



Strategic Migration Policy in Georgia Under Soviet Totalitarianism: Government Approaches and Implementation Practices

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the strategic population relocation policy implemented by the Soviet government in Georgia, a component of the multifaceted migration strategy adopted by the Soviet dictatorship.

The objective of the paper is to examine the Soviet strategic migration policy in Georgia as a tool for labor resource allocation and regional governance, as well as its effects on demographic, social, and spatial distribution processes. The research employs documentary and discursive analysis to examine the Soviet strategic migration program as a crucial instrument of state control, significantly influencing the demographic and socioeconomic landscape of Georgia.

While ecological hazards in Georgia, particularly the natural disasters of the 1970s and 1980s, were occasionally employed to justify migration, the primary objectives were to facilitate economic development, allocate labor resources, and uphold regional stability. The research is grounded in structural migration theory, the ethnic management model, and the eco-social systems approach, facilitating a nuanced understanding of migratory processes.

The research's originality stems from its inclusion of ecological resettlement of the population throughout the Soviet era as a primary driving force, while also integrating environmental, economic, and regional considerations into a cohesive strategic migration framework.

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სტრატეგიული მიგრაციის პოლიტიკა საქართველოში საბჭოთა ტოტალიტარიზმის დროს: სახელმწიფოს მიდგომები და განხორციელების პრაქტიკა

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სტატიის შესახებ	აბსტრაქტი
საკვანძო სიტყვები:	სტატიაში შესწავლილია საქართველოში საბჭოთა ხელისუფლების მიერ მოსახლეობის სტრატეგიული გადაადგილების სახელმწიფო პოლიტიკა, რომელიც იყო საბჭოთა რეჟიმის მიერ გატარებული მრავალფაქტორული მიგრაციული პოლიტიკის ნაწილი.
საქართველო სტრატეგიული მიგრაცია იძულებითი გადაადგილება დემოგრაფიული ცვლილებები რეგიონული პოლიტიკა	<p>კვლევის მიზანია გაანალიზოს საბჭოთა სტრატეგიული მიგრაციული პოლიტიკა საქართველოში, როგორც შრომითი რესურსების გადანაწილებისა და რეგიონული კონტროლის ერთგვარი მექანიზმი და მისი გავლენა დემოგრაფიულ, სოციალურ და სივრცით განაწილებით პროცესებზე.</p> <p>კვლევა ეფუძნება დოკუმენტურ და დისკურსულ ანალიზს, რომელიც იძლევა საბჭოთა სტრატეგიული მიგრაციული პოლიტიკის როგორც სახელმწიფოებრივი მმართველობის მნიშვნელოვანი მექანიზმის შესწავლის საშუალებას, რაც თავის მხრივ მნიშვნელოვან ზეგავლენას ახდენდა საქართველოს დემოგრაფიულ და სოციალურ ლანდშაფტზე.</p> <p>მიუხედავად იმისა, რომ საქართველოში ეკოლოგიური საფრთხეები, განსაკუთრებით 1970-იანი და 1980-იანი წლების სტიქიური მოვლენები, ზოგჯერ გამოიყენებოდა გადაადგილების ლეგიტიმაციისთვის, მთავარი მიზნები იყო ეკონომიკური განვითარების უზრუნველყოფა, შრომითი რესურსების განაწილება და რეგიონული სტაბილურობის შენარჩუნება. კვლევა ეფუძნება სტრუქტურული მიგრაციის თეორიას, ეთნიკური</p>

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მენეჯმენტის მოდელსა და ეკო-სოციალური სისტემების მიდგომას, რაც მიგრაციული პროცესების კომპლექსური გააზრების საშუალებას გვაძლევს.

კვლევის სიახლე მდგომარეობს იმაში, რომ ნაშრომი მოიცავს არა მხოლოდ საბჭოთა პერიოდში მოსახლეობის ეკოლოგიური საფუძვლებით განხორციელებულ განსახლებას როგორც ერთეულ და მთავარ მამოძრავებელ ფაქტორს, არამედ აერთიანებს გარემოსდაცვით, ეკონომიკურ და რეგიონულ ფაქტორებს ერთიან, სტრატეგიულ მიგრაციის კონტექსტში.

