym for "*Abkhaz*", and both terms were used to denote ethnic identity. The difference in meanings like "*Russians*" and "*Rossiyane*" is absent here.

[100] According to the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* of 1926 (the figures were evidently taken from the population census of Georgia conducted in 1922–1923), the population of Abkhazians in Abkhazia was 83,794 people, or about 48.1% of the total population of Abkhazia, which was 174,126 people. At the same time, the number of Georgians (including Mingrelians) was listed as 32,000 people. During the All-Union Census of 1926 (as of 17 December 1926), the number of Abkhazians was established at only 55,918 people (including four foreign citizens of Abkhaz ethnicity—27.8%, about a quarter of the total population of Abkhazia), while the number of Georgians in Abkhazia (including Mingrelians) was given as 67,494 (only Soviet citizens). Thus, the number of Abkhazians had decreased by approximately 28,000 people over the year, while the number of Georgians had increased by 35,000. Here we can detect a "*re-evaluation*" of the ethnic affiliation of the so-called Samurzakanians—approximately 30,000 residents of the Gali district, Christians by faith, as confirmed by local data. As early as 1897, 58,697 Abkhaz-speaking residents accounted for 55.3% of the population of Sukhum District, which totalled 106,179 people. According to the so-called "*family lists*" of 1886, the Samurzakanians were recorded separately as a sub-ethnic group of Abkhazians. As a result, at that time, 30,640 Samurzakanians, as well as 28,323 (other) Abkhazians, lived in Sukhum District, along with only 3,558 Mingrelians and 577 Georgians out of a total district population of 68,773.

[101] Lak'oba, S. *History: 1917–1989 // The Abkhazians*, G. Hewitt (Ed.), Richmond, 1999, pp. 89–101.

[102] <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1200511.html> (Accessed 15 September 2013).

It should be noted that in the Abkhaz ASSR, leadership positions in government, the party, and public organisations were held by Abkhazians in disproportionately large numbers.

[103] The same applies to the Ossetians.

[104] It is also important to note that during the 1937 census, Abkhazians who had undergone "*Mingrelisation*" were classified as Mingrelians, but since such a category no longer existed, they were recorded as Georgians in the census data. However, as this pattern also applies to the punitive statistics, it does not significantly affect our calculations here. See: Müller, *Sowjetische Nationalitätenpolitik*, p. 102.

[105] The total proportion of Abkhazians sentenced to death was 56.2% of the Abkhazians convicted by the *kulak* troika. In this regard, the Abkhazians "*lag behind*" the Laz, who had 84% of death sentences.

[106] See Table 38 in the second volume of this publication.

[107] In the South Ossetian Autonomous Region, there were 87,358 inhabitants, the majority of whom were Ossetians. See: *All-Union Population Census of 1937*, p. 46.

[108] Here, only the ratio of death sentences to the total population of different national groups is compared. As for the proportion of those sentenced to death from the total number of people of a given nationality convicted by the *kulak* troika in 1937–1938, it was approximately 53.9% for Ossetians, 56.2% for Abkhazians, and 46.6% for Georgians.

[109] See: Tables 44 and 45.

[110] Due to the loss of archival-investigative files during the 1991 civil war in Georgia, it is no longer possible to determine whether the investigative files contained data on the social origin of the victims, which are absent in the troika protocols.

[111] See Table 9 in the second volume of this publication.

[112] See the chapter "*Regionalisation of Punitive Powers*" in this publication.

[113] The proportion of Georgian civil servants sentenced to death was 68%, Ossetians—67%, and Abkhazians—57%.

[114] In 1937–1938, a total of 76 representatives of the Abkhaz elite were convicted. Some of them (28 individuals) were sentenced by the *Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR* or other high-ranking Georgian courts before 6 October 1937, while the rest (48 individuals) were, with rare exceptions, "*processed*" by the *kulak* troika. For the *kulak* troika, the peak of the repressions occurred in 1937—25 were convicted. In 1938, the troika additionally convicted "*only*" 19 Abkhazians from the elite. The situation with the Ossetians was different. In 1937, the *Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR* convicted five individuals, and the troika convicted 18, but in 1938, the troika convicted 32 members of the Ossetian elite. These figures were obtained using the database of those convicted under the *Stalinist lists*. The database was compiled by staff of the *Institute for Development of Freedom of Information* (Tbilisi). See Table 37 in the second volume of this publication.

[115] The degree of repression is always calculated here as the ratio of the total number of repressed victims (or those sentenced to death) of a particular ethnicity to the total population of that ethnicity within the Georgian SSR.

[116] See Table 41 in the second volume of this publication.

[117] A statistical sample of 39 out of 384 victims convicted by the *kulak* troika was taken, including two people who were first convicted in 1937 and 1938, followed by every tenth person.

[118] Protocol No. 81/38 of the session of the NKVD troika of the GSSR from 21 January 1938 // Georgia Ministry of Internal Affairs Archive. 1st Department. F. 8. D. 473. L. 141. A statistical sample of 7 out of 33 victims was taken, i.e., the 1st, 5th, 10th, 15th, 20th, 25th, and 30th convicted person.

