Backward and Deficient: Exploring Soviet Imaginations and the Modernization of Svaneti, 1920s-1930s

By

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Abstract

The MA thesis explores the changes that took place in a remote mountainous region of the Georgian SSR called Svaneti under the Soviet system in the 1920s and the 1930s. The Soviet Union had identified cultural "backwardness" and illness-related physical impairments as the main problems of the group that populated a geographically disconnected area. To effectuate the Soviet project and usher the Svans through the Marxist historical timeline towards communism, the USSR started the rapid, state-driven modernization of Svaneti. In this context, my thesis asks the following questions: What did the modernization of Svaneti look like? What was the ideological and historical context that shaped it? How did the USSR deal with the identified aspects of the region's "backwardness" and what were its collateral effects? And finally, what does the Svan case tell us about the USSR as an imperial formation?

Based on three-months-long archival fieldwork in Tbilisi and Mestia, utilizing discourse analysis to study historical sources on the Svaneti region, as well as observing their logic of documentation, my thesis puts forward three arguments: i) the rationale of Soviet modernization was fundamentally at odds with the local value systems and created tensions; ii) the large-scale process of goiter treatment in Svaneti generated a medicalized subjectivity that circumscribed the region's position with respect to the state; iii) the analysis of changes in peripheral Soviet Svaneti can bolster the academic position that conceptualizes the USSR as an "imperial formation". The discussion also sets the tone for further developments in the field, including the relevance of post-colonial theory for Soviet studies.

Keywords: Soviet Union; Empire; Svaneti; Medicalized Subjectivity; Modernization; Public Health.

Acknowledgments

I dedicate this thesis to my mother, Irka, without whose support I would not be here. Your son could not be more thankful to have such a parent.

I am deeply grateful to my supervisors Professor Vlad and Professor Prem for their invaluable support throughout the year. The insightful and guiding comments always put me back on track, no matter how puzzled I felt.

My dear friend Mariam, before blowing out the candles on her birthday cake, secretly wished that I would get my lost laptop back, an item I had forgotten in an unidentified taxi on my way back home. The laptop contained all the archival materials that I gathered during my research. Nothing was backed up. After a day, with the magic of her wish and the kindness of the taxi driver, I somehow got the laptop back untouched. And now, here is the thesis too. Thank you, Mariam, for being such an amazing friend at all times.

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Terms and Abbreviations

GSSR – Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic

JSK' – People's Commissariat of Health

MLA – Mestia Local Archive

SEA – National Archives of Georgia

TSFSR – Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic

Notes on Transliteration and Translation

To transliterate from Georgian to English the names of rivers, villages, cities, individuals, and institutions, I used an online platform translit.cc which employs the scholarly system. As for the Russian sources, I used the same source with the addition of another scholarly system-using platform called transliterattion.com. At points, I made exceptions in favor of better-known and easily understandable English words like Upper Svaneti (instead of zemo svaneti) and Svans (instead of svanebi).

The translations of the quotes from Georgian to English and Russian to English are done by me.

Introduction

In the 70 years of the USSR's existence, empires and iron curtains fell, new nations consolidated, widespread diseases were eradicated, some of the old traditions in localities were battled out of existence, while others further solidified as symbols of anti-colonial resistance. In short, the twentieth century within the vast Soviet borders was a period of tumultuous and relentless transformation. The wave of changes extended to a remote and mountainous region of Georgian SSR, Svaneti as well. The place that historically stood in semi-isolation from the rest of the world during long wintery months had to suddenly find its role in the larger, interconnected system of the Soviet Union. The Bolshevik project that aimed at creating a modern, classless society identified the cultural and material "backwardness", as well as illness-related physical impairment of Svans as serious obstacles on the way toward socialism. The Soviet intervention in the Svan social fabric to remedy these was far-reaching, especially in its violent collision with the local ways of being and traditions.

Critical analysis of the transformations that took place in the 1920s and the 1930s Svaneti, a process documented only by Soviet sources before, enables us to capture the incongruities and dissonance created as part of the USSR's attempt to make its domain more manageable. It also broadens the understanding of the tools of governance, institutions, and individuals that were involved in the modernization of Svaneti. In this context, my thesis answers the following questions: What did the modernization of Svaneti look like? What was the ideological and historical context that shaped it? How did the USSR deal with the identified aspects of the region's "backwardness" and what were its collateral effects? And finally, what does the Svan case tell us about the USSR as an imperial formation?

The mention here of the term "imperial formation" is not by accident. I follow in the footsteps of scholars in imperial historiography that go beyond empire-realism - that is seeking a normative and objective conception of an empire - and focus instead on empire as a context-setting category (Gerasimov et al. 2009). My analysis also seeks to answer the call of interpretive historiography for increased attention on the languages of imperial self-description as a way to capture the governance in its unevenness and idiosyncrasy (Stoler et al., 2007). Despite the heterogeneity of imperial situations, I find certain philosophical and historical ideas as context-setting. Soviet Marxism-Leninism and the firm belief in science and progress of the Bolsheviks can be thought of as such. To examine how these ideas shape realities, events, and relations, I find the Foucauldian concept of the "regimes of truth" particularly useful (1980), especially as it pertains to the production of "truths" based on the physical and health-related impairments of the Svans, as well as the subsequent efforts to manage them.

The thesis analyzes the Soviet modernization in Svaneti in two chapters. The first chapter reviews the theoretical corpus querying the imperial nature of the Soviet Union and adopts the position that endorses the term "imperial formation". After defining the USSR as a polity, it proceeds to illustrate Svaneti's position in the same system by describing the vision of the Bolsheviks for the region and the modernization efforts that followed. Modernization is connected to the process of union-wide mass mobilization of natural resources and economic interests of the state. The text then analyzes the incongruities between Soviet rationale and local value systems.

The second chapter analyzes Soviet modernization in the form of organized efforts directed toward public health improvement as a scaffolding for the utilization of human resources in the region. The main obstacle to harnessing the productivity of Svans turned out to be the high incidence of goiter in the population, a disease that is caused by iodine deficiency in the body.

Goiter is an enlargement of the thyroid gland that is located on the neck, it hinders brain growth and causes bodily dysfunctions. The chapter thus follows the management of goiter in 1920s Svaneti and centers around the ideas, institutions, expeditions, and individuals that partook in the research and treatment of goiter in the region.

The third and final chapter compares the management of and stories around Svan goiter in the Soviet Union with the mentions of the same disease in Russian imperial sources, where it is a recurring trope and a central issue. Providing a genealogical account of goiter in Svaneti, the comparison within the framework of Foucaldian "regimes of truth" – understood as a context-sensitive set of mechanisms, techniques, and processes necessary to arrive at truth – permits to make an argument on (dis)continuities between the two systems, further contributing to a strand in imperial historiography that discusses the USSR as an empire.

Comrade Archive(s): Making Sense of Soviet Multivocal Documentations and Other Notes on Methodology

The MA thesis mainly draws on three-month-long fieldwork in the archives of the Republic of Georgia conducted in the winter of 2023-2024. It is also closely linked to the previous research done in Tbilisi for a BA thesis titled "Russian Imperial Orientalism in Svaneti". In two months out of the three, I was a frequent guest of the National Archives of Georgia and The National Parliamentary Library of Georgia. Both store valuable documents in Georgian and Russian languages about the history of the republic, the Caucasus (as Tbilisi was the cultural and administrative center of the region in the Russian empire and later as well), and the Soviet Union itself. As my interest lay in the Svaneti region of Georgia, I also decided that going directly to the region was necessary. A month-long stay in snowy, cold, but majestic Svaneti served to study documents in the Mestia Local Archive. There, records of local

community meetings, executive committee assemblies, letters from the center, letters from Svan denizens to the executive committee, and other important documents are stored.

The multivocality of Soviet documents stems from the transcripts of community meetings from almost 100 years ago that I found in the Mestia Local Archive. They narrate competing claims and voices from administrative officials, workers, and ordinary inhabitants of Svaneti. This is precisely what gives the historian a glimpse of the languages of self-description mentioned above. Religious scholar Sonja Luehrmann calls a similar approach "reading between the lines", a technique inspired by post-colonial analysis of literary texts that is aware of the juxtaposition of complex processes that took place at a given time. The richness of the study is added through the increased focus on small vignettes and paragraphs of "first-hand experiences" in official documents (2015, p. 40). Yet, a person researching Soviet archives must be aware of the heavy ideological undertones each of these documents might have, as they were strictly overseen and processed by communist party members or their subordinates. Navigating and making sense of that polyhedral epistemic environment then becomes the main challenge.

For the Soviet documents, I employ critical discourse analysis to illustrate the social and political context of the stories that were told. Paying sufficient attention to the moments in time of these documents' writing, the narrative structures employed, and the concepts used may give us an idea about the processes of production, distribution, and consumption of the texts. Looking at the way documents construct realities, influence societies, create discourses, and frame political stances shapes my analysis (Scott, 2023).

In the same vein, I think of Soviet documents as forms of action. The documents affected the dynamics of internal bureaucratic processes, as well as the unfolding of events which, in this case, was policy implementation. When thinking about the question of policy effects on the

Svan social fabric, one should think of documents and documentary practices as active shapers of events (Luehrmann, p. 2015, p. 42). Luehrmann insightfully comments on the concept of documents as forms of action in the following words: “As “accomplices” and catalysts of bureaucratic action, documents are bearers of textual information but also material things that tell us something about the practices of which they were a part” (Ibid, p. 43).

Finally, I employ comparative analysis to study the similarities and differences between the Russian empire and the USSR based on the discourses and policy (or absence thereof) that they employed for Svaneti and goiter incidence in the region. Such comparison allows me to highlight relations between the two entities and argue how that can be analyzed with close reading of historical sources on goiter in Svaneti (Given, 2008, p. 100).

The research has limitations. My fieldwork was confined to the archives of the Republic of Georgia, which most definitely store an abundance of relevant material but are by no means exhaustive. It is likely that conducting research in the archives of Moscow would have enriched the analysis, especially when it came to the discussion of Soviet policy, be it medical or other. Political, security, and feasibility issues prevented me from doing so. I tried making requests for the digitalization of certain sources from the archives in Moscow, but the answers never came. Another limitation is the historical timeframe that I covered. The management of goiter and modernization go further than the 1920s and the 1930s that is described in the text, but within the scope of an MA thesis, their comprehensive analysis was unfeasible. Thus, I decided to limit my discussion to the first two decades of Soviet rule in Svaneti, with the bulk of the focus on the 1920s. Further, writing history in the Georgian archives is a challenging task. The national archival administration for questionable reasons had adopted a “no photo” policy, which prohibits the taking of photos of any historical document. This drastically increases the time historians have to physically spend in the building, not to mention the

protracted process of paraphrasing or transcribing historical sources. This greatly affected my research.

Chapter I – When the Red Machine Meets the Stone: Svaneti in the Soviet Union

It is clear that if not for the October Revolution, if not for the Soviet government, complete extinction and annihilation would have been unavoidable for the Svans.

"Svaneti", 1925

P. Makharadze

Both parts of Svaneti are rich in natural resources and various minerals. Metals such as gold, silver, lead, marble, etc. are mined here. The true beauty and great national wealth of this part of Georgia are represented by diverse tracts of forests.

"Soviet Svaneti", 1974

A. Chark'viani

This chapter has a twofold purpose. First, I review the multi-layered theoretical corpus with its competing claims that query the imperial nature of the USSR to adopt a tenable definition of the latter as a specific political system. My analysis endorses the term "imperial formation" that emerged as a part of the cognitive turn in recent imperial historiography and went beyond the crude objectivism of empire-realism, focusing instead on the diversity of imperial experiences. Thus, the call for increased attention on the languages of self-description that suffuse multi-faceted imperial worlds buoys my investigation of the Svan case. Said adoption of the scholarly position has implications for the arguments proposed in the rest of the text too, including the Soviet reconfiguration of the Svan social fabric and the administration of goiter in the region.

