THE NATIONAL EPIC AS A SOURCE OF PLACE NAMES. THE TOPONYMY OF ESTONIAN SETTLEMENTS ON THE BLACK SEA COAST OF THE CAUCASUS

Aivar Jürgenson
PhD, Senior Researcher of Estonian National Museum
Muuseumi tee 2
60532 Tartu, Estonia,
+3725035980, aivar.jyrgenson.001@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1551-3218

Abstract. The article examines changes in place names in areas along the Black Sea coast of the Caucasus where Estonian settlers were relocated in the 1880s. Following the conquest of the Black Sea coast, Tsarist authorities sought to assert their power by introducing new place names, thereby inscribing their ideology onto the foreign territory. The names assigned by the authorities typically reflected the names of "heroes" of the Caucasian War, high-ranking representatives of the Russian administration, or members of the Tsar's family. However, the authorities also allowed settlers significant freedom in naming their new settlements. Although the settlers' chosen names did not reflect the colonial ideology of the Russian Empire, the names were influenced by the prevailing ideology in the settlers' homeland. For Estonians, this was national romanticism, which drew inspiration in part from Estonian mythology. The article explores which mythological figures were used in the names of Estonian settlements in the Caucasus and the purposes behind such naming. It also investigates the motivations behind the creation of local microtoponyms.

Keywords: Toponymics, settler colonization, Estonian settlements, migration, national epic.

Introduction. In the 1880s, several Estonian settler villages were established along the Black Sea coast of the Caucasus. In the Sukhum district of the Kutaisi Governorate, the villages of Linda (Lindau) and Estonia were founded, while in the Black Sea district, along the Psou River, the villages of Salme and Sulevi were established. All these villages are located in Abkhazia. The main push factor for migration was demographic transition starting in the 19th century and relative overpopulation and land shortages in Estonia. The pull factor was the policy of the Russian state, which called for colonization of the southern and eastern parts of the empire with settlers from the more densely populated governorates in the western and central regions. Estonian colonization to Abkhazian territory may have started after the Russo-Turkish War (1877-78), when much of the local population was forcibly displaced and driven into the Ottoman Empire. Massive colonization of the southern parts of the empire, during which Estonians also arrived in the region along with other ethnic groups, should therefore be seen in the context of carefully engineered political actions of the Russian power.
As part of colonization, new place names were bestowed. Some of the renaming took place on the central government level, but in general, settlers were given free hand to name their new settlements. The article examines the practical considerations and cultural preconditions that guided the Estonians in naming their new settlements on the Black Sea coast of the Caucasus. Besides the origins of village names, we look at how and for what purpose Estonian-language microtoponyms were bestowed in the villages and surrounding areas.

Methods: Since the primary sources for this study are handwritten village histories, diaries, and letters sent home by Estonian settlers, the comparative, descriptive, and analytical methods have been used in this article. Additional information has been obtained through interviews with current and former residents of the Estonian villages in the Caucasus.

Discussion and results:
Colonization and place names
Place names often denote points on the surface, geographical features, and also subdivide the landscape in a manner corresponding to people's needs (Päll, 2020: 235). Place names can endure for centuries,

but if the population in an area changes or power dynamics change, toponyms can change extensively as well. A French anthropologist Marc Augé writes that settlement stories rarely discuss autochthony and argues that the utility of social marking is inversely proportional to a group's nativeness to an area (Augé, 2012: 48). Colonial conquests are a frequent reason for name changes. Many studies have shown how colonial rulers have used place names in conquered territories as a symbolic strategy for "encoding" new ideologies and identities into the new dominions (Wanjiru-Mwita, Giraut, 2020: 3; Azaryahu, 1992: 351; Azaryahu, 2019; D'Almeida-Topor, 2016). It has been demonstrated that place names help to normalize new political, social and economic relations (Alderman, 2008: 195ff.) and they are rightly among the primary markers of a new regime (Yeoh, 2018: 41).

