

In the Aftermath of Empire: Memory, History, and Time in Adjara, Georgia

By

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## Abstract

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My dissertation, [The Aftermath of Empire: Memory, History, and Time in Adjara, Georgia](#) analyzes the forms that historical memory takes in everyday cultural practices in Adjara, an autonomous region of the Republic of Georgia. Based on 13 months of ethnographic fieldwork, I focus on the legacy of this region's history as a frontier province of the Ottoman Empire. I argue that, for a deeper understanding of Georgia and the larger Caucasus region, it is crucial to analyze Adjara and Georgia as inheritors to an Ottoman imperial past, and to content with how Georgian Muslims see themselves as stewards of this tradition, reinventing and reengaging it for the unfolding post-Soviet, post-Rose Revolution historico-political present.

Chapter One, "Absences, Gaps, and Desire: Batumi's Imperial Frontier," tells the hazy story of Ottoman Adjara, its port capital Batumi, and its place within the empire as a frontier land abutting the Russian and Persian Empires. I discuss Adjara's place within the eastern Black Sea region centered around Trabzon, as a site of banditry and smuggling, exile and transience. I discuss the "reunification" of Ottoman Georgia with the rest of the Georgia under the Tsar in 1878, and related assimilation projects of Tbilisi-based Georgian intelligentsia. Finally, I write analyze Batumi today as "post-modern" dystopian resort city of fantasy, desire, and escape, but also an everyday urban center for Adjarian villagers. I end with the story of becoming fooled by my own desire for a field, and the entrapment and extortion I suffered as a result.

Chapter Two, "Accounting for Origins: Names, Narratives, and Ancestors," analyzes family lines and narratives of origin as told in a village in Khulo, Adjara. I explore the evidentiary status of a select few of these narratives, elaborating on the dual system of naming that exists in Adjara: one family name that derives from an Ottoman-era ancestor and suffixed with the Turkish '—*oghli*' meaning 'sons of,' and one Georgian family name, *gvari*, adopted by a section of a village, thus indicating geographic provenance rather than kin. I discuss the multi-layeredness of kinship, residence, and hospitality in cementing a sociality across historical ruptures through narratives of origins and ancestors.

Chapter Three, "Funerals, Traces, Transitions: Transhumance from Here to There," analyzes the relationship between kinship, memory, and land in the village in Khulo, Adjara. I discuss

seasonal labor movements in Adjara between city and mountains, as contrasted with the anchoring role of villages and, in particular, of gravesites. Gravesites act as anchors to land and belonging, as well as portals to the past, transforming the landscape into an archive of local memory. I end this chapter with an ethnographic account of a funeral, exploring the ways that death and burial concretize the relationship between inheritance, kinship, and land, establishing the power of the grave as a temporal anchor, a portal to other times.

In the final Chapter Four, “Time and the End: The Nexus of History and the Divine,” I give an account of a sermon on the end times in a Quran school in Khulo, Adjara. I ask how the discussion of knowledge of the divine in this sermon outlines a way of understanding the nexus of historical time and divine time in this particular site marked by historical rupture and co-existing temporalities. I explore how the use of linguistic markers of reported speech and evidentiary status during the sermon figures for the temporal relationship between historical time and divine time in Khulo. I discuss the contested translation of the Quran into Georgian, analyzing a misunderstanding that arises as emblematic of the multiply enfolded positionalities of Georgian Muslims that they attempt to commensurate in this post-Ottoman, post-Soviet time of a newly unfolding present.

*To Joshi, my best friend, who helped me see that it would be okay*

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## Note on Transcription and Translation

This dissertation includes many words and phrases in both Georgian and Turkish. Below is a key to the way I have transcribed words from these two languages.

### *Georgian:*

The Georgian language, famous for its consonants, has only five vowels, ‘a,’ ‘e,’ ‘i,’ ‘o,’ and ‘u.’ These are roughly pronounced as in Spanish, with the ‘e’, ɔ, being a more open [ɛ]. As for consonants, all are roughly as one would expect, except I have transcribed b as ‘x’, pronounced like the ‘ch’ in Bach or Chanukah. In proper names, this is written as ‘kh’ because of official accepted spellings, such as in the placename *Khulo*. I have transcribed ɣ as ‘gh,’ pronounced like the French r.