Second, to tell the history of Svaneti that has only been told by Soviet sources before, I critically analyze some of the changes that took place in the 1920s and the 1930s Svaneti as a part of the radical modernization project of the USSR. By revealing points of friction that arose during modernization processes between the Soviet rationale and the existing social and material reality in the region, I argue that the interventionist vision of the Bolsheviks derived from the political goal of creating a classless society was fundamentally incompatible with the local value systems and the way of being. The tools of Soviet governance will be connected to the epistemic framework of modernity based on the existing literature that examines Russian imperial and USSR's governing trajectories within a pan-European context. To approach these issues, the chapter also provides a brief history and geography of the region as elements that considerably shaped the modernization of the twentieth century.

Imperial Formations

Most of the existing literature considers the USSR as an empire in one configuration or another, with one distinct, challenging claim put forward by Adeeb Khalid, a scholar of Central Asian history in the Soviet Union. Analyzing the transformation of the region in the twentieth century, he proposes to conceptualize the USSR as a modern mobilizational state similar to Kemalist Turkey, Reza Shah's Iran, and King Amanullah's Afghanistan.[1] A deep, state-led socio-cultural transformation, shock modernization programs, push for secularization, and policies for the emancipation of women were the common characteristics of the three mentioned states. The author argues that the USSR fits better in the genealogies of these interventionist states rather than overseas colonial empires like the British and the

[1] For a contrasting claim made by yet another scholar of Central Asia in the USSR, see Douglas Northrop's "Veiled Empire", 2016. The author claims that the administration of Central Asia by the Soviet Union resembles the structures of a colonial empire that are expressed along the lines of hierarchy and difference. He also argues for a metropole-periphery divide that have several axes of manifestation, including geographic, ethnic, political, economic, and cultural (p. 22).

French (2007). However, Khalid's own interpretation suggests a certain dynamism in the Soviet System that also has implications for his inference. The turn in conservative values in the 1930s USSR led by Stalin was predicated on the nationalities policy that had been implemented since the previous decade. State rhetoric differentiated Western developed republics from the "culturally backward" nations mainly from Central Asia. The most developed of all – the Russian nation was regarded as the big brother and an example for the rest. The economic and social policies devised in Moscow by the vanguard party operated in this framework and resembled the colonial dominance of the periphery by the metropole. Adeeb Khalid balances these by emphasizing the changing policy development from the Brezhnev era that ran affirmative-action programs for local peoples in the republic with regard to employment and university admissions. Paired with it were patronage networks that supposedly bolstered the local political elite's power (Ibid, 127-129).[2] But it seems that overlooking a crucial moment in USSR's history when high Stalinism dominated weakens Khalid's claim. Moreover, the affirmative action programs that were initially worked out, as the author suggests, in the 1920s and actively used in the Brezhnev era too, were not one-dimensional. Even though the USSR officially refuted the existence of a state-bearing nation, it effectively created one. It was only the Russians that did not have their territory granted with a local communist party in charge.[3] The Bolshevik authorities formally demanded that the Russians yield their national status for the sake of the state's cohesiveness and proof of the USSR's anti-imperialist configuration. However, the attempted reversal of hierarchical distinction that previously existed in the Russian empire had the opposite consequences, as the distinction was not eradicated but in actuality reproduced. Russians bore the brunt on the

[2] As an additional note, affirmative action policies in the USSR were not only worked out based on the Marxist understanding of the linear development of peoples and certainly not out of Bolshevik benevolence. The decision to hand over the power and certain rights to the locals arose also because of pragmatic reasons as the Bolsheviks encountered local power(s) that made them do it. For state cohesiveness, instead of ostracizing local forces and elites, party policymakers decided to coopt them into a wider hierarchical structure that would give the Bolsheviks a tool to simultaneously subdue them.

[3] Coincidentally, the Supreme Soviet of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the highest authority of the state from 1936 until its dissolution was headquartered in Moscow, Russia.

way to building a socialist society (Martin, 2011, p. 20). My previous mention of Russia-as-a-big-brother during high Stalinism illustrates how the affirmative action rationale of the 1920s developed in the next decade. Thus, the search for a tenable definition should proceed.

Historian Ronald Grigor Suny provides the most comprehensive normative account of the USSR as an empire. He deems an unequal, hierarchical relationship between two separated polities that creates a metropole-periphery relation a constitutive element of an empire. The distinction between an empire and a multinational state or confederation is the unequal treatment of its people based on specific categories like ethnicity. The relation could be characterized by asymmetric distribution of resources and discrimination along linguistic and cultural lines. Thus, the delimitations between the metropole and the periphery are manifested in ethnic, geographic, and administrative distinctions that permit the differences in governance (Suny & Martin, 2001, p. 25; Suny, 2017, p. 251). In this context, the metropole is distinguished by its systematic antecedence that overturns any kind of priority potentially arising in the periphery if it comes in conflict with the interests of the core. The route of goods, power, and information is established from the periphery to the metropole. This further allows the core to establish its superior status via cultural landmarks like architecture and monuments. Apart from the above qualifiers, Suny hints at what I think is a crucial element in operating with the term empire and its further theorization, namely the perceptive one. The perception of the metropole, as well as the one of the subjects' in the peripheries, constitutes much of the imperial context. They shape the attitudes of people's relations that set the tone for political developments (Ibid. p. 26). When the people of the republics of the Caucasus, Baltic, Ukraine, and Moldova decided in the late 1980s that the empire of the USSR was oppressing them as nations (Beissinger, 2006, p. 301-302), their efforts ultimately led to the dissolution of a system that was once conceived as an extremely sturdy and enduring entity.

How populations relate to institutions and systems of authority as surrogates for foreign domination is what makes the utilization of the empire category prolific in a historic analysis of the Soviet Union. It gives room for the perusal of the vocabularies and voices mobilized (hence important political dynamics) in response to foreign domination by local/peripheral populations that might otherwise be obscured if the operative concept is a "mobilizational state" or something else (Beissinger, 2006, p. 302).

The search for objective markers of empire-ness in this part of the globe, as has hopefully been shown in the discussion of the section, attests to the potential limits of the chosen path, which is not only true for the USSR but even for the Russian empire itself (Gerasimov et al. 2009). The diversity of imperial landscapes is at times renitent to its translation into categories with objective markers. Hence, the cognitive turn that has recently shaped imperial historiography comes as no surprise. The cognitive turn recalibrates the focus of scholarly inquiry towards the languages of self-description of the imperial experience and adopts the empire as a category that sets contexts. The empire is thought of as a frame of reference for ever-changing identities and subjectivities. The locus of analysis is then the encounter of difference shaped by the disparities in power in a given imperial setting. This analytical move is underlain by a critical approach to the premise of the empire as an instrument that produces difference. As the theorization by Ernst Gellner and Rogers Brubaker among others in nationalism studies has aptly shown, the production of likeness and otherness can be an interdependent process possibly taking place in the same spatial and temporal setting (Ibid. p. 17-19).

Accordingly, Ann Stoler's term "imperial formations" which captures the dynamism of the entities that are in constant flux of making and unmaking seems like a promising concept to think with. Defining it as polities based on constantly shifting categories and populations that selectively produce, as well as manage exceptions with temporary interventions and the

granting of delayed sovereignties, the author avoids the dangers of languages of rationalization often employed in empire theorizations that reduce the heterogeneity of imperial experience to more manageable, facile descriptors (Gerasimov et al. 2009, p. 24; Stoler et al., 2007, p. 8). The incongruities and the dissonance revealed in the efforts of an empire to make its domain more manageable become valuable entry points for analysis. In this framework, the uneven and idiosyncratic application of class and nationality (on the path towards Soviet internationalism, a synonym for homogenization), among other categories, is precisely what enables the understanding of the USSR as an empire (Gerasimov et al. 2009, p. 22). The perspective allows for an insightful examination of Svaneti's case, especially considering its distinct geographical location that has historically helped to attract unbridled imperial imaginations.

History and Geography of Svaneti

Svaneti region is located in northwest Georgia at the southern foot of the Greater Caucasus Mountain range. It is surrounded by glaciers and tall peaks from all sides, which makes the region mostly impervious during long winters. Historically, the three months of summer were the window when visitors could visit Svaneti for research, trading, or traveling purposes. Svaneti is further divided into two, upper and lower parts by Svaneti range. These parts are connected through the lat'pari mountain pass. Upper Svaneti villages are located in a valley along the inguri river, while Lower Svaneti is inhabited on the banks of the river tskhenists'qali. The bases of the mountains and the valleys are covered with dense forests and pasture lands (Gabliani, 1925, p. 5-10).

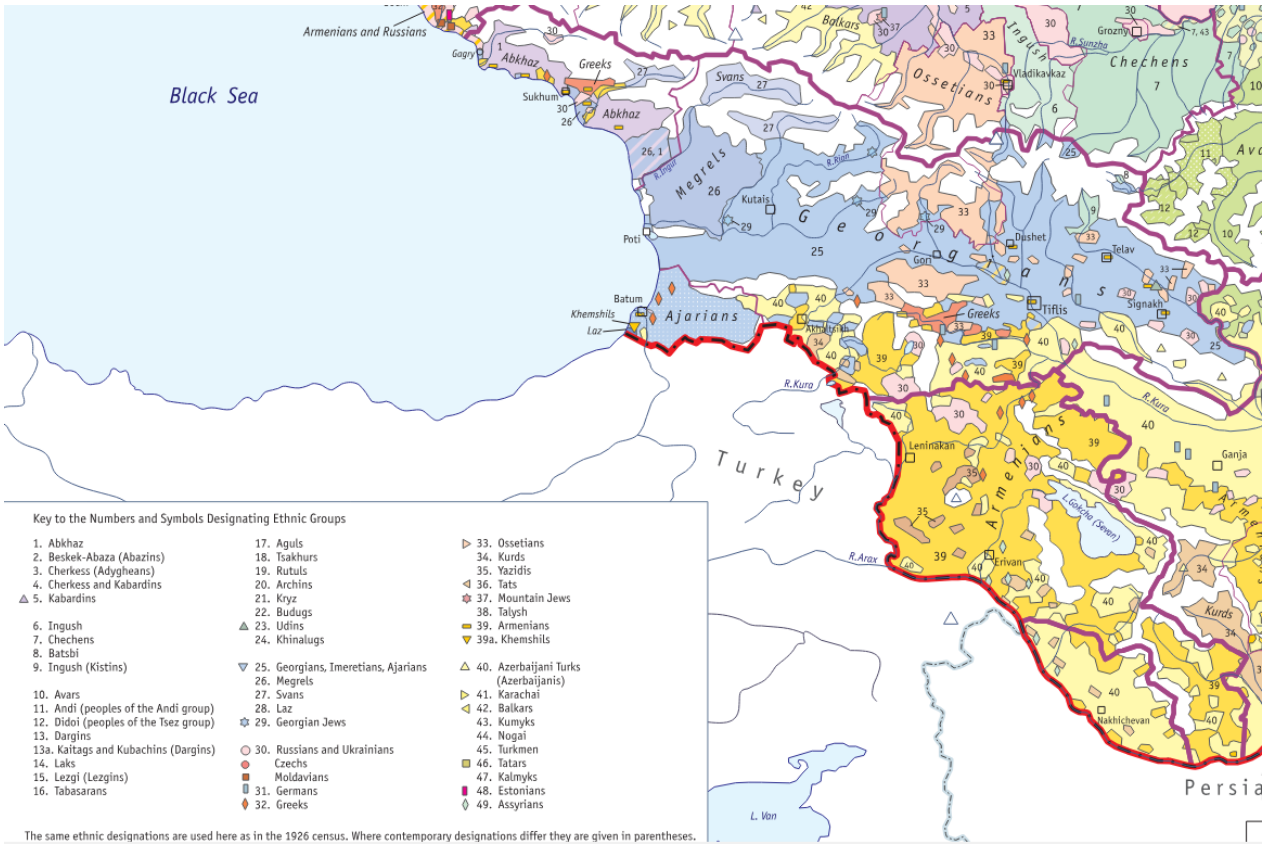

Figure 1. An Ethnic Map Reflecting the First Soviet Census[4] *(Cuciev, 2014, p. 88).*

During the Middle Ages, Svaneti and Svans had close economic and cultural ties with neighboring regions of Imereti, Samegrelo, and generally the rest of Georgia. As the latter was often invaded and decimated by reigning empires, in times of turmoil, Georgian nobility would take refuge in well-nigh inaccessible Svaneti and deposit the treasury there.