1. Introduction

During the Soviet era, substantial alterations occurred in the socio-economic and demographic environment of Georgia due to strategic migration initiatives. Buckley asserts that the Soviet Union explicitly influenced economic development models and the allocation of social resources to affect individual demographic choices (Buckley, 1995). Population movements during this period served as a strategic tool for the central government to shape regional economic development and regulate social and demographic structures. Formally, these movements primarily stemmed from environmental threats or the demand for labor resources; however, internal analysis indicates that such policies frequently reflected the long-term political strategies of the central government, intending to alter regional demographic and social structures. As Polian accurately observes, the Soviet state's program of enforced deportations throughout the Soviet era altered the significance of numerous concepts associated with migration theory, resulting in a loss of their original meanings (Polian, 2004).

The objective of the paper is to study the operation of the Soviet strategic migration policy in Georgia as a means of labor resource allocation and regional governance, to assess its effects on demographic, social, and spatial distribution processes. The study focuses on the formal and informal objectives of migration, the techniques employed by the central government, and the enduring effects shown in the demographic structure and spatial distribution of the population. This study seeks to address the following research questions to attain its objective:

What were the methods employed by the Soviet authorities to facilitate migration?

What were the formal or informal objectives underlying these processes?

What was the long-term impact of this program on the demographic and social structures of Georgia?

The objective was to comprehend the elements of resettlement, labor migration, and socio-demographic management executed for environmental reasons within a cohesive and intricate framework of Soviet migration policy.

This study provides a novel and comprehensive analysis of Soviet strategic migration in Georgia, focusing not only on officially stated objectives but also on implicit political, ethnic, and socio-economic goals. Unlike earlier works that either examine general forced migrations in the USSR or post-Soviet eco-migration patterns, this research integrates archival data, historical documentation, expert interviews, and discourse analysis to reveal the interplay between environmental hazards, labor demands, and deliberate demographic engineering.

The novelty of the study lies in three main aspects:

Holistic approach – combining ecological, economic, and demographic factors within a single analytical framework.

Focus on Georgia – addressing a gap in existing literature by examining internal structural determinants of migration, including ethnic redistribution, strategic labor allocation, and regional governance.

Linking formal policies to long-term social consequences – demonstrating how ostensibly humanitarian or economic relocation programs were frequently used to achieve political, ideological, and administrative objectives, with lasting impacts on population structure, settlement patterns, and regional stability.

By highlighting these aspects, the study contributes new insights into the mechanisms and outcomes of strategic population management in the Soviet era, offering a more nuanced understanding of how migration served as a tool of governance and social engineering in Georgia.

1.2. Literature Review

The phenomenon of coerced population displacement during the Soviet era has been extensively documented in both international and post-Soviet scholarly literature. Research encompasses the examination of coerced deportations and displacements (Polian, 2004); nevertheless, in the context of Georgia, insufficient focus is directed towards the internal structural determinants of migration processes, such as the interaction of environmental hazards, labor demands, or demographic requirements.

Numerous researchers have examined the challenges of labor migration within the framework of the Soviet planned economy, notably Buckley, who highlights the implementation of the “propiska” system for the centralised mobilisation of labor resources (Buckley, 1995). The population movement policy during the Soviet era frequently transcended economic or "environmental" motivations, incorporating an ethnic dimension that resulted in the demographic restructuring of several regions. An explicit instance of this is the coerced expulsion of Muslim Meskhetians, which also encompassed Kurds and Hemshin people, from southern Georgia, namely Meskheta, in 1944 (Vacharadze, 2020). The author elucidates the political and ethnic motivations behind this extensive resettlement scheme, which were dictated by the objectives of state security (subsequently proclaimed) and regional dominance of the Soviet Union. These papers affirm that certain relocation actions were explicitly associated with ethnic groups, independent of environmental or solely economic imperatives. This specific deportation significantly altered the demographic composition of southern Georgia, clearly reflecting the ethnic aspect in the concluding phase of migration policy.

Natmeladze’s study shows a crucial element of the Soviet migration strategy of the 1940s - the forced expulsion of Turkish and other ethnic groups from Georgia, which clearly demonstrates the objective of population engineering. The author emphasises that these displacements were carried out not only for security reasons but also to reshape the ethnic landscape and preserve centralised power (Natmeladze, 2002).