In Georgian, unvoiced stops (‘p,’ ‘t,’ ‘k,) and fricatives (‘ch,’ ‘ts’) have both aspirated and an ejective forms, which are different phonemes that are written with different letters. In my transcriptions, I have not indicated this distinction because it almost never creates any ambiguity, and Georgian speakers will always know which one is intended.

### *Turkish:*

As Turkish is written with the Latin alphabet, I have not needed to transcribe. Turkish letters are all as one would expect, except the following:

*c* is j as in English *jam*

*ğ* is silent, or somethings lengthening the preceding vowel

*ı* as in the unstressed vowel in English *rabbit*

*ü* as in the vowel in French *tu*

*ö* as in the vowel in French *coeur*

*ç* is ch as in church

*ş* is sh as in shoe

Finally, I have done all the translations myself except where indicated.

## Acknowledgements

The past four years have been the hardest of my life. My year of fieldwork in Georgia was one of extreme loneliness, depression, and isolation. Like many anthropologists, I sometimes experienced unsafe situations and violence in ways that perhaps define the process of conducting fieldwork. In addition, I was navigating being queer and disabled in Georgia, without yet having developed the self-acceptance to really be able to navigate being queer and disabled anywhere. When I came back from the field at the end of 2018, I struggled to begin to write for two years, sometimes unable to even look at my fieldnotes. I had to work through so much before I was able to even begin.

I have Usher Syndrome, the most common genetic cause of deafblindness. My sister and I both have Type 2, which causes congenital mild to severe hearing loss that remains stable. I wear hearing aids in both ears, and I often miss what people are saying. Listening and conversing with others is tiring and requires me to work hard lest I miss a crucial part of the conversation, and at the end of the day I am often overcome with listening fatigue and cannot concentrate on anything.

I first started to notice changes in my vision in high school. Usher Syndrome also causes retinitis pigmentosa, a progressive retinal disease that causes the rod cells of the retina to die over the course of one's life, eventually leading to cone cell death in its late stages. At this point in my life, at 33 years old, I have a severely restricted, narrow field of central vision that meets the requirement for legal blindness.

I know now that I have a lot of grief because of losing my vision. I see now that I was not able to write until I began to address my emotions around being visually impaired. It feels necessary to begin my acknowledgements by thanking those who have been lifelines for me as I work towards accepting blindness.

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Most of all, thank you to the Tavartkiladze family in Dzirkvadzeebi, for taking me in as one of your own. I hope I can be the best *kirva* possible.

Thank you to my parents, Marianela and George, for always supporting me even and especially when it's been hard, and for visiting me in both Turkey and Georgia. I still can't believe you came! And my sister Catarina, thank you for being there through thick and thin.

Last but most importantly, my partner, and my love, Joshua Wizman. I truly never thought I would ever find you. Thank you for loving me and for being in my life. I love our little life.

## Introduction

*Ben Giderim Batum'a*  
*Batum'un Batađına*  
*Bahçenizden İçeri*  
*Al Beni Otađına*

I shall go to Batumi  
To the marshes of Batumi  
Through your garden  
Take me into your quarters

—opening stanza from “Ben Giderim Batum'a,” a Turkish folk song from the Black Sea region

## Ports of Call

On September 27, 2013, a ship carrying 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate set sail from the eastern Black Sea port of Batumi, in the former Soviet Republic of Georgia. The ship, known as the *Rhosos*, was built in 1986, was owned by a Russian and registered to a Bulgarian company. It flew the Moldovan flag as it sailed from Batumi westward through the Black Sea along the coast of Turkey. Passing through the Bosphorus Strait of Istanbul, waters that are guaranteed free passage to civilian vessels during peacetime by the 1936 Montreux Convention. The *Rhosos* continued across the Marmara Sea, southward through the Dardanelles Strait and out into the Aegean Sea.