[4] The given map is based on the 1926 all-Union census. The classification of the diverse peoples of the Transcaucasian region proved to be extremely difficult. At first, Megrels, Svans, and Ajarians were classified as a separate group. However, after deliberations from Georgian representatives of the Transcaucasian government, arguing that as these groups were actually tribal sub-groups of Georgians and the census in its current form served to dismantle the Georgian nation, the Commission for the Production of the Census was persuaded to include Svans, Megrels, and Ajarians as sub-groups of Georgians (Hirsch, 2010, p. 132-133).

Figure 2. Svaneti in the Contemporary Georgian Administrative Division (Lower, Upper Svaneti, and Svan settlements in apkhazeti region are in red). Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Historical_Svaneti_in_modern_international_borders_of_Georgia

In turn, centuries-old Eastern Orthodox icons, manuscripts, crosses, and other types of invaluable cultural material, locally also referred to as “gandzi”, were carefully preserved by Svan guardians over the years (Batiashvili & Aleksidze, 2023). With the weakening of the Georgian state, the noble house of Dadeshkeliani gained power and ruled the principality of Svaneti in the 17th and 18th centuries, a period marked by inter-clan blood feuds and decreased contact with the rest of the world. In the 19th century during the advent of the Russian empire towards the Caucasus, the political context in Svaneti started to change. Tsar Alexander I forcibly incorporated much of Georgia into the empire in the first decade of the century, however, Svaneti proved to be elusive for imperial administrators. In the year 1830, Russian military leader Ivan Paskevich tried to bribe Svan noblemen to no avail. Nonetheless, the imperial expansion continued relentlessly. Three years later, the empire managed to subjugate all of Svaneti excluding one-half of Upper Svaneti, often also called Free Svaneti. In 1834, a Russian commission was sent towards Free Svaneti, only to be ambushed and confronted on the way by Svans. The empire made numerous attempts to penetrate into the remaining part of

the region, but most of them fell short for two decades. Ultimately, Free Svaneti was absorbed into the Russian empire half a century later than the rest of Georgia, in the year 1853 (Gabliani, 1927, p. 34-49). From then, Svaneti was administered as a part of Lechkhumi uezd[5] in the Russian empire until 1918, when the Georgian Republic declared independence from the empire. The independence of the former was short-lived as the Red Army marched to occupy Georgia in 1921 and incorporated it into the Soviet Union. The Soviet rule in Svaneti was not fully consolidated until 1925, some four years after the Bolsheviks managed to curb an anti-Soviet uprising in Svaneti.

Svaneti in the Early Soviet Union

If the task is to illustrate Svaneti's position in the USSR and the rapid changes that took place in the first decades of Bolshevik rule, one should look no further than the film "Salt for Svanetia" (1930) directed by Mikheil Kalat'ozishvili (1903-1973), one of Soviet Union's finest Georgian filmmakers. The documentary is symptomatic of the vision Bolsheviks had for the mountainous region and demonstrates par excellence the Soviet-style attempt at the utilization of an art medium to fundamentally shape audiences' knowledge of the union's diverse lands (Josephson, 2005, p. 15; Sarkisova, 2021, p. 24). Kalat'ozishvili's "Salt for Svanetia" is part of the trend in the 1920s and the early 1930s Soviet filmmaking that falls under the term *kulturfilm*. The latter included ethnographic, popular-scientific, and educational films with a tint of ideological intentionality.

[5] An administrative-territorial unit in the Russian empire and early Soviet Union. In terms of scale, the unit is close to European county, Iranian ostan, and Korean gun.

Figure 3. A group of Soviet workers building a road to the mountainous region in "Salt for Svanetia" (1930).

The didacticism of a kulturfilm laid in its aim to supply novel, scientific knowledge to the citizens of the USSR about diverse compatriots scattered across the vast territory of the Union who also actively partook in building the socialist project (Sarkisova, 2021, p. 3).

Kulturfilm "Salt for Svanetia" tells the story of a "backward" region Svaneti where dwelled the "people from the past". Stuck in the centuries now gone, according to the film, Svans had not overcome economic primitiveness in the form of subsistence farming and damaging cultural practices, such as isolating pregnant women from communities until they gave birth. The social asperity was exacerbated by the lack of salt in the region, contributing to the poor diet and health of the locals. All of these were attributed to the harsh nature of Svaneti, where the "undomesticated" landscape had put the dwellers in a developmental stasis. Sergei Tretiakov, the writer of the film's script, remarks in one of his essays: "Repulsive is the primeval forest, untilled steppe, unused waterfalls, falling not when they are told to, rains and snows, avalanches, caves, and mountains.

Figure 4. A machine used to build a road is depicted in "Salt for Svanetia" (1930).

Beautiful is everything, which carries an imprint of an organizing human hand" (Sarkisova, 2021, p. 159-160). Having depicted the Svan condition, the last five minutes of the film are in stark contrast with the rest. In the end, Kalat'ozishvili gives a glimpse of Soviet Svaneti, where nature is starting to get domesticated through technology and the region connected with the rest of the world. The Soviet modernization of Svaneti had begun.

Thus, "Salt for Svanetia" neatly serves as a point of departure to describe what exactly modernization meant in the Svan context. Firstly, on a more material level, it included building roads, communication lines, hospitals, schools, as well as the provision of modern technology, and mechanization. The construction of a road had the utmost importance – the disconnectedness of Svaneti conditioned the "backwardness" of the region, according to the Bolsheviks. Additionally, the novel role of the region within the wider union necessitated a functioning road. The economies of the Soviet Union's republics were strongly interdependent and based on the inner circulation of goods and materials. Svaneti, in this framework, was expected to export raw materials such as lumber, mineral wealth, and livestock. The new Svaneti road suited for automobiles was supposed to connect the region to

the railway network along the Black Sea and form a functional supply line within the Georgian SSR and ultimately with other republics (Makharadze, 1925, p. 38).

After the evaluation of several highway options by engineers, the Zugdidi-Jvari-Mestia route was selected. It would first link Svaneti to the Samegrelo region. It was also estimated that the highway would save 200,000 rubles a year for the government. The importance of the project was highlighted by a Bolshevik representative of Svaneti at one of the congresses of the Soviets of Georgian SSR[6]: "A functioning road is a matter of self-preservation for Svans. The soul of each Svan will boom with the explosion of the mountains and finally achieve tranquility when the sounds of roaring engines are first heard in the center of Svaneti" (Chark'viani, 1974, p. 84). The speech was a typical example of the Soviet transformationist vision of nature. Science and technology in the service of socialist reconstruction were supposed to ensure the survival of Svans and subjugate the oppressive nature to a rationalizing human will (Josephson, 1992).

During the construction of the road, local Svan workers, as well as parts of the Red Army were mobilized. Ultimately, the spending for the infrastructural project amounted to more than 6 million rubles and it was finally completed in 1936 (Ibid. p. 85-86). Although the project was actively described as a salvation for the Svan people, it also served to materialize Soviet economic interests and actualize the region's expected contributions to the union. Svaneti, a land rich in natural resources, had to be harnessed as modernization went full steam ahead with the task of advancing the socio-economic base and the creation of a classless society. Just as central Asian republics of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan were rendered as cotton-growing states of the USSR and their economies, infrastructure, and labor force reshaped according to that logic (Obertreis, 2017), Svaneti too could have been modernized

[6] Congress of the Soviet is an assembly of local council representatives. As for the local councils themselves, they were responsible for managing local affairs in different administrative units.

and mechanized enough to export 5 million cubic feet of lumber, including rare woods like red maple and Nordmann fir (Almanac of the Important Decrees of the Congress of Soviets of Georgian SSR, 1929, p. 19).

The process of timber extraction was buttressed by organized efforts that aimed at raising awareness of the "correct socialist ways of gathering wood" and the importance of forests for the ecosystem. The forest manager, the person responsible for organizational and financial matters connected to forests in Svaneti, was tasked by the People's Commissariat for Agriculture of Georgian SSR to conduct an annual "Forest Day" event and informative public lectures in different communities of Svaneti. The goal was not only to provide information to the public but also to secure mass involvement in state-led forest exploitation. The "Forest Day" included practical activities such as tree planting, delimitation of forest borders, recruitment of komsomols,[7] and local worker committees to enlarge the process (People's Commissariat for Agriculture, 1929, p. 121). Such organized efforts were typical Soviet agitating events that selectively promoted topics identified by ministries and instilled them in public spaces to secure mass mobilization – a collective necessity for the Soviet project. These efforts coincided with the initiation of the first five-year plan[8], rapid industrialization, and the state's desire to increase productivity rates.

The full mobilization of natural resources and the effective extraction of lumber in the Soviet context meant securing a monopoly on their obtainment. Large-scale territorial sectors for lumber exploitation were delimited in Svaneti, where only state-run enterprises collected

[7] Komsomol was a mass socio-political organization for youth in the USSR. It assisted the communist party in implementing the Marxist-Leninist ways of upbringing and raising class consciousness in the masses. Komsomol is also often referred to as the reserve of the communist party.

[8] Five-year plans, first one being implemented in 1928, were radical departure from Lenin's NEP policy, which aimed at retaining some parts of market economy. With the advent of five-year plans, the Soviet government decided to completely switch to state-planned economy, with central planners devising exact production rates for goods. The production of goods was also collectivized, which meant that farms would be collectively managed by farmers (or the state in some cases), with none of them having sole ownership. Collectivization in Svaneti experienced a lot of difficulties. It, according to Georgian Bolsheviks, sufficiently expanded only in the 1940s (Chark'viani, 1974, p. 64-67).

wood. In light of this, the fact that the local church owned sizeable patches of land and forests in Svaneti contradicted the Soviet rationale. On the one hand, the Soviet Union was an openly atheist system and denounced religion, especially in its institutionalized form. On the other hand, the ineffective and inefficient way priests governed these lands, according to Bolsheviks in Svaneti, hindered the ongoing modernization project. On the 19th of March 1929, the lands of the church were confiscated in the chubikhevi district and allocated to various state institutions (chubikhevi Local Council Session).

The rapid development of state-led logging shook the existing local property systems. The forest manager in the ch'viberi district wrote a letter to the Svaneti uezd executive committee about forest exploitation matters in the lakhami sector. According to him, the first five-year plan targeted 6 ½ million cubic feet of wood for export from the mentioned sector, a goal that was becoming increasingly unattainable. Citizen Grigor Saghliani, a dweller of lakhami village, owned goats that browsed and grazed at the place. The animals fed on growing trees' stems and twigs which, following the manager's words, seriously hampered the multiplication of saplings. The uninterrupted life cycle of the forest was crucial for the Soviet planners who centrally devised their goals according to state needs, overlooking local necessities and the points of friction that might have arisen during plan implementation. As an adjacent example, the devastating effects of a similar state-driven approach have been aptly theorized in the literature on man-made famines in the 1930s Soviet Central Asia (Cameron, 2020, p. 15; Obertreis, 2017, p. 166). Going back to the case, the forest manager demanded that the executive committee ban Svan peasants from using lakhami logging sector to feed their animals (A Letter to Svaneti Uezd Executive Committee, 1929, p. 142).