In post-Soviet Georgia, numerous studies have been conducted, and several publications have been produced about eco-migration; nevertheless, they rarely examine the migration policy issues from the Soviet period. The monograph by Trier and Turashvili (2007) analyzes the patterns of eco-migration in Georgia from 1981 to 2006. Nonetheless, their emphasis predominantly lies on the post-independence history of Georgia, with reduced attention to the Soviet period (Trier, 2007).

Giorgi Rodionov’s paper “From Mountain to Desert: The Migration of the r” (Rodionov, 2018) effectively elucidates the complexities of Soviet-era population resettlement plans within the Georgian setting. This source illustrates that although environmental threats—specifically landslides and avalanches—were frequently identified as the primary official rationale for population evacuation from Svaneti, these "environmental pretexts" fulfilled broader, more intricate objectives. The resettlement procedure was frequently conducted under the guise of "labor migration." The Soviet authorities relocated them to areas requiring labor for agriculture to fulfil the demands of the planned economy. This

program ultimately led to substantial demographic alterations in multiple parts of Georgia, signifying that the resettlement process extended beyond environmental requirements to encompass intentional modifications in the demographic makeup of the population.

A. Kachadze's research is among the earliest investigations into the trends and reasons of migration in mountainous regions, focusing on the socio-economic factors influencing the mobility of Georgia's mountain population. The influence of state policy on the trajectory of migration processes (Katsadze, 1977).

The literature presents explicit instances of the examination of internal migratory mechanisms. Nizharadze's study examines the migration of Svans and their settlement locations, elucidating the formation of the ethnographic landscape resulting from migration across various regions of Georgia (Nizharadze, 1999). Putkaradze's (2006) study examines the historical and ethnological dimensions of Adjarian migration, particularly the social and cultural factors that influenced movements in southwestern Georgia (Putkaradze, 2006).

A recent international study by Andrea Borroni (2024), *Economic and Climate Migration in Georgia*, provides an updated analytical perspective on how economic pressures and climate-related risks shape migration trends in the country. This work contributes to aligning the Georgian case with broader global research paradigms on climate-induced mobility (Borroni, 2024).

Recent studies and policy documents significantly expand the theoretical and empirical understanding of eco-migration and labor mobilization in Georgia. In particular, the Migration Strategy of Georgia (2021–2030) provides the state-level framework and declared priorities for migration governance (Issues, 2020). Reports by local think tanks and international organizations supply up-to-date evidence and legal/policy analysis. Triangulating these contemporary sources with archival materials enables a clearer assessment of how Soviet-era migration narratives intersect with current policy frameworks and implementation practices.

While the phenomenon of coerced population displacement during the Soviet era has been extensively examined in both international and post-Soviet scholarly works, current research tends to overlook the particular context of Georgia and the underlying structural factors influencing migration mechanisms. The literature fails to thoroughly and comprehensively examine the interplay among elements such as environmental hazards, labor demands, and demographic changes in Soviet Georgia. The fragmentation

of extant knowledge hinders a comprehensive understanding of the exact reasons, magnitude, and long-term effects of the strategic population displacement executed by Soviet authorities in Georgia. The primary objective of this work is to address the information research deficit in this area. This paper specifically examines the strategic population relocation campaign in Soviet Georgia, executed under the guise of environmental justification, addressing labor demands, and resulting in demographic alteration. This comprehensive method offers a profound comprehension of the strategic migration policy of the Soviet-era state, its underlying objectives, and its impact on the socio-demographic landscape of Georgia.

1.3. Methodology

This study employs a **mixed-methods approach**, integrating documentary analysis, historical research, and discourse analysis to achieve a comprehensive understanding of Soviet strategic migration policy in Georgia. Each methodological component has been specifically chosen to address distinct aspects of migration processes and their socio-demographic outcomes.

Documentary Analysis constitutes the primary method for examining formal policy frameworks and the mechanisms of population relocation. Archival sources, including normative acts, official decrees, five-year resettlement plans, and internal correspondence from Soviet authorities, were systematically analyzed. Through this method, the study identifies the official objectives of migration, such as labor mobilization, environmental protection, and regional development. By comparing official documentation with actual implementation records, it becomes evident that many migration initiatives also served informal goals, such as ethnic restructuring and demographic engineering. For example, archival data from the Adjara Central State Archive (ACSA, Fund R-356) revealed the planned redistribution of populations from ecologically vulnerable highland areas to economically strategic lowlands, demonstrating the dual environmental and economic rationale behind resettlement. This method thus allows for the assessment of policy intent versus practical outcome, clarifying the state's strategic objectives and the administrative instruments employed.