It was headed to Mozambique, where a commercial explosives manufacturer awaited its order of ammonium nitrate. The crew, eight Ukrainians and two Russians, had to make an emergency stop in Beirut, and was impounded by the Lebanese government for failing to comply with local and international fee requirements and regulations. The *Rhosos* would remain at the Beirut port for years, until on August 4th, 2020, it exploded, killing 219 people and destroying a large part of the port and the surrounding neighborhoods.

I read this news as I was struggling to begin writing my dissertation in the first wave of Covid-19, sequestered in my studio apartment in Berkeley. I was isolating at home because I had a (fortunately asymptomatic) case of Covid, and felt delirious. I thought I had read the article wrong—Batumi? In 2013? It seemed almost uncanny—the ship set sail from Batumi, where I would conduct my fieldwork, the same time I was applying to PhD programs, and it exploded as I began writing.

On its own, the catastrophe of *Rhosos* tells a story of corruption, neglect, bureaucracy and often idle quality of extreme violence. 219 people were killed because those in charge did...well, *nothing*. I would often walk to the port of Batumi to watch the ships arriving and departing, wondering where they came from and where they were off to. Batumi has been an important port in the eastern Black Sea region since the day of the Roman Empire, but the modern iteration of the port, as a site for exporting Azeri and Kazakh oil to Europe, began in the late 19th century—a project that was funded by Nobel, Rothschild, and Samuel Samuel, the founder of Shell.

The first bulk oil tanker to depart from Batumi was the British ship *SS Murex*, which transported Russian oil from the Georgian port in July 1892. The *SS Murex* then passed through the Suez Canal, the first oil tanker to do so, in August of that same year en route to Thailand. In

December 1916, the *SS Murex* was torpedoed by a German submarine and sunk in the Mediterranean, a casualty of the first World War.

This corner of the Black Sea, the capital and largest city of the region of Adjara in today's southwestern Georgia, has found itself throughout its history at the crosshairs of international networks of resource extraction, desire, and capital.



The Batumi port, photo taken January 10, 2018, by the author

Batumi was built as a British port for Baku oil in the aftermath of one empire, marking its entry into that shadowy other kind of empire: the empire of European global capital driven by extraction of raw materials. By virtue of its strategic harbor on the eastern coast of the Black Sea, and its relative proximity by land to Baku, Batumi became enfolded in a global web of ties and flows and desire that would determine its future from without, and change life from within. These multiple timelines of empire, however, do not disappear or die out when a certain infrastructure of governance is succeeded—the ties, the flows, and the desires that were structured under such imperial times persist, intact or displaced. Multiple temporalities remain, laminated on and interwoven with the landscape of Batumi and Adjara.

Imperial frontiers are theaters of history, sites where the powers that be play out the dramas and rivalries among them. They are fringes of worlds where multiplicity reigns. Code-

switching and translation are the norm, and define everyday life and survival. —  
 frontiers/borders are multiple as well, inscribed in the land as well as on people, those who are  
 folded into these multiple imperial times, inscribed on their names, their religion, their God, and  
 their language.



Map of Georgia

### Memory, History, Time

I have found myself dogged by the question of memory and its relationship to time. This dissertation has grown out of this haunting that I have felt my whole life.

My dissertation, *In The Aftermath of Empire: Memory, History, and Time in Adjara, Georgia* analyzes the forms that historical memory takes in everyday cultural practices in Adjara, an autonomous region of the Republic of Georgia. Based on 13 months of ethnographic fieldwork, I focus on the legacy of this region’s history as a frontier province of the Ottoman Empire. I argue that, for a deeper understanding of Georgia and the larger Caucasus region, it is crucial to analyze Adjara and Georgia as inheritors to an Ottoman imperial past, and to contend with how Georgian Muslims see themselves as stewards of this tradition, reinventing and reengaging it for the unfolding post-Soviet, post-Rose Revolution historico-political present.