Following the complaint, the executive committee received a responding letter from citizen Grigor Saghliani. The latter stated that for generations he and his family lived in a gorge that was surrounded by forests from all sides. There were no pasture lands in the vicinity either. In

order to keep the family from starving, he possessed twenty goats that provided dairy products. Saghliani asked the executive committee to disregard the forest manager's complaint and allow him to keep the goats, hence saving his family from undernourishment (Letter to the Chair of Svaneti Uezd Executive Committee, 1929, p. 143). The executive committee, itself a branch of the government, was used as a negotiating platform by Svan dwellers for claims that arose in the conflict with other branches of the government, like the ones accountable for logging in Svaneti. Although the resolution of this particular case is unknown to me, what is at hand is the incongruity between local property systems and the newly imposed state-led regime that aimed at radically harmonizing the extraction rates of natural resources in Svaneti with pre-devised plans. This also meant the relegation of local value systems. The supposedly culturally "backward" order, unable to use its natural resources to its potential and for larger purposes, started to get replaced by a more modern Soviet value frame. It, as Tretiakov desired, would tell waterfalls when to fall, snow at what volumes to come, domesticate the impervious peaks, and appreciate the value of unused forests. Soviet modernist rationale and economic demands identified further incompatibilities.

Assault on Local Customs

The Soviet rationale and the modernization project in Svaneti were preconditioned and shaped by the coming of modernity. Modernity in this sense is defined not only as an epoch characterized by the emergence of nation-states but as a particular episteme and knowledge framework. The latter sprouted from the Enlightenment school of thought and entailed optimistic trust in progress, and reason, as well as directed skepticism, especially but not exclusively, towards institutionalized religion and traditions. In the USSR, religious symbols would often become a principal marker of difference and reason for intervention, disapproval

of veiling in Central Asia serves as one of the examples. The veiling there was seen as an obstacle to creating a citizen-category based on common ideals (Northrop, 2019, p. 22-23). Soviet modernity disembedded traditions and ways of life local to specific places and located them on a universal grid, the existence of which was legitimized by rational configurations and universal truths that hold across space and time. Modern institutions, including the ones of the Soviet Union, sought to replace the traditional ways of being with novel norms and regulations that were based on scientific knowledge (De Waal, 2019, p. 71). Thus, policies that deeply intervened in a given social fabric with the task of transformation were effectively disconnected from the political context and leveled with unquestionable scientific truths, granting them conclusive legitimacy. In a volume about Russian and Soviet modernity, historian David L. Hoffman aptly concludes: "Similarly, when we examine Stalinism, we cannot ignore modern forms of knowledge, modern goals of government, and modern technologies of social intervention…" (2000, p. 246-247, 255). In this light, 1920s Svaneti becomes indicative.

Travelers to the region and Soviet officials alike distinguished a local custom called "dat'ireba", a practice similar to a funeral. After a person's death in Svaneti, during the funeral, relatives and neighbors of the deceased put the coffin in the middle of the space and surround it. The ritual started with a man going forward to start crying and mourning. He was later joined by every surrounding person as the process carried on for minutes. After, they buried the dead at a designated place and collectively came back to the house of the deceased (Aslanishvili, 1926:a, p. 66-68). There, and that is where the problem for the Soviets started, an enormous feast would take place. At the feast, the hosting family, as well as the visitors incurred high costs in the forms of bread, meat, and vodka. The feast lasted the whole day and took up the time that was otherwise used for labor. Additionally, there were other feasts after 40 days and a year from the date of the person's death. The latter would place, according to

Bolshevik observers, the heaviest burden on mountain dwellers. Two to ten bulls were supposed to be slaughtered, liters of vodka drunk, hundreds of loaves of bread baked, and all of these not only for the people living in the vicinity but the inhabitants of other villages too (Shanshiev, 1931, p. 115-118).

The custom did not fare well with the vision that Bolsheviks had for Svaneti. For them, this obsolete custom was yet another marker of the "backwardness" of Svans that had to be eradicated. Not only was it filled with religious elements mixed with superstition, but it deeply conflicted with the notions of economic rationality. Instead of doing labor, people partook in "materially costly rituals", instead of pursuing the goals of five-year plans that aimed at "catching up with the West", people further wasted resources. In response, Soviet intervention in the Svan social fabric was two-faced. On the one hand, the state mobilized propaganda across the region, demanding that members of each community of Svaneti attend public lectures that provided information about the history of humankind from primitive societies to contemporary times, as well as the role "harmful" morals and customs played in degeneration or annihilation of a given society (Civil Assembly of pari Community, 1928).

In addition to painting an apocalyptic picture and disseminating it in public space, they legally introduced penalties. The penalties slightly varied across the region but all of them put ceilings on how much vodka and bread could have been used for funerals. The donations to the family of the deceased (money or otherwise) were limited to close relatives and the people that violated these laws would be fined 100 rubles (Public Meeting of becho Community Citizens, 1928). Various customs such as k'onchkhari, lukhori, sinnokhsna, and aghdgoma were also outlawed (lenkheri Local Council Session Report, 1929). Enforcing these rules on the ground and eliminating certain practices proved to be extremely difficult - evident in the fact that some of the customs in one way or another are still practiced in contemporary Svaneti. Nevertheless, they illustrate the Soviet attempt at the intervention in Svan traditions,

seeking to reorganize it according to premises rooted in rationality, efficiency, economic thinking, and the general "cultural development" linked to "backwardness".

The process shared some similarities to *hujum*, a mass campaign started by the USSR in 1927 in Central Asia against gender inequality. There, the Muslim paranji veil became the symbol of tradition, seclusion, and inequality, hence the subject of Soviet assault. The unveiling was seen as a crucial step towards modernity. However, just as local customs were not completely rooted out in Svaneti, in Central Asia too veiling practices lingered as it became an important marker of national identity and a symbol of resistance against alien force (Northrop, 2016, p. 345-347).

The Soviet project to rapidly industrialize and ultimately create an economic basis for communism required the mastering of natural resources within its borders. Modernization and mechanization were a part of the process of governing rationally and scientifically. Through these means, the extraction of valuable goods from regions like Svaneti would reach its zenith and contribute to the larger asymmetrically interconnected economy of the Soviet Union. To recollect Suny's point, one of the characteristics of an imperial configuration is the establishment of trade routes for resources and goods from the periphery towards the center. By the 1980s, the Transcaucasian republics, including Georgian SSR and its lumber hotspot Svaneti, conducted more than 90% of their trade with other republics and mostly Russia. Only one-tenth of the resources stayed within the region's borders (De Waal, 2019, p. 93). Svaneti's traditions and customs were major obstacles on the path to resource mobilization and their radical alteration was a necessity to minimize inefficiency, demonstrating the fact that the local social fabric was incompatible with the Bolshevik agenda.[9] As a result, property systems based on communal sense and local moral codes were shaken as well.

[9] The inefficiency part in this chapter should be strictly located within Soviet Marxist understanding of economy and its premise that command-type is an optimal way of organizing the system. As it is beyond the scope,

The mobilization of natural resources went hand in hand with the mobilization of human resources, yet another asset unlocked by the Soviet Union and of utmost importance for the system. However, impediments in the process were plentiful. The next chapter explores the Soviet attempts at dealing with medical problems that threatened the productivity of Svan society, therefore putting the plans that were on the table for the region at risk.

interest, and relevance for the thesis, my analysis does not discuss whether the command economy of the USSR came close to macro-economic efficiency at all. However, for those interested, a challenging claim to Soviet beliefs was convincingly proposed by the anthropologist Katherine Verdery in "What was Socialism, and What Comes Next?" (1996). She insightfully described the problem of inefficiency in Soviet economy and identified it as one of the reasons for the system's dissolution.

Chapter II - Goiter and Iodine Deficiency in Svan Highlands

> The unexpected image that unfolded before our eyes as soon as we crossed the Svanetian borders was dire. The numerous illnesses that we found in Svans demanded from us their research, thorough listing, and appropriate help
>
> "Expedition to Svaneti", 1926
>
> I. Aslanishvili

The daily newspaper "komunisti", a periodical heavily supervised by the Georgian Communist Party Central Committee, covered cultural, economic, and political matters from 1921 till the dissolution of the USSR. Party officials and editors used the newspaper as a platform to communicate the deeds and victories of the communist government to the masses, along with occasional vitriolic sections about threats to the state, whether it be anti-Soviet Mensheviks, epidemic diseases of the 1920s, or wealthy kulaks amidst intensified collectivization of the Stalinist era. The issue №117 of "komunisti" which was published on the 24th of May in 1925 dedicated a segment to the third scientific congress of the doctors of Georgia that commenced on the same day. The five-day event was supposed to host dozens of lectures and reports by medical doctors working in different parts of the Georgian SSR. Nikolai Atoev, a Bolshevik official, gave the opening speech that indicated two key aspects of the Soviet system. On the one hand, he emphasized the importance of science and scientific knowledge for the communist party in state-building and, on the other hand, mentioned the physical sacrifices that the proletarian masses had to make under capitalist exploitation in the past (p. 2). Drawing on the latter point, the profiles of the congress and more broadly Soviet health policy were their specific focus on diseases that plagued the working class. Early Soviet Marxist medicine, well exemplified in Atoev's words, established a clear link between

the material conditions characteristic of social classes and their effects on physical health (Field, 1967, p. 37, 159).

On the 27th of May and the fourth day of the congress, doctor Akhvlediani gave a distinguished speech that first problematized goiter and cretinism[10] among the Svan population in the Soviet Union ("Third Congress", 1925:b, p. 3). The presented evidence garnered sufficient support from the attending experts to have rendered the above-mentioned illnesses as a social catastrophe worthy of decisive challenge by a collective Soviet effort. Subsequently, according to the decree issued at the third scientific congress of the doctors of Georgia, the People's Commissariat of Health of the GSSR sent a medical-scientific expedition to Svaneti to research goiter incidence. The expedition members were tasked to stay and conduct their research in the region from July to September in the year 1925 (Aslanishvili, 1926:a, p. 3).

Before proceeding to the historical analysis of the expedition and other events that followed, it is important to describe in breadth the biological and medical effects of goiter, cretinism, and iodine deficiency on the body, as well as reasons for their development in the first place. Mapping out these details will enable us to gain better insight into the nature of Soviet efforts in combatting goiter prevalence among the Svans.

On Goiter

The condition of the goiter is not novel to modernity. It has afflicted humankind for many centuries. Written mentions of goiter can be traced back to ancient Greek and Roman texts,

[10] The term "cretinism" is now regarded as obsolete. Medical professionals nowadays use the name "congenital iodine deficiency syndrome" (CIDS) to describe the same condition. In my work, I have decided to use the term "cretinism" for the following reasons: i) it was the working term of the period of which I am giving a historical account; ii) replacing it with another word would decontextualize my analysis and leave out important linguistic or other types of associations that operated with the usage of the term in the context of Svaneti.

with the architect Vitruvius expressing his hypothesis on the correlation between water and the frequency of the disease in 30 A.D. Although nowadays considered a frightening and disturbing disease, ancient Greeks believed the enlargement of the neck that is goiter to have been aesthetically pleasing and normal for the body (Weart, 1929, p. 359-360). Even earlier than the Greeks, Chinese medical specialists wrote about goiter in the 4th century A.D. There, goiter was combated with available means of the time, which were seaweed called Sargassum and Laminaria. These marine plants contain large quantities of iodine (Fuge, 2007, p. 70).

The deficiency of the iodine element in human organisms is the main cause of goiter. Iodine is an important element that ensures the proper functioning of the human body. It is stored in the thyroid gland, which itself is located in the neck. The thyroid gland as the producer of thyroxine and triiodothyronine is responsible for hormonal balance in the organism. If the intake of iodine at a daily rate is no more than 10 micrograms, the thyroid gland starts to expand to be more efficient and tries to produce necessary hormones with little available means (WHO, 2014, p. 1). The increase in the size of the thyroid gland can often become visible to the naked eye and marks the development of goiter. Iodine deficiency is the most damaging during fetal development and infancy as it might result in cretinism. This condition inhibits mental and general development, often also causing dwarfism. Additionally, if iodine deficiency does not reach a critical level as in the case of cretinism but still remains high, it hinders brain growth in children. The latter case becomes all the more problematic as it is often insidious and does not exhibit any clear physical symptoms (Abebe et al. 2017, p. 2; Fuge, 2007, p. 70; Querido, 1969, p. 88).

