

**Manana Tsereteli**

*Georgia, The University of Georgia, Assistant Professor,*

*mtsereteli@ug.edu.ge*

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**Historical memory as one of the major factors in the  
process of ethnic identity development (the case of  
deported Meskhetians living in the Region of Samtskhe -  
Javakheti)**

This article deals with the group known as “Deported Meskhetians” who were exiled from Georgia to Central Asia in 1944 and returned to Georgia in the 1990th. Nowadays they live in the various villages of West and South Georgia. The article is focused on the historical memory as one of the major factors in the process of ethnic identity creation (case of Deported Meskhetians living in Samtskhe–Javakheti region).

There are various narratives related to the ethnic identity of the Deported Meskhetians in the scientific literature, the Georgian public and even among the Deported Meskhetians themselves. Their origins cause different points of view. Some parts of the Georgian society consider them as the ethnic Georgians, who have changed their faith with the permanent pressure from the Turks and adopted Islam; but others consider them as ethnic Turks inhabiting parts of southern Georgia as a result of invasion.

The issue of Meskhetian repatriation was an official obligation and commitment of the Georgian Government. The above mentioned duty was obliged to the Georgian Government in 1999, when the country became a member of the European Council. There were discussions about returning the 425.000 Deported Meskhetians to their homeland. Georgia was required to adopt a law in two years, commence the repatriation in three

years and complete the program in twelve years. The Georgian government could not fulfill the obligation in the prescribed time. The Georgian government only passed the new law about repatriation on September 12, 2014 (Government of Georgia 2014) In spite of this, the problem is still very sensitive and not solved; therefore, one of the major troubles is connected to the perception of Meskhetians.

The analysis and reconciliation of the obtained data with the relevant theoretical viewpoints confirmed the validity of the main hypotheses formulated in the article. In particular, the obtained field material ("life stories" of the deported Meskhetians) shows that the history of the group, its historical memory is one of the important factors in terms of the process of formation, preservation, protection or change of ethnic identity.

The historical memory of the deported population is largely confined to the deportation act, which serves as a unifier between group members, although it is associated with different categories of emotion, confirming Wang's view that not all members of the group need to be traumatized or suffered. The cause of social trauma, at some point in time, will be widely shared by group members.

It has been proven that the historical narrative adopted and accepted by the deported Meskhetians plays an important role in the process of identity preservation, and the history interpreted by them is decisive in the perception of the ethnicity of themselves or members of a group. Although the history of the deported Meskhetians has been interpreted in many ways by both the scientific community and members of the group, there are still components / events in these historical narratives that act as a unifier for the deported Meskhetians.