This is an ethnography of life lived from within the rupture of history. An ethnography of forms of memory that repair, that remember to repair, to contend with and bear witness to the vertigo of history. At its core, this dissertation poses the simple question, what is memory? What is the nature of memory, the form of memory, and the time of memory? Does a memory exist in matter or in thought? In language? In the body? Does it exist in the time of the now, of the

moment, or is it anchored to history through a narrative or an archive? Or does memory exist outside of time, in the intemporal, in the eternal? In the now? I write these questions here not to say that I aim to answer them in my dissertation, but rather that these are the questions that have haunted me throughout the last eight years. I write these questions here as guideposts for finding an origin of this inquiry, the stone from which flows all else [see chapter 2].

Asking these questions of memory begs the following question as well: How does one give an account of memory, or bear witness to a memory, and how do such accounts come to form a tradition, or a *history*? If, as Reinhart Koselleck tells us in *Futures Past*, the conception of history contains two senses. The first, older, sense of history indicated a “constancy of human nature” embodied in “iterable” accounts and collections of “examples” that assume the fundamental sameness of the past and the present, allowing people to see *historia* as a source of “lessons” for the future (2004, 27-28). As Koselleck explains, according to this sense of history, “the temporal structure of past history bounded a continuous space of potential experience” (2004, 28). Furthermore, the function of history for prophecy and pedagogy, using the past as a lesson for the present, was “symptomatic of a continuity connecting the past to the future” (2004, 30). In contrast, the modern sense of history, Koselleck’s *Geschichte*, came to signify a “unique event,” or “a universal relation of events” (2004, 32).

These two modes of history are related for Koselleck to two modes of relating to the future: prognosis and prophecy. He writes, “prognosis produces the time within which and out of which it weaves, whereas apocalyptic prophecy destroys time through its fixation on the End” (2004, 19). Prognosis *produces* time and prophecy *destroys* it. Prognosis produces time by producing the singularity of the event, while prophecy destroys it by collapsing the End into the present, collapsing the future into the now. These two modes of history coexist—the linear time of the event collapses in the face of the return, of the cyclicity that leads to the End.

### **Witness and Archive**

What is the relation of a memory to its account? The account brings the memory into a temporality of the here-and-how through language, and into a history that does violence as well to the memory. This violence is that of the archive, the work that must be done to categorize and contain, to make legible, and to give it materiality. At the same time that telling the memory alters it fundamentally, memory as well demands that the past be reckoned with. Memory *demand*s a response, a reckoning, an account, a testimony, a witness.

I ask these questions of memory in Adjara, a small autonomous republic on the southwestern frontier of Georgia, bordering on Turkey to the south and the Black Sea to the west. This land, Adjara, has lied on the edge of worlds for centuries, long straddling the line between the Ottoman and the Russian empires, today between Turkey and the post-Soviet Republic of Georgia.

Part of what I aim to investigate in this dissertation is the contours of the archive and its relation to history. Here, I consider the archive to be the collection of traces organized/dis-organized according to some system (or in a way that eludes any semblance of systematicity), understood beyond the bounds of a textual, institutional archive. Thus, I look for traces of memory in such loci as forms of social relations, in narratives of origins, in the land and the built environment, and in language, translation, and religious practice. history as a narrative linking traces and filling in the lacunae, filling in the gaps (leading to forgetting, conflation, commensuration, etc.)

How does this relation between archive and history become embodied as tradition in the present through social practices such as hospitality, domestic labor, religious education, translation, and desire?



Map of Adjara, indicating the locations of my two field sites, Batumi and Khulo.

## Methods

This dissertation is based on 13 months of ethnographic fieldwork and participant-observation in Adjara. I was primarily based in Batumi and Khulo (see map of Adjara). I rented a small apartment in the city center in Batumi and stayed in various villages in Khulo throughout my year, invited as a guest to stay in people's homes. The ethnographic descriptions and analyses I offer here are based on my field notes, voice recordings, photographs, and memories accumulated during those months in Georgia. My field sites are described within the body of the dissertation.