Historical Research provides a contextual framework to understand the temporal and structural evolution of migration policy. By tracing population movements across decades and situating them within broader political, economic, and environmental developments, historical analysis illuminates the long-term effects of Soviet migration policy on demographic and social structures. This approach has enabled the identification of trends such as the depopulation of mountainous regions (e.g., Svaneti, Racha) and the urbanization or ethnic balancing of key areas (e.g., Kvemo Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti).

Historical investigation, drawing on secondary sources, official reports, and contemporaneous accounts, also clarifies how ostensibly humanitarian measures, like eco-migration, are often intertwined with broader goals of labor mobilization and regional governance.

Discourse Analysis is applied to interpret the narratives and ideological constructs surrounding migration policies. By analyzing official speeches, government reports, and contemporary commentaries, the study examines how migration was legitimized and communicated to both the public and local authorities. This method uncovers the implicit rationales and ideological imperatives behind resettlement programs, such as the creation of the "new Soviet citizen," integration of minority populations, and the justification of politically sensitive measures through environmental or economic pretexts. Discourse analysis also enables the identification of contradictions between publicly stated humanitarian objectives and the coercive or strategic nature of resettlement practices, thus revealing the interplay between rhetoric and practice.

Expert Interviews complement the documentary and historical evidence by providing qualitative insights from individuals with specialized knowledge of Soviet-era policies, including historians, archivists, and social scientists. These interviews elucidate the human and social dimensions of resettlement, capturing experiences, local responses, and the perceived effectiveness of policy implementation. Insights gained from these interviews help validate archival findings and highlight the social and emotional consequences of migration, including integration challenges, identity transformations, and inter-ethnic tensions.

The empirical materials used in this study are organized into four main categories, providing a clear understanding of how each source contributes to the research objectives:

- **Official and archival documents** – including Soviet-era normative acts, five-year resettlement plans, ministerial correspondence, and collective farm administrative documents. These materials are essential for identifying formal policy objectives, administrative mechanisms, and implementation practices.
- **Historical and analytical literature** - domestic and international academic works that provide the **theoretical background and historical context** for analyzing Soviet migration policy.
- **Discourse materials** - official speeches, Soviet press, and ideological narratives. These sources help reveal the discursive and legitimizing frameworks through which population movements were justified.

- **Expert interviews** - a key empirical component reflecting the social and cultural outcomes of migration.

The interview process is described as follows:

Number of interviewees: 8 experts (historians, archivists, ethnologists, and researchers).

Sampling strategy: purposive and snowball sampling to ensure the inclusion of individuals with direct expertise on Soviet-era migration.

Interview type: semi-structured interviews with thematic blocks (eco-migration, labor relocation, ethnic redistribution, administrative mechanisms).

Ethical considerations: anonymity, informed consent, and confidentiality.

Interview data were triangulated with archival and discourse sources to enhance the reliability, validity, and analytical depth of the findings.

By combining these methodologies, the study achieves a multi-layered understanding of Soviet **migration policy**, linking formal policy instruments, historical patterns, ideological discourse, and lived social outcomes. This integrated approach allows the research to:

- Identify formal and informal objectives of population relocation;
- Trace **temporal and spatial demographic changes**;
- Assess **economic, environmental, and socio-cultural effects** of migration;
- Evaluate **the gap between policy intent and implementation**;
- Understand **the long-term legacy** of strategic population management on Georgian society.

In summary, the mixed-methods framework ensures a robust and comprehensive analysis of Soviet strategic migration, revealing both the procedural mechanisms employed by the state and the enduring socio-demographic consequences across regions of Georgia.

1.4. Correspondence Between Methods, Research Objectives, and Hypotheses

Each method used in the study is not merely described but analytically linked to the research objectives and central hypotheses. The methodological design functions as an integrated system, where each approach addresses a specific dimension of the research questions:

Documentary analysis identifies the *formal and informal objectives* of Soviet migration policy, directly addressing the first research question: *What were the official versus implicit goals behind population relocation?* It also tests the hypothesis that environmental justification often concealed political and demographic aims.