The diagnosis of goiter is usually done through palpation. A thyroid gland enlargement is classified as goiter if: “lateral lobes have a volume greater than the terminal phalanges of the thumbs of the person being examined” (WHO, 2014, p. 3). A severe case of goiter is usually simply identified as a large swelling in the neck when it is in a normal position (Ibid.).

With all its adverse effects, iodine deficiency and goiter are present in specific parts of the world, among specific populations, and not in others. Even the earliest historical accounts of iodine deficiency directly or indirectly indicate geochemical aspects of the problem. Iodine on the surface of the earth is mostly transferred from the sea via precipitation. The marine environment, as a major reservoir of iodine, well enriches coastal sectors up to a radius of 100-120 kilometers (Fuge, 2007). Moreover, the capacity of the soil to store the iodine deposited by precipitation also plays an important role. For example, sandy and waterlogged soils tend to be bad at storing iodine, while iron-rich and clay-rich soils are characterized by the ability to well retain the element (Ibid.). Thus, we can correlate iodine deficiency to two categories: the distance from the marine environment and the type of soil.

However, even if we are dealing with a coastal region, the presence of iodine in the soil is not sufficient on its own, indeed it has to make its way to the human body. The main source of iodine intake for humans is dietary, which happens mostly with the consumption of sea salt, plants, and animal meat. Plants themselves receive iodine through their roots from the soil, while animals that are grazing often get the element through soil bits that end up in their mouth along with grass and later in the stomach (Abebe et al. 2017; Fuge, 2007, p. 71).

Settlements that are at high altitudes and surrounded by mountains might face several layering risk factors for iodine deficiency. In combination with distance from the coast, insufficient iodine in the soil, and a scant supply of sea salt, glaciers covered with ice and snow add an extra problem. Glacial activities like erosion, deposition, transportation, and flooding severely affect iodine levels in the soil. Essentially having a sweeping effect, they drain soil and carry the iodine to lower altitudes, mostly towards the sea (WHO, 2014). As a reminder, 5 peaks in Svaneti are above 4000 meters from sea level, Mikheil Kalat'ozishvili named his famous film "Salt for Svanetia" (1930), and locals produced Svan salt, a variant of salt that is standard sea salt mixed with various spices to "increase" its quantity.

In areas with multiple interlocking risk factors, the chances of the development of endemic goiter drastically increase. Etiologically, apart from biological and geochemical factors, others have been pinpointed as well. According to 2017 and 2020 studies, endemic goiter was associated with parents' education level, wealth status, and residence, indicating the social dimension of the problem (Abebe et al., p. 5; Zekarias et al.). Thus, several biomedical, geochemical, and social problems coalesce in the process of goiter development in the human body.

To recall Doctor Akhvlediani's speech at the third scientific congress of the doctors of Georgia, the presented evidence outlined the first traces of a public health problem. Whether it was a mild, moderate, or severe case of endemic goiter was yet to be known, along with the etiology of the condition. For the moment, goiter in a remote, mountainous region of the Georgian SSR was a conundrum. Coupled with the "mysterious" nature of the region itself, a trope that was heavily cultivated in the Russian orientalist imagery about Svaneti in the 18th century (Jersild, 2014; Kanevskij, 1882; Layton, 2015), the non-tangibility of goiter with regard to specialized medical thinking served as a puzzling, yet promising challenge for scientifically-minded Soviet scientists spurred by Lenin's famous words: "the fight for socialism is at the same time the fight for health" (Starks, 2009, p. 3).

Applying Soviet Socialized Medicine in Svaneti

On the 15th of July 1925, an expedition crew of the People's Commissariat of Health of the GSSR was sent to Svaneti to study goiter and it consisted of 8 members.

Figure 5.

Members of the 1925 Svaneti expedition. Sitting from left to right: Nik'o Orlovsk'i (Surgeon), Professor Mikheil Asatiani (Psychiatrist, neuropathologist); Standing: Student K'irile Chek'urishvili, Beso Okrop'iridze (Hematologist), Ioseb Aslanishvili (Surgeon), T'it'e Ghlont'i (Psychiatrist, neuropathologist), Paata Mgaloblishvili (Doctor for skin and venereal disease) (Aslanishvili, 1926:a, p. 14).

The "color palette" of the specializations of the doctors that included psychiatry, neuropathology, and venereal disease, as well as the reason for their assemblage reflected the growing tendencies in Soviet medicine. The creation of a new Soviet man, the cornerstone of the Bolshevik project and simultaneously a tool to achieve true communism, was heavily contingent on the mental and physical health of the population. The motto "healthy mind in a healthy body" was widely shared among state builders of the 1920s USSR, including Lenin (Starks, 2009, p. 25). Psychotherapy, psychology, and psychiatry played an important role in thrusting state-driven mental health improvement on a societal scale. Underpinning this

process was the belief in the radical plasticity of the nature of a man. If the environmental and social factors were correctly modified, the creation of Stakhanovites[11] on a mass scale would be both desirable and inevitable (Etkind, 1997, p. 64-65). The application of Soviet psychiatric practices was mediated and shaped by a Marxist ideology that emphasized the importance of the social environment for any given illness. Venereal and sexually transmitted diseases, on their part, fit neatly in the framework of Soviet medicine as ultimate social maladies that require a relentless offensive for their eradication.

The report on the activities of the People's Commissariat of Health of the GSSR in 1925 serves as a good example to illustrate the Soviet approach. For the year, the institutional body, in accordance with the union-wide policy, had pinpointed the following priorities: improvement of the existing clinical units, expansion of medical care in rural areas and proliferation of new units, advancement of sanitary education, fight against social disease, establishment of institutions for the protection of mothers and children's health, and the improvement of the working conditions of medical specialists (JSK', 1925:a, p.1). In pursuit of this policy, JSK' sent 98 circular[12] textbooks and instructive documents from Tbilisi to various uezds inside GSSR, as well as dispatched supervisory committees. The People's Commissar of Health was also supposed to receive reports every three months from officials scattered across different regions (Ibid.). With the provision of medical services to rural areas and provinces as its explicit priority, Svaneti once again assumed an outstanding position. JSK"s yearly report dedicated a special section to the "backward" region and celebrated the Soviet effort to introduce proper medical service to the periphery, triumphantly commenting

[11] Aleksey Stakhanov (1906-1977) was a miner in the Soviet Union that managed to reach extremely high levels of productivity. According to Bolsheviks, his work was distinguished by utmost rationalization. After his death, Soviet propaganda created a cult of Stakhanovites, a following of exemplary workers that had mastered technology and moved socialist production to a higher stage of development (Young, 2020)

[12] Circulars were important document-based tools for Soviet administration. It was used to disseminate information that came from the center to regions and peripheries. As the name suggests, it circulated throughout republics and gave instructions on all kinds of matters, including rules for maintaining archives, shaping of economic, social, and other kinds of policies on a local level. Sent from the center, they were mostly received by the executive committee chairperson of a given region, who was also responsible for acting on them.

on one hospital and four smaller medical units thinly dispersed across the territory (JSK', 1925:b, p. 84). Needless to say, the reality on the ground was different from the official documents tinged with red color. JSK' suffered from a severe lack of funds, resulting in the abolition of health departments on local levels and a reduction in worker numbers. The actions of supervisory committees sent to provinces were anything but comprehensive, and the trimonthly correspondence with public health officials in the peripheries was not always on schedule. Despite all the hardships, financial and institutional backing for the chief medical activity of the year was found and the expedition was sent to Svaneti. Assembled specialists led by Doctor Mikheil Asatiani were ready to apply Soviet socialized medicine (Field, 1967) to the harsh realities of the mountainous region.

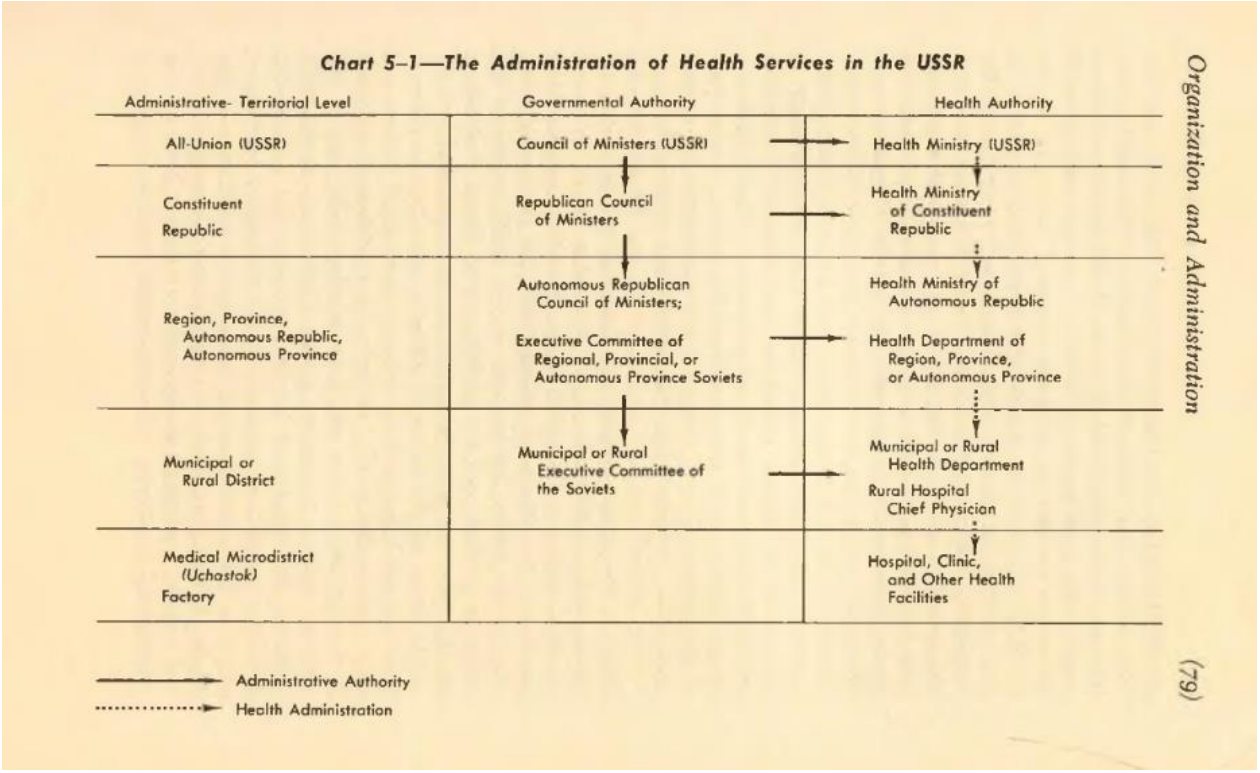

Figure 6. The Administration of Health Services in the USSR (Field, 1967, p. 79).[13]

[13] Field provides a structure for health services administration relevant to 1960s. As can be read, he outlines ministries, which is a term that came into use in the USSR in the 1940s. However, in their structure and purpose, they are mostly identical to what I call People's Commissariats, which was the label in use in the 1920s and 1930s.

The expedition members commenced their research in Lower Svaneti, which consisted of 36 villages distributed in 3 larger communities (lent'ekhi, choluri, lashkheti). The compilation of tables of prevalence and etiology of goiter in Svaneti, which was the task, required a thorough listing and scanning of each villager. The Herculean duty that assumed a scale previously unseen for the region quickly confirmed the expectations. Village sht'vili of Lower Svaneti with 79 inhabitants gave a 72,1% goiter rate. The settlement of t'vibi at the altitude of 930 meters and consisting of 97 settlers turned out to be 70,1% goitrous. Surprisingly, a fluctuation of statistics was detected in the village muts'di at 1150 meters from the sea level. One part of the village drank water that dribbled from the soil, while the other part consumed their water from a hill spring.