## Chapters

Chapter One, "Absences, Gaps, and Desire: Batumi's Imperial Frontier," tells a hazy story of today's Batumi, the seaside capital of Adjara, as a "post-modern" dystopic resort city of fantasy, desire, and escape, but also an everyday urban center for Adjarian villagers. I write of Batumi as a landscape of history and an urban archive of Ottoman Adjara and its place within the empire as a frontier land abutting the Russian and Persian Empires. I discuss Adjara's place within the eastern Black Sea region centered around Trabzon, as a site of banditry and smuggling, exile and transience. I discuss the "reunification" of Ottoman Georgia with the rest of the Georgia under the Tsar in 1878, and related assimilation projects of Tbilisi-based Georgian intelligentsia.

Chapter Two, “Accounting for Origins: Names, Narratives, and Ancestors,” analyzes family lines and narratives of origin as told in a village in Khulo, Adjara. I explore the evidentiary status of a select few of these narratives, elaborating on the dual system of naming that exists in Adjara: one family name that derives from an Ottoman-era ancestor and suffixed with the Turkish ‘—*oghli*’ meaning ‘sons of,’ and one Georgian family name adopted by a section of a village, thus indicating geographic provenance rather than kin. I discuss the multi-layeredness of kinship, residence, and hospitality in cementing a sociality across historical ruptures through narratives of origins and ancestors.

Chapter Three, “Funerals, Traces, Transitions: Transhumance from Here to There,” analyzes the relationship between kinship, memory, and land in the village in Khulo, Adjara. I discuss seasonal labor movements in Adjara between city and mountains, as contrasted with the anchoring role of villages and, in particular, of gravesites. Gravesites act as anchors to land and belonging, as well as portals to the past, transforming the landscape into an archive of local memory. I end this chapter with an ethnographic account of a funeral, exploring the ways that death and burial concretize the relationship between inheritance, kinship, and land, establishing the power of the grave as a temporal anchor, a portal to other times.

In the final chapter, “Time and the End: The Nexus of History and the Divine,” I give an account of a sermon on the end times in a Quran school in Khulo, Adjara. I ask how the discussion of knowledge of the divine in this sermon outlines a way of understanding the nexus of historical time and divine time in this particular site marked by historical rupture and co-existing temporalities. I explore how the use of linguistic markers of reported speech and evidentiary status during the sermon figures for the temporal relationship between historical time and divine time in Khulo. I discuss the contested translation of the Quran into Georgian, analyzing a misunderstanding that arises as emblematic of the multiply-enfolded positionalities of Georgian Muslims that they attempt to commensurate in this post-Ottoman, post-Soviet time of a newly unfolding present.

## **Chapter 1: Absences, Gaps, and Desire: Batumi's Imperial Frontier**

### **Introduction**

This chapter begins with the idea of Ottoman Adjara, its place within the empire as a frontier land abutting the Russian and Persian Empires, at the edge of the eastern Black Sea region centered around Trabzon; as a site of banditry and smuggling, exile and transience; and Khulo as provincial center during the Ottoman period. I discuss the story of “reunification” of Ottoman Georgia with the rest of the Georgia under the Tsar, and assimilation projects of Tbilisi-based Georgian intelligentsia. I write about my encounter with Batumi today as “post-modern” dystopic resort city of fantasy, desire, and escape (gambling, sex tourism, construction boom) but also an urban center for locals (port, bus terminals, markets, universities, religious organizations and institutions). Finally, I describe myself as driven by desire—for a field, for anthropological knowledge—within a series of unfolding encounters and relations with others initiated by invitation issuing from their own desires in turn.

### **Ottoman Adjara**

Adjara is an autonomous republic in southwestern Georgia bordering Turkey to the south and the Black Sea to the west. Its capital is Batumi, a port city on the Black Sea coast. Conquered by the Ottomans definitively in 1614, it remained part of the Ottoman Empire until the Russo-Turkish War 1877-1878, during which time most of the population converted to Islam and many notables participated in the imperial structures of military, religious, and administrative power (cf. Meeker 2002). The negotiations at the end of the war granted Adjara to the Russian Empire, ‘reuniting’ this land of Islamized Georgians with the rest of historical Georgia for the first time in nearly 300 years.