Expansion of colonial possessions is often followed by the arrival of colonial settlers. Almost never do colonists show up in an empty territory, although some have had this notion (Sokolow, 2015: 140-141). Almost all colonized lands were, to some extent, previously settled, and places bore names that reflected the previous history of settlement. New toponyms bestowed by settlers or colonial authorities reflect violent change in the social order and political system, i.e. new power relationships. Where the population has been eradicated or thinned – as in North America, the Caribbean or the Black Sea coast of the Caucasus – the new place names introduced often ignore the previous history. On one hand, this shows the motives of the colonial rulers – the desire to emphasize a place's colonial status (Dipper, 1995: 17). However, the settlers' motives can also be to transport the old homeland to the new environment and place the foreign in a familiar scale. Travelling abroad and establishing settlements means a new beginning in a new land. Besides physical relocation, leaving the homeland means cultural interruption – the old homeland and its physical and cultural dimensions is replaced with a new one, which generally leads to challenges in adapting. There are many examples of how colonists and emigrants in a new environment attempt to bring about conditions that correspond as much as possible to the conceptions and cultural patterns brought from the homeland (Greverus, 1972: 37 ff., Dipper, 1995: 10 ff.). More than techniques and tools, or social values and norms are brought from the old homeland, but also more symbolic markers of homeland, such as toponyms. From the perspective of the settlers, naming places is thus more of an aspect of adaptation strategy. It has been shown in the case of many colonies that although colonial authorities may wish to rule and exploit a colony, the top motivation of the settlers is not to rule but just to seek a better life in a new land. They also seek to retain their original culture (Young, 2016: 20). Metropoles and their colonization policies will support settlers in realizing these aims, by giving privileges conferring an advantage over indigenous inhabitants and making the environment favourable for them to cultivate their own culture.

Colonial powers often adopt the use of place names that emphasize the connection to the metropole. Through the centuries, an old tried and true tradition has been used – new places are named after localities in the metropole, with "New" added in front: New England, New France, New Caledonia, New Zealand, New Holland etc. Such place names demonstrate how they are placed into the colonial power relationship (Smith, 2017: 38; Tucker, Rose-Redwood, 2015), while attesting to the attempt to symbolically transfer the culture of origin to new places. While entire regions (New England etc.) are named by colonial authorities and represent the function of manifesting power, settler villages were usually named on the grass-roots level by ordinary settlers and the main function was to provide a familiar scale to a foreign environment.

Estonian colonists were no exception here. In various regions of Tsarist Russia there were one Uus-Balti (New-Baltic) village, seven Estonias and two Estonkas, and two villages named Uus-Estonia (New Estonia). A village called Estonia was founded in the Sukhumi district (*okrug*). Some place names derived from romantic-era Estonian literature, including Linda in Sukhumi district and Salme and Sulevi in the Black Sea district referring to characters in the national epic. Although the settlers' motives and those of colonial officials exercising metropolitan power vary in bestowing new names, both involve imposing a new political reality on the landscape and maps.

Colonization of Abkhazia and the naming of places

Colonization left an imprint on Abkhazian place names, too. The Principality of Abkhazia was disbanded after the end of the Caucasian War and its various parts were annexed to Russian governorates and *okrugs*. A large share of the Abkhazian population was deported after the war, the Jiget (Sadz) people of north-western Abkhazia and a few communities of Abkhazia mountain folk being driven out of their country wholesale for staunchly resisting the Russians during the war. A new wave of expulsions hit Abkhazia

during the Russo-Turkish War (1877-78), with locals being accused of collaborating with the Turks and forced to leave for the Ottoman Empire.
Tsar Alexander II's ukase of 31 May 1880 declared indigenous Abkhazians a "guilty nation" (Russian: *vinovnoe naselenie*) after the uprising of 1877. They were forbidden to bear arms, serve in the army, inhabit in coastal regions and cities (Guazhba, 2014: 150) or within a 30 km radius of Suhum-Kale - in the area between the rivers Kodor and Psirtskha. The Abkhazians were prohibited from owning land in the area of the Gumista and Kodor rivers and in the Gudauta region, and the land was expropriated into a state reserve (Gamakharia, Akhaladze, 2016: 38; Gelenava, 2011: 357). The purpose of clearing the land was to reduce numbers of recalcitrant inhabitants and to prepare for agrarian colonization from other parts of the empire and beyond. It was in the watershed of the Gumista and Kodor and north-western Abkhazia's Psou watershed where land was also distributed to Estonians in the 1880s.

The new authorities also began redrawing maps to reflect their sphere of interest, i.e. changing local place names. The new names invoked iron-handed "heroes" of the Caucasus War, the tsar's courtiers and the administration in the Caucasus: Yermolovka, Pilenko, Baranovo, Shafranovo, Mikhailovskoe, Aleksandrovskoje, Yekaterinovka and Olginskoe (Kvarchija, 2015: 15). The establishment of Linda, Estonia, Salme and Sulevi villages by Estonians and Neudorf (Naidorf) and Gnadenberg by the Germans in the 1880s signals the extensive freedom that colonists had in naming their settlements. This was the privilege of village communities (EAM 284.1.19: 23).