Historical analysis situates migration practices within their temporal evolution and explains long-term structural changes. It answers: *How did policy mechanisms evolve over decades, and how did they impact population distribution?* This method is essential for validating the hypothesis that eco-migration was part of a broader labor allocation strategy.

Discourse analysis reveals ideological and legitimizing narratives used by the Soviet state. It addresses the question: *How was migration framed and justified in official discourse?* This helps test the hypothesis that natural disasters were frequently instrumentalized to legitimize politically sensitive relocations. Expert interviews provide empirical insights into social and cultural consequences and validate documentary evidence. They address the question: *What were the lived social and demographic effects of these relocations?* Interviews also support the hypothesis that migration generated significant integration challenges and identity transformations.

Together, these methods form an analytically coherent system that links empirical evidence to the broader theoretical framework and research goals.

1.5. Theoretical framework

The study is grounded in three primary theoretical frameworks that offer distinct analytical views on the migration process.

Structural migration theory highlights the socio-economic and structural determinants that compel population displacement. Migration is regarded as both an outcome of individual decision-making and a process influenced by structural conditions (Lee, 1966; Massey, 1993; Todaro, 1987). During the Soviet era, economic planning constituted a framework in which migration served as a mechanism for achieving labor, economic, and ideological objectives.

Ethnic management theory analyzes the methods by which states utilize migration to control demographic proportions and maintain regional stability (Bates, 1983; Brass, 1991; Horowitz, 1985). In the Georgian context, this was evident in the strategic allocation of the local populace, particularly the

resettlement of individuals from the Georgian ethnic group to areas with a large concentration of national minorities.

Eco-social systems theory integrates environmental problems with social disruptions, enabling the analysis of how natural disasters influence the migratory process. This concept underscores that environmental crises are not merely natural difficulties, but also catalysts for societal dislocation (Holling, 1973; Adger, 2000; Blaikie, 1994)..

2. Historical Context: Development of Soviet Migration Policy in Georgia

In the Soviet Union, migration policy served as a crucial instrument for state control, economic development management, and the maintenance of social stability (Buckley, 1995). Migration was perceived not as a personal decision, but as a series of strategic processes that fulfilled economic objectives as well as political and ideological purposes. Alongside natural calamities, economic factors also prompted migration, which was linked to the labor movement and tied to the deliberate policies of the Soviet government (Manvelidze, 2024). This tendency is particularly evident in Georgia, where geographical diversity, ethnic complexity, and seismic-climatic dangers have established unique conditions for population relocation policies.

Since the 1930s, demographic shifts in Soviet Georgia have been linked to extensive industrial or infrastructure initiatives, urban expansion, and agricultural collectivization. In this context, systematic methodologies were established, enabling the state to focus on populations in resource-abundant or strategically significant areas.

Under the Soviet system, the population policy prompted by environmental issues extended beyond humanitarian objectives. The practice of resettlement, in the context of environmental hazards such as landslides and floods, frequently coincided with a deficiency of labor resources in agriculture and industry. Consequently, the migration policy partially fulfilled economic objectives. It was imperative for the state that individuals from families displaced by environmental hazards were actively engaged in the labor force of Soviet farms, thereby affirming the state's objective of mobilizing the workforce and facilitating the execution of the plan (Zoidze I. Manvelidze I., 2022).

During that period, the state managed population resettlement using centralized institutional procedures. This role was formerly executed by the Resettlement and Settlement Department of the Ministry of Agriculture of Georgia (NAG, 1963). In 1967, the State Committee for Labor Resources under the

Council of Ministers of the Georgian SSR was established to manage population relocation matters until the dissolution of the Soviet Union (NAG, 1963). This institutional alteration signifies that the state regarded resettlement procedures mainly within the framework of the strategic allocation of labor resources.

In specific instances, like as the resettlement of Muslim Meskhets in entirety and Muslim Adjarians (a minority), oversight was conducted by the Soviet security agencies: People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs and People's Commissariat for State Security (Vacharadze, Official Documents of 1944 on the Deportation of Minorities Living in Southern Georgia., 2020,). During the Soviet era, population resettlement manifested as intra-republican agricultural relocation (Adjara Central State Archive). The government first implemented intra-regional resettlement, followed by inter-regional resettlement, for which it devised "prospective plans for the organized settlement of families in the collective and Soviet farms of the Georgian USSR (ACSA)." These constituted five-year plans executed via annual action plans. In alignment with these plans, the state enacted the pertinent normative instruments, and resettlement was conducted pursuant to the applicable decision of the Council of Ministers of the Georgian USSR (ACSA, Fund R-356. Inventory 1. Case 89, Sheet 64; Case 118, Sheet 15; Case 133, Sheet 32; Case 287, Sheets 8–9).