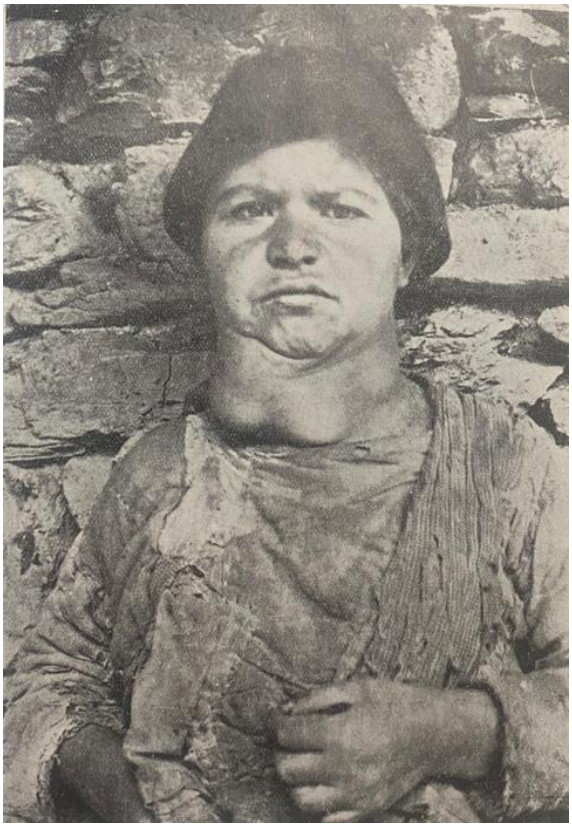

Figure 7. A goitrous woman from choluri (Aslanishvili, 1926:b, p. 25).

The goiter rates in the two parts of the village were 66.6 and 15.9 percent respectively (Aslanishvili, 1926:b, p. 18, 20-21). The data on 13 villages of the choluri community was as follows:

Village	Male	Female	Total	Goitrous (M)	Goitrous (F)	Total Goiter %
sht'vili	40	30	79	26	31	72.1
ghvadura	20	17	37	13	11	64.8
t'vibe	55	42	97	29	39	70.1
muts'di	97	92	189	17	39	29.6
buleshi	31	43	74	16	27	58.1
saqdari	59	61	120	15	38	44.2
ch'velieri	138	113	251	73	87	44.2
ch'velpi	48	42	90	18	21	43.3
levshieri	77	72	149	29	33	41.6
mami	66	61	127	25	25	39.3
zagalodi	25	24	49	12	15	55.1
tek'ali	13	16	29	2	1	10.3
uk'leshi	10	12	22	3	3	27.2
Total: 13	679	634	1313	278	370	49.4

(Aslanishvili, 1926:b, p. 26)

According to collected information, 49.4% of the Lower Svaneti population was goitrous. Having researched Lower Svaneti, the expedition members continued to gather their statistics in Upper Svaneti, which was further divided into two parts: Feudal Svaneti (sadadeshkeliano) and Free Svaneti. In the latter part, the total goiter percentage in the population (6380) was 21.4%, while the goiter incidence in the former was 23.4% among the observed 3347 people (Ibid. p. 46).

Figure 8. A goitrous person from mulakhi (Aslanishvili, 1926:b, p. 39).

The hypothesis of Surgeon Ioseb Aslanishvili (1891-1955), who would later dedicate most of his professional life to studying and combating iodine deficiency in Svaneti, as well as shaping almost every initiative of the JSK' as an institution with regard to public health in the region, stated that the prevalence of goiter was correlated with the type of water. Upon initial observation, it seemed that mineral waters that passed through ores and rocky channels were less harmful to health as opposed to waters from narrow, muddy, and grassy gorges that were often used for drinking by the Svans (1926:b). Additionally, Svans' poor health state was explained by substandard living conditions – the absence of windows for houses, eight long wintery months of shared underground rooms with domestic animals, and lack of air circulation. These created an environment that germinated tuberculosis with which 25% of the population was sick. Paradoxically for the researchers, there were no venereal diseases

detected (1926:a, p. 42). The latter, according to Soviet logic of socialized medicine, should have decimated the Svans:

> As we headed towards Svaneti, we were sure that venereal diseases and syphilis would be very common there. Such was the common knowledge in Georgian medical circles… But we were disappointed, and it turned out that people in Svaneti are healthy in this regard (Aslanishvili, 1926:a, p. 43).

This was both a relief and an obstacle. On the one hand, there would be one less disease to cure and mobilize resources for, but on the other hand, it meant that another hole was poked in Soviet medicine, which "prescribed" all kinds of social diseases to the exploited, "backward", or lower class. Notwithstanding, the belief in science-based medicine among the doctors was abounding:

> Science will provide people with light, which is gravely necessary for our people, especially as today's world demands it so insistently. The workers of science should strive towards this goal, study the troubles, worries, and the nature of the working-class people and get closer to them (Aslanishvili, 1926:a, p. 118).

Providing light, in this context, meant social and even biological transformation of people through science to create a new Soviet man (Josephson, 2005, p. 13, 70). Moreover, Aslanishvili's quote which was also intended for wider audiences served to legitimize their newly started campaign in the light of wider health policy that focused on the conditions of the proletariat, cutting across narrow professional interest supposedly devoid of practical use that was increasingly becoming demonized in the USSR as a bourgeois undertaking.

Soviet Modernism in Numbers, Medicalized Subjectivities

The expedition research and compilation of statistics on the goitrous population ran parallel to recalibrations in the logic of the local medical system in Svaneti. A circular sent from the administrative office of JSK' of the Georgian SSR to health inspector[14] of Svaneti G. Nizharadze, gave an order to start enumerating medical personnel in the region. Doctors, midwives, pharmacists, dentists, nurses, assistant managers, and office workers were to be recorded in a specific form sent from the center (Circulars from the Center, 1925). Setting the tone for further developments in the region, the language of numbers became the medium of communication between medical scientists, as well as a tool for negotiating the acquisition of resources from the JSK'. Relying on the hypothesis that argued goiter's etiology in drinking water, in the next years Doctor Ioseb Aslanishvili set out to study the parameters of springs and rivers in Svaneti, which included measuring their temperature, CO2, radioactivity, the ratio of elements like Potassium, Iodine, and others (Aslanishvili, 1935; Abashidze, 1935). The fundamental study of goiter, iodine deficiency, and related environmental and social issues in Svaneti continued for some 30 years, with Aslanishvili spearheading many of the measures taken in this regard. The relevance, treatment, and administration of goiter differently reflected the economic (five-year plans) and political developments (WW2) in the USSR, but the language of numbers and science employed in 1925 with the dispatch of the expedition in pursuit of socialized medicine lingered. The number of goiters in Svaneti by the 1940s was cut in half with the employment of prophylactic efforts. The latter being a textbook Soviet approach – prophylaxis through the modification of environmental factors (Starks, 2009, p. 47). The centrality of this point, especially in the Svan context, will be further investigated soon.

[14] A specialist that supervised all matters connected to medicine in Svaneti. From administrative matters to treatment of patients, inspectors were tasked to oversee them.

The monumentality of the Soviet project showed itself in its ruthless demand for the participation of every citizen in the ongoing socialist experiment (Hirsch, 2010, p. 5). To this end, public health became critically important as a precondition to access the true potential of the population and its productivity. Similar to mineral, agrarian, or other types of resources, the health of the population was rendered as a quintessential Soviet resource. To illustrate this point, Leningrad (currently known as St. Petersburg) in the years 1928-1929 lost a quarter of its annual production for reasons related to the ill health of the population - an unacceptable fact (Field, 1967, p. 7, 66). In the same vein, goiter, iodine deficiency, and the mental/physical impairments that come with them harrowingly threatened the Georgian SSR with depletion of human resources and hence had to be eradicated. Before I made an emphasis on the motto "healthy mind in a healthy body", which individualizes health, but adjacent to this and so characteristic to the USSR operated the modernist logic of numbers and populations – things much more important for the state apparatus and evident in the case of Svaneti.

In this context, Soviet "mass politics", and by that, I mean the aspiration to govern society in the most rational and productive way, were not extraordinary per se. Rather, it was part of the pan-European trend of modernity. However, the placement of the USSR in a European political context must not push us to overlook the distinguished features of the Soviet system. No state, in the history of humankind, can be compared to the gargantuan effort that Bolsheviks put into social engineering in the name of Marxism-Leninism (Hoffmann, 2000, p. 255-256). This line of Soviet modernization has been probed from different perspectives.

Historian Francine Hirsch argues that the "cultural technologies of rule" (census-making, enumeration, mapping, surveying), in the Soviet case, served to eliminate the differences between peoples, nations, and the state itself, unlike other European colonial empires that tended to pick and sequester parts of colonized populations to produce difference and simplify governance (2010, p. 13). It is indeed true that the envisioned end goal was the creation of

Soviet man that transcended national or class identities, however, the real effects of Soviet policies have also been theorized otherwise (Martin, 2000), especially when it comes to the nationality question that Hirsch focuses on. The offshoot of Soviet nationalities policy that aimed to usher the population through different civilizational stages, from tribes to nations, and finally to communist society without national markers, was the creation of primordial nationalism that cemented imagined national cultures, thus having the opposite effect than intended (Ibid. p. 172-173).

Similarly, I argue that the medical expeditions, enumeration, and tabulation, during the research of goiter in Svaneti that planned to eradicate the disease, therefore the difference of the selected population in relation to the rest, had an opposite effect in the first three decades of the USSR's existence. Simultaneous to this process was the creation of medicalized subjectivity that fed on difference. The Svan, translated into numbers, statistics, and percentages, found a new identity that defined it as a subject in the wider Soviet Union. Hence, these medical practices, instead of being indifferent data-gathering tools, contributed to the creation of a new category-identity in Svaneti (Appadurai, 2013 p. 245). A category that was corroborated by numbers and scientific data. The medical gaze of the state, fixed on Svaneti, seeped into the subject, caused it to reorganize, function in a new way, and with a novel identity (Foucault, 2003, p. 109-110). When there was a lack of medical resources in the becho community's micro-district etseri in 1928, villagers demanded from the Upper-Svaneti executive committee the relocation of a medical point from ushkvanari to dolasvipi, a closer village. etseri denizens declared that they were neither conscious nor educated enough to take care of themselves in a proper way, therefore necessitating the proximity of a doctor (etseri local council session, 1928). Internalizing the imposed "backwardness" label that in this case ran along medical lines, inhabitants used their newfound subjectivity as a tool to negotiate resources from the state.

Svan's medicalized subjectivity can be further illustrated. Frequent were, among passages in newspapers or other texts, mentions of Svaneti as the land of goiter. Mikel P′at′aridze, one of the authors in the newspaper "salit′erat′uro gazeti" [literary newspaper], named his article on Svaneti "Blood, Goiter, Pipeline" and described the efforts of the contemporary socialist world in combating goiter which also happened to be the main calamity of the region (1934, p. 5). Similarly, the proximity of the biological and the Svan identity was outlined in an unreleased film by "Salt of Svanetia's" director, Kalat'ozishvili. The movie was titled "The Blind Girl" and connected blindness with Svan cultural backwardness. The remedy for the girl and simultaneously a proxy for modernity were medical practices (Sarkisova, 2021, p. 157-158).

The scientific knowledge that produced a novel identity for Svans also had other collateral effects. To recall Luehrmann's instructions, the observation of documentation as a form of action will tell us more about the process in question. What role did Aslanishvili and other authors' documents regarding goiter in Svaneti play in making particular events happen (2015, p. 42)? At the initial stage, it helped with the problematization of the disease, putting it, as an obstacle, at the heart of the Soviet mobilizational project (of natural resources and human population). After the successful expedition of 1925, the publications that followed helped to grow the mandate of particular scientists, including Doctor Ioseb Aslanishvili. JSK', upon receiving the preliminary reports from expedition members, deemed it necessary to expand work in the same direction. Aslanishvili was tasked with researching Svaneti's neighboring Abkhazeti region for goiter, iodine deficiency, and cretinism (Aslanishvili, 1926:c, 1933). Not only did it set the tone for further research, it also helped to attract resources from the center. The People's Commissariat of Health increased the budget for medical practices, amounting to 63,000 rubles, compared to just 780 in the last years of the Czarist empire (Correspondence with the Center, 1927). Additionally, it prestigiously put

Georgian SSR on the union-wide map of medical specialists. The first all-Soviet conference about the practices of fighting goiter took place in Kharkiv, Ukraine. There, after the presentation of Aslanishvili's comprehensive works, the conference designated the Georgian SSR as a leading nation in its rationalization and range of preventive work against goiter, which provided further impetus to continue exemplary work (K'ogan-iasni, 1939, p. 69-70).