National Romantic-inspired village names in Estonian settlements.
After the indigenous inhabitants were displaced, the lands apportioned to the Estonians on Abkhazia's Black Sea coast had been deserted for years by the time the Estonians arrived in the 1880s: for a shorter period near Sukhum Kale – two to five years – and longer in Jigetia in north-western Abkhazia, 20 years. Although colonists of other ethnicities had established settlements in the area by that time, the natives were gone and their place naming tradition was mostly interrupted. Colonists availed themselves avidly of the possibility of bestowing names in their own languages to the places. What antecedents were used? One option was to carry over place names with a symbolic importance from the old homeland to the environment being colonized. As stated, this strategy was informed by new beginnings and a need for the well-known and safe – new toponymics were in the context of the newly colonized land but for the settlers, this constituted a cultural resource brought with them from their homeland. Settlements were thus pre-accumulated, not starting completely from scratch. From the settler perspective, this beginning was only partially new, then. Although the settlers in Abkhazia were not required to use toponymy reflecting the ideology of the Tsarist regime, they were not ideologically neutral in naming places either. Their guiding ideology was Estonian national romanticism.
The names of the Estonian colonists' villages included entirely five villages that bore the name of Linda, the mother of the protagonist in the Estonian national epic *Kalevipoeg* (Viikberg, 2010: 532). In Siberia, for example, Pritayozhnyi Village was renamed Linda by Estonian colonists in hopes that the mythical name of Linda would ward off wolves and bears (Maamägi, 1980: 13). A Linda Village was also founded in Abkhazia, but the mythology of the Estonian national awakening is also seen in the names of Salme and Sulevi villages – Sulev is one closest friends and companions of Kalevipoeg, and Salme is a significant female character in the Estonian epic Kalevipoeg.
What motivated the settlers to borrow from mythology? While the settlers in the Siberian case themselves alluded to a protective magic function, what other motives could be seen behind the use of such place names? As said, these evince a need for a sense of security – besides the toponyms of the old homeland, the mythical past of their people was one source of such psychological support alongside place names from the homeland. By the time Estonians emigrated to the Caucasus, the national awakening had lasted several decades, and the (pseudo)mythology that supported the movement was familiar from *Kalevipoeg*, the press, literature and school textbooks. *Kalevipoeg*, written by the Estonian doctor and writer Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald, appeared in 1862 and through several reprinting, rallied Estonian self-consciousness; its protagonist as an epic hero changed the way Estonians conceived of the world. Kalevipoeg became a symbol of Estonian identity (Ränk, 2000: 15). The figures in the national awakening pantheon and their exploits were seen as an invented or pseudo mythology later, but at the time they were considered an authentic folklore. Kreutzwald and other

Estonian intellectuals believed that a harmoniously integral epic and its cast of characters did indeed exist at some point. Among Estonian intellectuals, the epic was not considered artificial or constructed as later ones did, but it was rather seen as about the Estonians' noble past, heroism and folk wisdom. In the spirit of the father of German Romanticism Johann Gottfried von Herder and other literary figures of the era, the folk songs and tales were seen as fragments of a wondrous past (Jansen, 1999: 290). By the time Estonians migrated to the Caucasus, 20 years had passed since the *Kalevipoeg* was published and the migrants' lives had also been influenced by it.

The idealization of mythologized ancient Estonia – which was after all the germ of the national awakening – spurred the migrants to use the mythological figures in village names. The influences of the national awakening on one hand and the heroic settlement rush on the other led the settlers to make the ideal landscape of the past palpable in the present. Migration meant a mission to build a new homeland – one that had to be better than the deprivation in the old one left behind. The Estonian press at the time of the emigration charged the emigrants with abandoning the homeland but for the emigrants leaving meant carrying the cultural resources with them – and building a better homeland in place of the flawed one behind them. While historical toponyms were used to name places and establish Estonian settlement, imaginary ancient Estonia may have offered an even more powerful impetus for a new start. It was a land that was closer to all sorts of new beginnings than the historical or contemporary homeland. In their new home abroad, they could longing for a new start, symbolically go back to the genuine beginning, the original actions of the mythological beings. Poems written by one settler from Estonia village feature a god borrowed from Estonian mythology, Vanemuine, the Estonian mythological giants Kalevs and Olevs, who through their play reshape the Caucasian landscapes (EAM 284.1.5, l 57; EAM 284.1.5, l 39). According to this view, it was as if the Estonian settlers were returning home – a place where the deities of their country were already busy.