Since the 1970s and 1980s, migration policy has notably encompassed migration driven by ecological problems, representing a nascent kind of ecomigration policy. Individuals impacted by natural disasters, such as landslides, mudslides, avalanches, and floods, were relocated to "protected" areas, but this process frequently involved considerations of labor requirements and strategic land use planning. The Soviet leadership likely utilised ecological calamities as a means to justify population migration.

The diverse ethnic landscape of Soviet Georgia is significant as well. Migration policy was frequently employed as a mechanism to enhance regional stability and refine administrative-territorial organisation. In several instances, this entailed a policy of structural population redistribution, impacting ethnic groups, particularly in areas where national minorities resided in close proximity (for example, Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli, etc.).

3. Practical Implementation: Mechanisms and Pathways of Population Migration

The execution of the Soviet migration strategy was conducted according to a centralized plan, wherein party institutions and republic ministries were pivotal. The choice to resettle the population was typically predicated on economic and security considerations; however, it frequently aligned with the political

aims of the state, specifically on workforce distribution, ethnic displacement, and demographic alteration of border regions.

One approach was resettlement driven by the repercussions of ecological disasters. As a consequence of natural disasters in Adjara and Svaneti throughout the 1970s and 1980s, numerous families were relocated to various villages in the regions of Kakheti and Samtskhe-Javakheti, among others. This method formally provided aid to catastrophe victims; however, it frequently entailed the selection of resettlement locations where labor was required, such as collective farms, Soviet farms, state farms, construction projects, or new industrial establishments.

Resettlement facilitated by labor migration involved the strategic mobilization of the workforce in resource-abundant or economically expanding regions. For instance, the Chiatura and Tkibuli mines, along with the city of Rustavi, exemplify the relocation of labor from diverse regions according to industrial demands, resulting in permanent settlement.

The relocation routes during the Soviet era were primarily guided by the following principles:

From high-altitude and disaster-prone areas to lower and flat regions; for instance, intra-regional resettlement from the Khulo, Shuakhevi, and Keda districts of Upper Adjara to the Kobuleti, Batumi, and Khelvachauri regions (1920s-1950s of the 20th century), or from the Khulo, Shuakhevi, and Keda districts of Adjara to the villages in the Ozurgeti, Lanchkhuti, and Chokhotauri districts of the Guria region.

-from peripheral socio-cultural areas (such as Racha, Imereti, Adjara, and Svaneti (Topchishvili, 2015)) to central regions (including Guria, Shida Kartli, Samegrelo, Kakheti, and Imereti) or to geopolitically essential locations (such as Samtskhe and Javakheti).

The ethnic "balancing of composition" reflects the aspiration to attain demographic dominance, as exemplified by the Meskheta case, which involved de-ethnicization and the resettlement of individuals from other regions.

The resettled frequently encountered challenging socioeconomic circumstances, including a housing deficit, incomplete residences, inadequate financial resources, daily disputes with the local populace, and harsh climatic conditions, particularly in Samtskhe-Javakheti. Notwithstanding the formal character of

the support, the relocation occurred amid mobilization and, to some extent, compulsion, which further hindered the absorption into the new milieu.

4. Socio-cultural and structural attributes of the people

The Soviet migration program in Georgia influenced socio-economic dynamics and resulted in substantial population alterations. Population movements—whether due to ecological migration from natural disasters, labor mobilization, or intentional resettlement—frequently amalgamated economic, regional, and socio-cultural elements. Consequently, strategic actions undertaken throughout the Soviet era impacted the nation's demographic composition and the spatial dispersion of its populace.

By the conclusion of the Soviet era (1980s), distinct trends in the demographic distribution of Georgia became evident.

- Population growth in Kvemo Kartli and Kakheti is attributed to the influx of eco-migrants and labor migrants;
- Depopulation of high mountain regions (Svaneti, Racha, Khevsureti) due to the permanent displacement of individuals facing natural hazards and insufficient economic incentives;
- Increased urban population density primarily driven by labor migration;
- Structural demographic shifts in regions inhabited by ethnic minorities aimed at sustaining population stability (Katsadze, 1977).