For Soviet socialized medicine that had prophylaxis as its modus operandi, goiter and iodine deficiency were the ideal images of a villain. Marxist teaching found the etiology of any disease in working and environmental conditions. For Aslanishvili and other experts interested in Svaneti, it was becoming increasingly clear that environmental factors, particularly the drinking water were the root cause of goiter in Svaneti. Was one to improve these factors by building pipelines and making selected, healthy sources of water accessible to the inhabitants of every village, the problem would start to diminish. In this sense, Doctor Aslanishvili and his colleagues were on a triumphant path to provide point source evidence for the effectiveness of Soviet scientific medicine.

Thus, the discussion in the chapter served to analyze public health administration and the process of goiter treatment in Svaneti in relation to the larger Soviet structure that shaped the events. Soviet modernization, which aimed at creating a classless society, required the full mobilization of natural and human resources within its borders. Iodine deficiency in Svaneti, rendered as an obstacle and threat to the state, had to be eradicated through the application of Soviet socialized medicine. Underpinning the latter was the modernist logic of numbers, enumeration, tabulation, rationality, and the language of science. Utilization of Soviet socialized medicine created a medicalized subjectivity in Svaneti that circumscribed the region's position with respect to the state, as well as defined how, why, and in what quantities material resources would be allocated for the place. In turn, the analysis of monographs issued in the 1920s showed that the Svan goiter started to fit well into the Soviet-Marxist

understanding of medicine and naturally the ways of disease management it had prescribed. Hence, contributed to the febrile atmosphere of the early USSR imbued with admiration towards Soviet science, state, and medicine all at once.

The above discussion is only a part of the genealogy of goiter in Svaneti, which requires placement in time and further analysis in relation to the other, already existing parts. These efforts would serve as an entry point to make an argument about structural, epistemic, and ideological (dis)continuities between the Russian empire and the USSR. It also contributes to the conceptualization of the latter as an imperial formation.

Chapter III – One Disease, Two Worlds: Goiter in a Comparative Frame

The endemicity of goiter in Svaneti that the Soviet medical scientists extensively discussed indicates that the issue had been present in the region well before the formation of the Soviet Union. One of the first written mentions of the condition can indeed be found in nineteenth-century texts by Russian travelers, natural scientists like botanists and biologists, as well as imperial administrators. Their visits for scientific purposes or otherwise to Svaneti, an adjacent region to the North Caucasus, are not by accident and firmly rooted in the political context of the imperial growth of the time. Hence, the texts that discuss goiter in Svaneti should be analyzed in the same light.

The nineteenth-century expansion of the Russian empire towards the Caucasus was a bloody and lengthy process conditioned by inaccessible terrain and the fierce resistance of the locals to imposed imperial rule. In the Muslim North Caucasus, Imam Shamil (1797-1871) managed to consolidate the peoples of Chechnya, Dagestan, and Circassia into a caliphate, a much smaller yet formidable adversary to the Russian empire. Shamil and his allied Murids[15] led the Muslim forces in several battles against the Russians, inflicting heavy losses. In the 1830s, most Russian campaigns to counter the imamate failed. In 1845 too, a 10,000-strong imperial force was crushed in the forests of Chechnya, forcing the military apparatus to seriously reconsider their strategy towards the Caucasus. Imam Shamil finally succumbed to the power of the Tsar in the year 1859 (Gammer, 2013, p. 124-125).

As I discussed in the first chapter, Svaneti was similarly elusive for imperial administrators and got incorporated into the empire some fifty years after the rest of Georgia. History of resistance to the imperial rule, geographic remoteness, as well as linguistic and ethnic

[15] A person devoted to spiritual enlightenment in Sufi tradition.

diversity of the region[16] prompted imperial imagination to form visions and knowledges about the peoples of the Caucasus that would (re)form their identity and identify a position in the wider structure of the empire (Jersild, 2014, p. 5). The ethnographers, botanists, biologists, geographers, and others that were sent to the region sought to study the "problem subject", often attempting to unearth forgotten histories, races, cultures and legitimize their presence as representatives of the empire who desired to save the Caucasus from its current, degenerated form and bring back the pristine past (Ibid. p. 6). Underlying the process of knowledge production was a distinction between the "self" (empire) and the "other" (peoples of the Caucasus). This distinction in popular imagination had already been cultivated in famous authors like Tolstoy, Pushkin, and Bestuzhev of the Russian literary tradition (Layton, 2015). The "self" in this context was associated with civilization, wisdom, progress, and enlightenment, while the "other" adopted the categories of "backwardness", primitiveness, and "savagery". With the imperial production of difference, two distinct groups were placed on a hierarchical ladder of civilization. The benevolent imperial project was supposed to spread progress to "backward" Caucasian recipients. This strand of analysis advanced in Russian studies is indebted to Edward Said's seminal work "Orientalism" (2003) which first formulated the concept of orientalism based on recurring tropes, structures, parlance, and stereotypes of the Orient found in the works of British and French orientalists of the imperial period. According to the author, this epistemic domain charged with symbolic meanings auspiciously served as a tool for imperial domination.

Close reading of archival sources from the times of the Russian empire can illustrate strands of Russian orientalism in Svaneti which are inextricably linked to the problem of goiter in the

[16] Although North Caucasus and Svaneti are not technically considered to be part of the same region as the latter is located at the Southern foot of the Caucasus Mountain Range, I believe that they are part of the same imaginative space in the empire, attracting similar visions from imperial administrators. Hence, in the usage of the term region, I mean both the North Caucasus and Svaneti.

population.[17] One of the of recurring tropes that stand out in Russian sources of the 19th century on Svaneti concerns the disease. Even more notably, goiter became the defining characteristic of the Svan people and was utilized as a discursive tool to explain the backwardness of the group. Geobotanist, florist, and researcher of the Caucasus Ivan Akinfiev travels to Svaneti with five students to study the geo-botany of the region, as well as the phenotype of the local mountain dwellers. He states:

> When we talk about the appearance and physical aspects of Svan men and women, we cannot ignore the ugliness that is often found here, which is goiter. The reason for the development of goiter among Svans, if we believe the common opinion in the Caucasus, is the water there. It is difficult to agree with this opinion, because the presence of goiter is often accompanied by cretinism, and cretins are known to be found in the mountainous regions of many countries, such as the Alps, etc. It is clear that not only enguri and tskhenists'qali waters are the reason for the spread of goiter. Added to this is the brutal nature, the difficulties associated with it, as well as the economic and household features of society. This issue is controversial and interesting at the same time. It has been little researched from an anthropological point of view (Akinfiev, 1893, p. 20).

According to his observations, goiter is the reason why Svans do not stand out with their intelligence. The author continues to illustrate his position by mentioning a doctor named G. Ol'derogge who was supposed to study goiter in Svaneti but left abruptly, instead of staying for months, in the second week of his research: "As G. Ol'derogge testifies, cretinism is currently more common among the younger generation. This means that the degeneration of the Svan tribe is rapidly advancing" (Ibid. p. 21).

Russian ethnographer A. Stojanov travels to Svaneti to visit the Switzerland of the empire, as well as study the origins of the Svan language, mythos, folktales, songs, and generally the social organization of the locals. At the end of his work, he makes a definitive conclusion about the people and the role of the Russian empire in relation to its subject:

> In my opinion, we should either stop caring about the enlightenment of Svans altogether or really enlighten them. Many people say: why should we waste time on several thousand

[17] The information on Russian orientalism in Svaneti draws on my past research conducted for a BA thesis titled "Russian Imperial Orientalism in Svaneti" (Gulbani, 2022).

pagan savages, most of whom are half-cretins? Let them suffer complete degeneracy in their locked valleys (Stojanov, 1876).

The incidence of goiter in Svaneti which was mostly based on anecdotal evidence in the times of the Russian empire was discursively utilized to affirm the cultural superiority of the latter. Biological conditions – goiter and cretinism were linked to mental deficiency and marked the Svan population as a "backward" entity on a path to degeneration. This path heralded a bleak future for the region had the empire not intervened. The necessity to intervene for salvation thus legitimized imperial expansion and presence. Underlying this process was the hierarchical vision of civilizations entangled with the Enlightenment's idea of progress (as understood and applied in an imperial context) that put different peoples at different points on the ladder of civilization. Although the Russian empire entered its Southern frontier with the idea of bringing the torch of progress to its future subjects, the imperial project in some cases, and especially when it came to the Svans, created and cemented difference.

The orientalist discourse on goiter that served as a cultural trope essentialized a particular biological state of Svans to make inferences about their cultural development. I use the term essentialize here because the imperial discourse was effectively stuck for decades at the stage of decision-making on whether to really transform the Svans - well exemplified in the quote above by Stojanov. Hence, the asymmetry between the two entities, apprehended by goiter, was there to stay, no matter at what chronological point in the empire's existence we pause and start to investigate the case. Additionally, In Stojanov's dithering two important points are revealed: a) the imperial system of belief never really allowed for the complete transformation of Svans. Otherwise, the imperial project would lose the legitimacy necessary for its own expansion, or at least weaken it significantly[18]; b) the second point is simple and more

[18] Here, I am not arguing that homogenization might not be a viable option for a given empire to bolster its governance. There are cases for it in the Russian empire too. However, I do believe that retaining certain types of difference is necessary for empires.

important - there just were not enough resources, human, material, or knowledge-wise, to really study the problem of goiter in Svaneti and make a meaningful change[19]. A quote from D. Orbeli, a doctor from Tbilisi who attempted in 1904 to study goiter in Svaneti dovetails with the second point: "I am entirely sure that a significantly high number of Svan population has a problem of goiter. However, for accurate research, we had to study every single member of society which is completely impossible in today's age" (Aslanishvili, 1946, p. 7). The genealogical account of goiter in Svaneti provides the basis for a comparative approach that involves the Russian empire and its successor state.

Goiter and the Regimes of Truth: From Imperial Orientalism to Soviet Modernist Utopia

In a historical analysis of the "biological" in peripheral Svaneti, one can read, with due caution, elements of structural and ideological differences between the two systems that are the Russian empire and the Soviet Union. To discuss these differences, I first propose the premise that goiter in Svaneti signifies different things, attracts dissimilar attitudes from outsiders, and alters the subjectivity of the people in a given political context, thus traveling through divergent "regimes of truth".

The concept was first proposed by the 20th-century French philosopher Michel Foucault and is closely linked to his other notions of power and knowledge. In accord with the author, different forces that exist within a social system always exist in relation to each other and form power relations. Power, in this context, does not only repress and define limitations but also seduces, instigates, and makes some things more probable than others. Power, in its [modern] capillary form, is not necessarily possessed but practiced as it permeates relational

[19] One of the closest things to a medical study of goiter in Svaneti in the time of the empire was I. Pantiukhov's data on goiter incidence in military recruits that came from Svaneti. Based on them, Pantiukhov anticipated no more than 15.5% goiter rate in Upper Svaneti and 56% in the lower part (Aslanishvili, 1946, p. 5).

networks. Lecturers exercise power over their students and so do institutions like the army or carceral institutions over a given population (Gore, 2013, p. 52). Knowledge too, instead of existing in a vacuum, is entangled with the power relations that constitute it and vice versa. The interconnectedness of the two lies in the implication of power relations in the constitution of the field of knowledge and the presupposition of knowledge in power dynamics. In studying the administration of knowledge, as that knowledge undergirds existing relations of power, the investigator is led to forms of governmentality that are identified in its territoriality or field (Ibid. p. 54).