The story of how the village of Linda got its name has been preserved in detail. When two Estonians Peeter Piir and Jaan Kilk arrived in Sukhum Kale in summer 1881 to scout out suitable places for Estonians, they were allocated a place in the mountains in the Gumista basin some kilometres from town. That place was named Linda – according to later Upper Linda schoolteacher August Martin it was because that "wild mountainous terrain had to be cultured like a mother nurtures and feeds her children." (Martin, 2013a: 81). The name of Kalevipoeg's mother had to ensure that a civilized landscape would be cleared and carved out of the wilderness. The local Estonians' later folklore ascribes a key role to naming of the villages – and the namers as well. When the Estonian scouts reached the location of the future Linda village on 25 June 1881 Piir had become so enthralled of the natural beauty that he did not want to continue on. The scouts took a break under a large walnut tree and the men carved "Linda" into the bark and drank a toast to their future happiness (Rezold, 1881: 2-3). A former inhabitant of Upper Linda who studied the local history, Mihkel Ruber, added later: "It can be considered the birth date of Linda village" (Ruber, 1995: 7), although the first inhabitants arrived in 1882 and the village was registered officially in 1884. As to whether Piir and Kilk bestowed the name Linda in a celebratory mood or in a joking spirit brought on by the spirits, as one settler, Johannes Pihlakas, later suggested (Pihlakas, 1906: 2), is perhaps not the most important question.

The name Linda went through certain modifications later on. It was entered into the register of villages under the name Lindau. The village name is considered in village tradition to have been germanized by the ethnic german head of Sukhumi *okrug* (EAM 284.1.s 19: 23). In the 1890s, the head of administration of the Sukhumi *okrug* was indeed a German, Viktor A. Bracker, who also mistakenly termed Linda a German-Estonian village in a report (Brakker 1894). But in the first half of the 1880s, when the name Lindau was officially registered, Bracker was not yet in his position in Sukhumi *okrug*. From 1883 to 1888, the *okrug* was headed by a Russian, Apollon N. Vedenskii and there was no reason for him to give the village name a German tinge. One possibility was that Ferdinand Konstantin Ludwig Hoerschelmann turned Linda officially into Lindau – he was the Baltic German pastor of Tbilisi's Lutheran congregation; he was born in Estonia, spoke Estonian and visited Linda in 1883 (EAM 281.1.18: 9; EKLA 235.26.2.15). The Estonians of Sukhumi *okrug* were in the area of administration of the Tbilisi church parish in the early 1880s. When Hoerschelmann visited Linda in 1883, he may have indeed conveyed the name to officials in the form Lindau. In village tradition, whoever, the German pastor and later German head of administration of the *okrug* may have been confused with each other, leading to the erroneous recollection that the German government officially changed the name to Lindau.

Later, when Linda had split into Upper and Lower Linda, the schools officially had Germanized Russian names (in Cyrillic) “Verkhne-Lindauskoe uchilishche” and "Niszhne-Lindauskoe uchilishche“ (EAM 284.1.19: 23). In German-language Lutheran Church materials, Lower Linda is given in the Russian-German form, “Nischny-Lindau” (NAG, KCA 114.1.5: 1). The non-Estonian neighbors in the area; for their part, adapted Linda into “Lindava”, and during the Soviet era, this usage spread to other ethnic groups and is occasionally encountered today.

Salme village in north-western Abkhazia also was likely named after Estonian national epic *Kalevipoeg*. It was said to have been named by former skipper and later Estonian colonist Jüri Ponamar (Võime, 1972: 233). Unlike Linda or Sulevi, the history of the naming of Salme is not extant. One interpretation related by Salme inhabitants today is: *There was this Salme Village on Saaremaa Island in Estonia and they came from that Salme village.* Actually, the first Salme settlers were not from the Estonian island Saaremaa and this interpretation is not correct.

A scholar of Abkhazian toponyms, V. E. Kvarchija, has drawn attention to the fact that the toponym Salme is similar to the name of a Jiget prince named Tsanba Haji Salama, who ruled the region until he was deported in 1860 (Kvarchija, 2019a: 78) but an etymological connection cannot be proved from the similarity. And indeed, the Estonian s could haettlers have hardly known the previous history of the land, nor would such etymology follow the general logic of the origins of place names. Earlier, before the Russian empire subjugated the land, another scout, Theodor von Tornau, who had Baltic German roots, wrote of Haji Salama (Tornau, 1835: 106). The name Salama may have been known to settlers from other ethnicities who arrived after the Jiget people were driven out, but it is not clear whether this information would have reached Estonians who arrived 20 years after the events in question. However, Salme is a character from the Estonian national epic Kalevipoeg just like Linda.