[119] Four Ossetians out of 39 were convicted as Mensheviks. The selection from the victims of the *militia* troika was made according to the principle described in the previous footnote. For more on the close alliance between the Ossetians and the Bolsheviks during the Civil War, see: Lang, David Marshall. *A Modern History of Georgia*. London, 1962, pp. 228–229.

[120] Hroch M. *Das Europa der Nationen. Die moderne Nationsbildung im europäischen Vergleich* [Europe of Nations: Modern Nation-Building in European Comparison]. Göttingen, 2005; Hroch M. *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations*. Cambridge, 1985; Hobsbawm E. *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge, 1992, p. 12.

[121] Müller. *Sowjetische Nationalitätenpolitik*, p. 199. It is difficult to say to what extent the trends of modernisation in Abkhazia contributed to the development of national consciousness, as this issue has never been thoroughly researched.

[122] A Latin-based script was introduced for the Ossetian language as early as 1923. See: Müller. *Sowjetische Nationalitätenpolitik*, p. 201.

[123] Protocol No. 108 of the session of the NKVD troika of the GSSR from 21 April 1938 // Georgia Ministry of Internal Affairs Archive. 1st Department. F. 8. D. 38456. L. 144.

[124] Out of 554 Abkhazians convicted by the *kulak* troika, a statistical sample of 76 people was taken according to the following principle: out of 374 people convicted in 1937, the first thirteen were selected, and then every tenth person, i.e., 50 individuals. Among those convicted in 1938 (180 people), the first ten victims were selected, and then every tenth person, i.e., 26 individuals.

[125] This refers to seven participants in the Gudauta Uprising and three Abkhazians convicted of nationalist activities.

[126] See: Blauvelt, *Resistance and Accommodation*, pp. 78–79. The author describes the beginning of mass collectivisation in Abkhazia in February 1931 (according to Blauvelt's personal statement, this should refer to February 1930, as the year 1931 is incorrectly cited in the published text). Blauvelt also writes that "*there is no reference to status in any of the documents of the period, public or secret, and yet it figures prominently in the interpretations of later Abkhaz historians.*" Nevertheless, the status of Abkhazia (as an ASSR or SSR) was occasionally mentioned in the documents of the time, as the authors of these documents did not always manage to avoid addressing this delicate issue. However, even if we fully agree with Blauvelt's assertion, who is perhaps the most knowledgeable about the relevant documents, another equally convincing explanation arises: the status of Abkhazia (in most or all cases) was omitted because it was so contentious that the wisest course for the authors was to leave it unmentioned whenever possible.

[127] This interpretation of the uprising corresponds to a combination of information provided by Blauvelt and the information contained in Tsitashi's letter to Stalin from 1935. See: *Ibid.*, p. 100; document No. 1 "*I. T. Tsitashi to Secretary of the VKP(b) I.V. Stalin on the Situation of the Laz in Georgia*", no later than 11 February 1935, in the second volume of this publication.

[128] The course of the 1931 uprising is excellently described by Blauvelt, so it makes no sense to repeat it here.

[129] An example of a Menshevik case: Protocol No. 12 of the session of the NKVD troika of the GSSR from 13 September 1937 // Georgia Ministry of Internal Affairs Archive. 1st Department. F. 8. D. 372. L. 46. In providing such an assessment, we do not doubt that this individual could indeed have had contacts with the Mensheviks at some point.

[130] Protocol No. 20 of the session of the NKVD troika of the GSSR from 26 September 1937 // Georgia Ministry of Internal Affairs Archive. 1st Department. F. 8. D. 380. L. 38.

[131] Protocol No. 90 of the session of the NKVD troika of the GSSR from 16 February 1938 // Georgia Ministry of Internal Affairs Archive. 1st Department. F. 8. D. 38444. Vol. 2. L. 38.

[132] Protocol No. 90 of the session of the NKVD troika of the GSSR from 16 February 1938 // Georgia Ministry of Internal Affairs Archive. 1st Department. F. 8. D. 38444. Vol. 1. L. 15.

[133] Protocol No. 32 of the session of the NKVD troika of the GSSR from 14 October 1937 // Georgia Ministry of Internal Affairs Archive. 1st Department. F. 8. D. 37392. L. 65.

[134] Protocol No. 32 of the session of the NKVD troika of the GSSR from 14 October 1937 // Georgia Ministry of Internal Affairs Archive. 1st Department. F. 8. D. 37392. L. 38.

[135] For more on Laz contacts with Turkey, see the case of Ahmed Alievich Delaver-Ogly: Protocol No. 15 of the session of the NKVD troika of the GSSR from 29 September 1938 // Georgia Ministry of Internal Affairs Archive. 1st Department. F. 8. D. 38468. L. 20. Philipp D. Khishba was also convicted on charges of contacts with Turkey. See: Protocol No. 15 of the session of the NKVD troika of the GSSR from 16 February 1938 // Georgia Ministry of Internal Affairs Archive. 1st Department. F. 8. D. 38444. Vol. 2. L. 128.