In the same vein, truth, for Foucault, exists within the relational network and the domains of power. This regime of truth, which can also be described as the politics of truth in a particular society, sanctions certain types of discourses as true, and not others. The mechanisms, techniques, and processes that are necessary to arrive at truth and differentiate it from falsehood are part of the same regime of truth. As knowledge and truth exist in their relationality, the status of an entity, whether it be an institution or a person, becomes yet another source of legitimacy and a source of truth in the regime (Foucault, 1980, p. 131). The regulations according to which truth is separated from untruth also bind power effects to it. These effects can have deep political and economic implications. Thus, truth is not merely a fact of the matter but: "a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements" and is "linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to the effects of power which it induces, and which extend it. A "regime" of truth" (Ibid. p. 132-133).

To recall, the goiter in Svaneti in the nineteenth century when it was part of the Russian empire was an "ugliness" that signified the degeneration of the population – all these a set of relations embedded in imperial regime of truth. Goiter placed, via its link with mental deficiency, the group at a lower level of cultural sophistication and explained their

"backwardness" as well. Orientalist discourse of the empire essentialized the "degenerated" biological state of the Svans and used it to reaffirm its own superior status. The Russian imperial administrator who was the person to finally subjugate Free Svaneti, Ivan Bartolomej (1813-1870), wrote during his journey to the region: "I was shaken to the core, the glory of the great Russian empire was acknowledged even by the poor savages that lived among inaccessible peaks" (1855, p. 40). The political implications that were conditioned by asymmetric power relations went further. In the imperial discourse, Svans were rendered mute even on the matters that were connected to their own representation, including the etiology of goiter. The Russian travelers, along with disregarding the common local knowledge on the causes of endemic goiter, frequently commented on the inability of Svans to cogitate fruitfully: "With incomparable naivety, they admit their ignorance and humiliate themselves… These simple savages in outward appearance are not at all clever, and this is characteristic of people at the first stages of development" (Stojanov, 1876). The "truths" that operated within the imperial context significantly shaped the reality on the ground. However, with the dissolution of the Russian empire, orientalism as a concept loses its analytical relevance. The regime of truth starts to recalibrate.

The revolutionary Bolsheviks were, at least in their outward appearance, adamant in their anti-imperial stance and sought to transform the political system to its core. However, in the process, they still retained some of the old traditions and thinking. As the Bolsheviks were Marxist, subscribing to the teleological and linear understanding of the historical timeline of social development, they too, identified "backwardness" in peoples and tried to combat it. The difference was that the "backwardness" in the Soviet context was explained by material conditions and not biological givens.[20] With this argument, I stand with Francine Hirsch in her

[20] Biological explanations to health or other problems would get increasingly marginalized as the USSR became progressively antagonistic towards the Nazis in the 1930s, culminating in Lamarckian Lysenkoism during WW2 and after (Bardziński, 2013).

assertion that Soviet "state-sponsored evolutionism" problematized sociohistorical circumstances instead of innate racial and biological traits (2010, p. 9, 16). Goiter prevalence in Svaneti and its implications for work productivity was indeed a problem on the path to Soviet mobilization of human resources, but, at the same time, instead of a discursive tool for the essentialization of certain attributes, it became a modifiable aspect of the Svan population and a reason for action. Professor A. Machavariani in the foreword of his apprentice I. Aslanishvili's first monograph on goiter in Svaneti writes: "…and if this is so we can reject the idea of primary degeneration. Goiter in Svaneti can be considered as a primary disease of the thyroid gland. Thus, we can fight it with prophylactic efforts…" (Aslanishvili, 1926:b, p. 10).

The Soviet specialists gave substance using medical science and data to what was mostly a cultural trope before. The disease in the region existed in a different regime of truth that was rooted in modernism-inspired belief in science. The operative statement "the goiter incidence in Svaneti is X, therefore necessitates Y type of medical intervention in the population" could have been made in the USSR and not the Russian empire. The political and economic implications of the statement would vastly differ as well. The Soviet Union's pursuit of the eradication of difference and the necessity to create a new Soviet man would facilitate the allocation of increased funds towards the region (partially because it simply had more resources than the empire), the assemblage of expeditions to reproduce, with their achieved results, the truth that science-based medicine could transform anything. Translation of reality into numbers and tables became, *inter alia,* the mechanism for arriving at truth.

The utilization of statistics as a tool for governance in Svaneti's administrative bodies, as well as in the provision of medical services was introduced in the Soviet Union and it indicates desired comprehensiveness in policy and scale. However, the matter requires further historical qualification on a systemic and not only regional scale. Enumeration and statistics were not

exclusive to the USSR but were used, to some extent, in the Russian empire for statecraft too (Hoffmann, 2000, p. 252-253). The sociologist Martine Mespoulet (2001) gives an account of the work of the statisticians who collected data for the empire from the 1860s onwards and carves out the role of statistics in the way systems assessed themselves. The work of these professionals gained relevance with the zemstvo reform in 1864, which aimed at boosting local governance by introducing local elective bodies that were tasked with overseeing economic, social, and political matters on a district scale. The medical, tax-related, educational, and other types of data that started to get collected after the Zemstvo reform by the experts greatly contributed to the proper functionality of Zemstvo executive boards (Bernstein, 1990; Hutchinson, 1990; Porter & Lerner, 2017, p. 38). Nonetheless, the Zemstvo reform with its internal contradictions, including a high number of liberal constitutionalists trying to subvert the central Czarist government through local governments (Emmons, 1982, p. 221-227), was very unevenly implemented and covered mostly the European part of the empire. The policy did not extend to the Caucasus, as it was deemed more politically turbulent and less integrated than the heartlands of the system. Giving even a limited autonomy to the region might have created a "security" concern. Thus, the Soviet turn towards statistics remains of qualitative importance for the Caucasus, Georgia, and naturally Svaneti.

As discussed in the second chapter, the offshoot of Soviet efforts at administering goiter in the region, hence sculpting a new and healthy Soviet man out of the Svan population, ended up deepening the difference between the "backward" Svans and the rest. The complexity of the context in Svaneti therefore promoted governance based on difference and the perpetuation of said difference through the creation of medicalized subjectivity, whether it be as a result of the problem of goiter itself or the interests of the doctors to continue their work. This is akin to the unintended consequences of Soviet nationality policy as a producer of primordial

nationalism within its borders. The incongruities and tensions of an "imperial situation", as Gerasimov and his colleagues encourage us to unpack by analyzing languages of self-description, reveals the non-tenability of a single noncontroversial narrative or category that we can confidently ascribe (2009, p. 24). When Svans negotiated medical resources with the system based on their "backwardness" label, they faced the imperial discordance of the "homogenizing" state par excellence. The imperial formation of the Soviet Union should be captured in its oppressive complexity by revitalizing the lost voices of regions, peoples, individuals, and ideas buried deep under the heaps of the "documenting state's" (non)material legacy.

Conclusion

The thesis set off with the task of analyzing the transformations that took place in the remote and peripheral Svaneti of the 1920s and the 1930s, a process significantly shaped by the image of the region formed as a result of the USSR's diverse administrative, scientific, and medical research-related efforts that buttressed its governance. The study of the state-led modernization of Svaneti allowed me to illustrate the ramifications of the interventionist vision of the Bolsheviks. The heterogeneity of the imperial experience under the USSR was distinctively revealed in the case. Svaneti's perceived "backwardness" that was multi-dimensional - physical, material, and cultural, were identified as obstacles on the path to human and natural resource mobilization. Hence, it prompted unique state approaches, researching of which led me to novel findings about the institutions of the GSSR like JSK' and the history of Georgia's remote mountainous region, Svaneti. The adopted methodology enabled me to juxtapose the policies of modernization with first-hand experiences of Svans where possible.

The analysis, with its spatial fix that provides a novel history of Svaneti, cuts across several axes of modernization in its Soviet variant. Although the USSR's tools of governance and rationale was placed in the paradigm of pan-European modernity, the Svan case further illustrated the unprecedented depth of social and political engineering employed by the system. The reconfigurations that took place in Svaneti that included reshuffling local value systems, uprooting centuries-old customs, and treating endemic diseases can be thought of integral parts of the process of modernization. The latter, hereby, was a process of studying reality, translating it into numbers and a set of statements intelligible within the truth regime. With these, it tried to mold a reality on the ground that would "speak" in the same "language" as the person that deciphered it, whether the latter person was a medical doctor, administrative official, or someone else. Hence, chapters probe modernization from different perspectives.

The first chapter “When the Red Machine Meets the Stone: Svaneti in The Soviet Union” discussed Svaneti in the GSSR (and according to the centralized and interconnected nature of the system, the USSR as well) as an expected exporter of lumber and minerals. In the discussion, the Soviet interest in natural resource mobilization necessary for the union-wide socialist project gained importance. The cultural “backwardness” of Svans that conflicted with Soviet economic rationale prompted radical interventions in the social fabric in the form of local custom and tradition prohibition via punishing fines. The discussion identified incongruity between the local value system and the Soviet value frame that related to social norms and the natural environment in a radically different way.

Proceeding with the analysis of modernization in Svaneti, the second chapter titled “Goiter and Iodine Deficiency in Svan Highlands” follows the process of public health management in the region. The identification of the disease of goiter as a major public health problem prompted the creation of professional expedition teams and the process of goiter management that lasted for decades. The discussion indicated that the goiter treatment in the region created a medicalized subjectivity that defined the position of Svans in connection with the state. Especially as it related to the reconfigured allocation of resources towards the region for medical purposes. The newfound subjectivity further contributed to the “backwardness” label that was internalized by the locals to make political and economic claims. The analysis put the goiter treatment process in Svaneti in the wider context of Soviet socialized medicine, which provided the necessary tools to medical experts to research and combat the disease.

The third and final chapter, “One Disease, Two Worlds: Goiter in a Comparative Frame” drew on the Foucaldian concept of “regimes of truth” and literature on Russian orientalism to provide the genealogy of goiter in Svaneti. The examination of historical sources showed that Svan goiter in the Russian empire was discursively utilized to affirm the superiority of the latter. It effectively placed Svans on a hierarchical ladder of civilization that explained their

"degeneration" and "backwardness", thus underlining the "imperial benevolence" during the expansion in the 19th century towards Svaneti. The analysis contrasted this with the significance of goiter in the USSR as one of the markers of "backwardness" but simultaneously a modifiable aspect of human biology and a reason for action. The genealogical account of goiter in Svaneti traced (dis)continuities between the Russian empire and the USSR, ultimately contributing to the scholarly debate that conceptualizes the Soviet Union as an imperial formation.

I wished to place my findings in the scholarly debate that queries the imperial nature of the USSR, but the contribution with the Svan case is only a small brick in the skyscraper that is the study of the Soviet system. Although the thesis endorsed a particular position, it by no means is conclusive of the debate. Rather, I hope it acts as an encouragement for colleagues to excavate hidden historical voices that can change epistemic and scholarly landscapes. Additionally, the engagement with the imperial nature of the USSR, as this thesis did, is key to framing scholarly inquiries in the field when it comes to utilizing (or not) post-colonial theory for Soviet history or in post-Soviet space (Koplatadze, 2019), especially given previous attempts at thinking between the posts (Chari & Verdery, 2008) and enriching theory's travelogue (Hladík, 2012).

The possibility for further research is plentiful. One can study the goiter treatment process in Svaneti until the 1950s and the way it changed according to different political developments in the state. Comparing it to the cases of goiter management in other republics becomes relevant too. For example, the study of the professional connections between medical experts working on goiter from Georgian SSR and Ukrainian SSR is likely to lead to valuable findings. Finally, the research of Soviet medicine is a promising endeavor with the abundance of historical material on the USSR's interventions against malaria, a public health problem

much bigger than goiter in the Georgian SSR. Theories on the Soviet tools of governance can potentially be reassessed and recalibrated according to these findings.

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