These alterations were accompanied by a disturbance of natural demographic growth rates, including local population movement, a low birth rate, and integration challenges within the resettled groups.

Soviet policies frequently employed population transfers to manipulate ethnic demographics. This was evident in the following:

Coerced displacement and substitution: Following the 1944 expulsion of Meskheta Muslims, known as Turkish Meskheta, resettlement from other areas, including Racha and Imereti in 1944 and Adjara between 1954 and 1956, was implemented in Meskheta to facilitate demographic alteration in the region.

“Fortifying” border regions: Particularly concerning Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti, the migration strategy is directed at fostering regional stability and social cohesion. This strategy involved

the deliberate relocation of distinct population groups from various regions of Georgia, such as Adjara, Racha, Imereti, and Svaneti, executed under the auspices of ecomigration and labor migration.

Examination of regional policy: In the instances of Shida Kartli and Abkhazia (from Imereti, Samegrelo), migration phenomena during the 1940s and 1950s were frequently linked to the state's objectives regarding the spatial development of these regions, infrastructural enhancement, and the maintenance of governance stability. The population's placement was occasionally dictated by regional goals, affecting its structural distribution.

Throughout the Soviet era, the demographic composition shaped by policy was a product of centralised planning and seldom mirrored the organic population dynamics or personal preferences. This has resulted in several structural and enduring socioeconomic issues, particularly noticeable in the post-Soviet era, including:

Utilisation of spatial and social resources in a competitive manner: The artificial migration and redistribution of the people resulted in heightened rivalry for land, agricultural resources, residential space, and infrastructure, which in certain instances also led to violence.

Impaired social integration: The proximity of diverse socio-cultural groups within the same environment has engendered a challenging integration context. There were no efficient means for fostering inclusive connections, which established the foundation for the elimination of social dissent.

Emotional strain stemming from historical experiences: Displaced populations frequently perceived that the alteration of their domicile did not align with their aspirations and necessities, which, over time, fostered scepticism towards governmental actions and intensified the emotional response to previous hardships..

Transformation of local identities: Multi-regional migration has resulted in alterations within certain traditional ethno-cultural units, culminating in the transformation or amalgamation of local identities with the wider cultural milieu. This method frequently posed a barrier to the organic evolution of cultural variety.

These findings suggest that during the Soviet era, ecomigration was regarded not merely as an element of environmental and labor policies but also frequently served a purpose within a comprehensive strategy

of population settlement, aimed at preserving social equilibrium and enhancing administrative governance across various regions.

5. Discussion

The examination of the government's population movement policy in Soviet Georgia reveals that migration served as a more intricate and deliberate governing instrument than merely a mechanical reaction to environmental circumstances, natural disasters, economic variables, and demographic considerations. The strategic alterations enacted by the state signified not merely an effort to reallocate resources, but also a reconfiguration of the spatial and structural makeup of the populace by the state. The convergence of these characteristics reveals migration policy as a mechanism of control, legitimisation, and ideological management. In light of this context, the subsequent problems warrant discussion:

1. Protection of the populace or the objectives of state governance? The government's organised relocation of the people in response to environmental conditions and natural risks serves to safeguard them from such threats. For instance, the relocation of inhabitants from landslide-prone areas. Nonetheless, during this process, the primary focus frequently shifted from their adherence to the attributes of their native habitat or climatic conditions to their active participation in labor within the relocation area. The population was frequently allocated territories that did not align with their natural habitat or climatic conditions, but rather areas where they were compelled to work, contribute economically, and acclimatise to a new social milieu. This signifies that the population migration served not just as a protective measure but also to fulfil the state's labor demands, hence influencing the institutionalisation of citizenship as outlined in the plan.

2. Ecological catastrophes as a method of legitimisation

The Soviet authorities frequently employed ecological catastrophes, especially natural calamities, as a rationale for politically delicate measures. For instance, if the relocation of members of an ethnic group faced opposition, the emergence of a natural disaster provided a valid justification for the migration, effectively constituting demographic engineering. This process was frequently associated with Soviet ideological strategies. The objective was to create a "new Soviet man," necessitating the physical and psychological adaptation of individuals to a new environment, along with the Marxist-Leninist ideology of human transformation.