[136] Akaaki Temurovich Tuiba was accused of a robbery at an airport; Petr Khanashevich Krikoria was accused of connections with bandits, engaging in anti-collective farm and anti-Soviet agitation. Similar accusations are found in many other cases. Protocol No. 12 of the session of the NKVD troika of the GSSR from 13 September 1937 // Georgia Ministry of Internal Affairs Archive. 1st Department. F. 8. D. 372. L. 21; 22.

[137] Protocol No. 98/55 of the session of the NKVD troika of the GSSR from 5 July 1938 // Georgia Ministry of Internal Affairs Archive. 1st Department. F. 8. D. 357. L. 120.

[138] Regarding the *militia* troika, the authors processed all 16 cases (100%).

[139] Thus, this concerns the formation of an "*ethnic*" group based on an interstate political agreement. Otherwise, the dominant Georgians would have included it in their nation. See: Reisner. *Integrationsversuche*.

[140] See: *All-Union Population Census of 1937. General Results. Collection of Documents*, comp. V.B. Zhiromskaya, Yu.A. Polyakov. Moscow, 2007, p. 107.

[141] The name "*Batumi*" is characteristic of Georgian spelling; the Ottoman-Turkish and Turkish name for the city is "*Batum*", which was also used in Russian from 1878 to 1936, after which the Georgian version—Batumi—began to be used, even in the Russian language.

[142] See: *All-Union Population Census of 1926. Vol. XIV. Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic. Part I. Nationality, Native Language, Age, Literacy*, comp. Central Statistical Administration. Census Department. Moscow, 1929, p. 104. For the extraction of information directly related to Georgia from the census materials, see: Müller. *Sowjetische Nationalitätenpolitik*, p. 97.

[143] See: *All-Union Population Census of 1937*, p. 46; Müller. *Sowjetische Nationalitätenpolitik*, pp. 164, 168.

[144] See: document No. 3 "*First Secretary of the Georgian CP(b) L.P. Beria to the Secretary of the Central Committee of the VKP(b) I.V. Stalin on the Ethnic Classification of the Peoples in Georgia, 5 January 1937*" in the second volume of this publication. Beria's position was not new. As early as the beginning of World War I, Georgian national forces attempted to win over their "*Adjarian Muslim brothers*". A special meeting was organised in Batumi for this purpose. See: Šamilišvili M. *Aç'ara da*

kartveli sazgado moghvac'eni [Adjarians and Georgian Public Figures] // *Macne. Enisa da lit'erat'uris seria*, 1990, No. 3, pp. 40–54.

[145] Stalin, I.V. *Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros* [Marxism and the National Question], 1913 // Stalin, I.V., *Sochineniya* [Works], Vol. 2. Moscow, 1946, p. 296.

[146] See, for example, the monograph by the Iranist I.I. Zarubin, which also covers the Caucasus: Zarubin I.I., *Spisok narodnostei Soyuzu Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik* [List of Nationalities of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics], Moscow-Leningrad, 1927 (= *Trudy Komissii po izucheniyu plemennogo sostava naseleniya SSSR i sopredel'nykh stran* [Proceedings of the Commission for the Study of the Tribal Composition of the Population of the USSR and Adjacent Countries], 13); The history and activities of the Commission are addressed in the following monograph: Psyanchin, A.V. *Komissiya po izucheniyu plemennogo sostava naseleniya: ot etnokartografii k perepisi naseleniya* [Commission for the Study of the Tribal Composition of the Population: From Ethnographic Mapping to Population Census]. Ufa, 2010.

[147] For Stalin's detailed position, in which religion was effectively given no place in national issues, see: Stalin, *Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros*, pp. 292–296.

[148] Letter to the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR from Sergei Spiridonovich Tsertsvadze and Viktor Semenovich Makatsaria, workers of the House of Party Enlightenment of the Adjarian Regional and City Committees of the CP(b) of Georgia, 26 September 1938 // GARF. F. 7723. Op. 9. D. 295. L. 83. Acknowledgement to Andrey Savin.

[149] *Ibid.*

[150] See: Bihl, W. *Die Kaukasus-Politik der Mittelmächte. Teil I: Ihre Basis in der Orient-Politik und ihre Aktionen 1914–1917* [The Caucasus Policy of the Central Powers. Part I: Its Basis in Oriental Policy and its Actions 1914–1917]. Vienna, 1975. In 1929, an uprising broke out in Adjara directed solely against the Georgians. In their proclamations (as reported by Beria), it was stated that "nothing good can be expected from the Georgians." See: RGASPI. F. 157. Op. 1s. D. 58. Report from Beria in Batumi, 22 March 1929.

[151] For the calculation method, see: Table No. 34 for further details.

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