A number of versions circulate regarding the naming of Sulevi, which was founded in 1885 near Salme. One theory is the village was named by one of its founders, Mart Olev. Jakob Nerman, a scholar of the local history of Caucasian Estonians, has treated the episode quite comprehensively based on local Estonians’ records. When Mart Olev, Johan Heilman and Juhan Teppe from Estonia reached the mountains above Salme, they started discussing what name to give the village. Teppe asked Olev: “Listen, Mart, if we settle here and more men come, what name will we give this village? You’re first here, we came after you, so it’s your right to name the village.” Mart drove an axe into a chopping block, removed the pipe from his mouth, knocked ash out of his pipe, thought a little and then said: “Yes, I am first here. My name is Olev, so may the village be called Sulev.” (EAM 284.1.28, l 1; EAM 284.1.31, l 165; Vilbaste, 1960: 128).

According to other information, the village was named directly after the mythological figure Sulev from national epic *Kalevipoeg*, (Võime, 1972: 233; Võime, 1980: 21) which seems more likely based on the analogy with Salme and Linda. In the case of other Estonian villages founded in the Russian Empire, folk etymologies have also started circulating in oral history (Jürgenson, 2006: 108 ff).

Microtoponyms

Since colonists, including Estonians, settled in areas that had been emptied of their previous population by the colonial authorities of tsarist Russia and had become overgrown over the years with the former native place names unknown, names had to be given to various features in and around the villages. The cultural interruption that had occurred in the landscape required a creative approach from the Estonians – in general, they could not rely on the traditions of the previous inhabitants. The microtoponyms were coined as needed for denoting key landmarks. Names were bestowed on features that were important for the local economy or otherwise significantly distinctive from the rest of the landscape (Kallasmaa, 2000: 197). Sulevi had a Black Cave and White Cave, and in the macrorelief the villagers distinguished a Fallen Cliff. The First Clearing was named since it was the first treeless area as one climbed into the mountains (Kosenkranius 2009: 74). The villagers of Linda villages called one hill *Linnamägi* (town hill) since it was along the road that led from Linda to Sukhum Kale town (Martin, 2013b: 87). There was a narrow vale between two high mountains on the road from Sukhum Kale to Lower Linda, which was named *Mägedevahe* by the Estonians – between-the-mountains (Vilbaste 1960: 128). The Estonians of Sulevi, who grazed livestock in the mountains near the onetime Abkhazian settlement Aibga (and still do), named the place *Kivikoppel* – Stone Glade.

In the Caucasus, being a mountainous area, promontories also needed names. Sulevi village features *Tinnarti mägi* (Mt. Tinnart) and *Hindovi mägi* (Mt. Hindov) – according to the surnames of the Estonian

hosts (Kosenkranius 2009: 74) as well as *Kannatusemägi* (Suffering Mountain), named because of the arduous ascent (Vilbaste 1960: 128). Kiigemägi (literally "Swing Hill", or village green) in Sulevi was named thusly because celebrations were held there before a clubhouse was built. It was also the site of midsummer bonfires. Hills and mountains were also named after trees growing there. Upper Linda had a *Tammemägi* (Oak Hill), since it was home to many oaks before the land was cleared for agriculture (Martin 2013b: 87), Sulevi had a *Kastanimägi* (Chestnut Hill) (Kosenkranius 2009: 74). Estonians also bestowed the names *Viigimägi* (Fig Hill) ja *Puutäimägi* (Woodlouse Hill), but the base and surroundings of mountains could also be named. One part of Sulevi Village was called *Mäealuse* (Underhill). In mountainous villages, farms could be established on cleared areas. So, *-lageda* (clearing) occurs in some names for parts of the village – Lepalageda and Tammelageda, Pärnalageda and Sepalageda (Alder, Oak, Linden and Smith Clearing) (Martin 2013b: 87; Võime 1972: 231). Other Estonian place names were *Karuauk* (Bear Hole), *Karusööt* (Bear Feed), *Kitseallikas* (Goat Spring), *Raba Koppel* (Bog Glade), and *Sõnajalapõld* (Fern Field) (Vilbaste 1960: 128). Bears were a nuisance for the first settlers, since they pillaged grain fields, and ferns – livestock did not eat them, and establishing cropland in a thicket of ferns was very time-consuming. As mandated by the state, the farmyards were separate from fields and forest stands. So, for instance, there is a Hundimetsatükk (Wolf Forest parcel) in Salme (authors field work).