3. Labor mobilisation or coerced relocation?

Labor migration, motivated by economic imperatives, is frequently portrayed as a mutually advantageous endeavor for both the state and the individual. Nonetheless, historical documents and interviews with displaced individuals reveal that this process frequently involved coercive elements, as the population relocated to a geographically challenging, climatically adverse, and socially dysfunctional environment, encountered significant obstacles in assimilating into the new economic system. This was followed by cultural difficulties with the local populace, which jeopardized migrants' likelihood of enduring marginalization.

4. Structural population management as a discrete strategy

A spatial planning strategy was implicit in Soviet migration policy, which included:

- the disintegration and relocation of undesirable groups;
- the stimulation of specific groups to resettle in strategic locations;
- the promotion of cultural homogenization, strengthening the emphasis on local priority populations in non-dominant regions.

This strategy involved symbolic violence, the denial of identity recognition, the ideological imperative for integration, and the disregard for historical privileges. The alteration in the demographic composition was accompanied by systemic oppression; it was never formally acknowledged that the resettlements benefited particular factions.

Consequently, Soviet migration policy in Georgia not only reacted to the environment but also actively altered it, with the population regarded as a malleable component of the state territory. This methodology contravenes the humanitarian and civic tenets of migration policy and necessitates rigorous historical and political examination.

The current demographic landscape of Georgia, characterized by ethnic tensions, regional disparities, and the intricate assimilation of migrant populations, is partially attributable to the legacy of Soviet migration. Consequently, comprehending this experience is crucial for both rectifying historical injustices and formulating a contemporary migration strategy that prioritizes individuals.

6. Conclusion

Consequently, Soviet migration policy in Georgia not only reacted to the environment but also actively altered it, with the population regarded as a malleable component of the state territory. This methodology contravenes the humanitarian and civic tenets of migration policy and necessitates rigorous historical and political examination.

The current demographic landscape of Georgia, characterized by ethnic tensions, regional disparities, and the intricate assimilation of migrant populations, is partially attributable to the legacy of Soviet migration. Consequently, comprehending this experience is crucial for both rectifying historical injustices and formulating a contemporary migration strategy that prioritizes individuals////////.

The strategy of population relocation during the Soviet era was a complex and methodically orchestrated initiative that went beyond mere catastrophe relief. It integrated environmental, labor, and demographic issues, reflecting a deliberate governmental strategy aimed at attaining economic development, regional stability, and ideological objectives.

Environmental risks frequently served as the official justification for the displacement of populations, forming the rationale for wholesale relocation. Notwithstanding the professed humanitarian intentions, in practice, relocation and migration predominantly functioned to reallocate labor resources and reinforce key areas for regional development.

The labor migration initiatives, designed to meet the requirements of the planned economy, resulted in substantial social and demographic repercussions: they altered the regional population structure and established new settlements, thereby affecting local social dynamics and associated formal and informal mechanisms. Owing to the scarcity of land resources and the high population density, the Soviet migration policy implemented strategic relocations and resettlements to alleviate settlement pressures and optimise resource distribution. This strategy was both a consequence of economic necessity and a strategic instrument employed by the state to promote regional equity and social stability.

Demographic changes were accompanied by an aspect of population structure management. State policy frequently sought to enhance the demographic standing of particular populations in designated regions. Resettlement frequently targeted regions requiring optimisation of the local population's quantitative and social distribution (such as Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti), suggesting that Soviet migration policy encompassed deliberate population structuring.

Demographic changes were accompanied by the management of population structure. State policy frequently aimed to strengthen the demographic positions of specific groups in particular regions. Resettlement often targeted areas where optimization of the local population's quantitative and social distribution was necessary (for instance, in Kvemo Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti, etc.), suggesting that Soviet migration policy involved targeted population structuring.

6.1. Linking the Conclusion to the Research Questions

RQ1: What methods were used by Soviet authorities to direct migration?

Findings demonstrate the use of ecological justification, labor mobilization, ethnic management, and administrative enforcement as primary mechanisms. National Archives of Georgia.

RQ2: What were the formal and informal objectives of these processes?

Formally, migration was framed as a protective or developmental necessity; informally, it served labor allocation, demographic engineering, and regional control.

RQ3: What were the long-term demographic and social outcomes?

The study identifies depopulation of highland areas, transformation of ethnic structures in strategic regions, and persistent social integration challenges.

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