Besides the old Estonian place names and mythology, the Bible also provided inspiration. There is a Mt. Nebo in the boundary area between Salme and Sulevi (Madison, 2014: 20). Mt. Nebo was where Moses could see into Canaan, which Yahweh promised to the children of Israel (5Mo 32:49). For the most part, the etymology of the Estonians' Nebo is considered to be Biblical (Martin, 2013b: 87; EAM 284.1.24, l. 2), although there was a competing explanation that its roots lay closer to home – the Russian word for sky is *nebo* (Madison, 2014: 19-20). Folk-Christian etymology can also be seen in *Põrguoru* (Purgatory Valley) and *Noa laevanina* (Noah's Ark Prow) in Sulevi (Kosenkranius, 2009: 74).

Estonian botanist Gustav Vilbaste cites an interesting microtoponym from Sulevi – *Abessiina põld* (Abyssinia Field). As with the abovementioned microtoponyms, Vilbaste assumes in this case as well that the landscape had a tabula rasa potential, the creativity occasioned by cultural interruption. Namely, Vilbaste says the place was formerly forested, but the trees were felled during the Abyssinian War and dubbed *Abessiina mets (Abezina/Abazina Forest)* by the workers. When a field was established here in place of the former forest, it continued to be called that (Vilbaste, 1960: 128). But actually, the roots of Abessiina do not extend all the way to modern Ethiopia in Africa. The similar-sounding Abazin was a term for the indigenous inhabitants of the region in the 19th century (Pallas,1803: 327 ff; Volkova, 1974: 65, 74). The local Estonians were also aware of the ethnonym Abazins in the late 19th century (Lossmann, 1891: 621). This ethnonym is a more logical explanation than a war faraway in north-eastern Africa. Although the native peoples had been driven out of this land 20 years before the Estonians arrived, both the local authorities and colonists arriving in the region earlier knew them at least by name, and this knowledge was spread to the Estonians. And Abessiina Field is thus probably not an example of spontaneous creativity but has ties to the earlier history of the land underlying the Estonian villages. The superficial similarity with Abyssinia was not only confusing to Vilbaste but also spawned a number of fanciful trains of thought in the 19th century. For example, German traveller Friedrich Wagner wrote in 1854 that Abkhazians were believed to be descended from Abyssinians (Wagner, 1854: 33). Anyway, *Abessiina põld* is one of the few microtoponyms in the Estonian settlements along the Black Sea, which refers to the earlier population of the region. In the case of the remaining microtoponyms, we see the work of the colonists, which indicates a cultural break in the settlement history of the region.

Conclusion: The conquest of the Black Sea coast of the Caucasus by the Russian Empire and the partial displacement of the local population in the 1860s and 1870s lay the groundwork for massive agrarian colonization. The partial replacement of one people with another led to a multi-vector cultural interruption in the region: for both the indigenous peoples who left for Turkey and the colonists who took their place, migration meant a new beginning in a new land. Although not all natives were deported or driven out of the region, the displacement had been total in the areas where the Estonians later settled: the Jiget communities of north-western Abkhazia had to abandon their homesteads and practically to a man left for the Ottoman territories, while the majority of the members of the Gumaa and Akapa

communities near Suhum Kale were forced out and those that remained faced a number of restrictions. The usual pattern of colonization based on power relationships, where the privileges enjoyed by the colonists do not extend to the natives, was particularly plain in Abkhazia: the government colonization policy favoured the colonists and put native inhabitants on a lower rung of the hierarchy.

By the time Estonians arrived, the lands designated for them had been practically devoid of native peoples presence for years. The cultural interruption was also expressed in place names. Many former place names disappeared – there was no indigenous community left to carry on the continuity.

From the settler perspective, they, too, experienced cultural interruption in the sense of leaving their homeland's cultural field. While arriving in "unclaimed" lands meant the need to bestow names on the new villages, names of actual places in Estonia (Estonia village) and pseudo-mythological entities both provided source material (Linda, Salme, Sulevi). The names of smaller features within villages and dotting the landscape (mountains and hills, cliffs, valleys, caves and fields) also ignored (with scant few exceptions) the earlier place names used by the native populations – the knowledge of the old place names was limited. Another reason for use of Estonian-style place names was the need to add meaningful markers to the landscape and more broadly to domesticate the unfamiliar places, which is a typical technique of settler colonization.

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