Adjara was one of only two autonomous Soviet socialist republics (ASSR) granted autonomy on the basis of religious difference during the Soviet period. The history of this period is little documented and much debated, but at some point the local elite, followed by peasants, converted to Islam and both written and spoken Ottoman Turkish were part of daily life to different degrees. Indeed, even today many Turkish words remain in daily use in contemporary Adjarian varieties of Georgian in both religious and mundane contexts.

Adjara's annexation to the Russian Empire sparked a crisis of political identity in greater Georgia at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a period in which the discourses of modern Georgian nationalism were being written, due to the encounter of the Georgian intellectual class based at Tbilisi with the Islamized Ottoman Georgians, ‘long-lost brothers,’ who they had seen as an object of desire of their nationalist integration projects (Manning 2012). This brief period of Russian Imperial Adjara, ending with the establishment of the first independent Georgian republic, and then its annexation by the Soviet Union, witnessed as well the rapid growth and urbanization of Batumi, which up to then had been a small settlement with a population in the tens of thousands with an economy based on the small port. Once Adjara was taken by Tsarist Russia in 1878, oil from the Baku oil fields began to be shipped through Batumi to Europe, bringing exponential growth and attracting many new workers in an ‘oil rush’ for quick wealth (Frederiksen 2013, 33).

Manning (2012) demonstrates how the nationalist project of the Georgian intellectual class ended in disappointed expectations, not least because of the mass exodus of Georgian Muslims from Adjara into the remaining lands of the Ottoman Empire. In the years following Adjara's annexation by Tsarist Russia, huge waves of Adjaran Georgian Muslims migrated to the

Ottoman Empire, a migration known in Georgian as the *muhajiroba* (Megrelidze 1964). This native term adds the Georgian noun suffix *-oba* to the Arabic term *muhajir* meaning pilgrim, but with clear reference to the Hijrah, or the migration of the Prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina which marks the start of the Islamic calendar. As Marshall Hodgson points out in his classic study on the history of Islam, *The Venture of Islam*, the Hijrah allows for the possibility of something radically new—a new social and political order guided by the principles of Islam as revealed to the Prophet in the Quran (Hodgson 1974, 172). Many of these migrants, who referred to themselves as muhajirs in this Islamic sense, were settled in the regions of Ordu and Trabzon, in the eastern Black Sea region of Turkey, and their descendants form the majority of the Turks who have come (back) to Adjara as investors, developers, and businessmen (Oktay 2010).

In the context of this mass exodus, Georgian national identity came to be articulated against the Ottoman, Muslim Georgian as its negative definition. This moment also marks the (re-?)entrance of a Tbilisi-based literary standard of Georgian into the linguistic sphere of Adjara, replacing Ottoman Turkish as the language of a non-local imperial elite. As Manning shows this is the moment from which Adjarians' Georgianness becomes a question and a problem. It must be determined whether Adjarians are to be considered Georgian, and that- in spite of, not in addition to, their being Muslim. This is an ongoing effort, played out in many spheres, from history and ethnology departments at Batumi State University to day-to-day conversations with Adjarians in which they are quick to disavow any affinity to the Turks or the Ottoman period of Adjarian history and speak vividly of the oppression their forefathers experienced under the 300 years of Turkish rule. The question of Adjara's Georgianness continues to present itself as a problem as well because much of the population, especially outside of Batumi in the villages of Upper Adjara, are still Muslim.

### **Contemporary Batumi as a locus of exile**

Since the fall of the Soviet Union and the reopening of the border with Turkey, the field of history, memory and religion has changed greatly in the context both of neoliberal capitalist development (Khalvashi 2015) and a kind of religious revival among both Christians and Muslims in Georgia with strong influence from both Georgian nationalist movements and political parties, and Turkish religious organizations and government investments respectively. Mathijs Pelkmans (2003) describes in great detail the politically contested field of public religious life following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of prohibitions on public religiosity. The role that Islam and Christianity each play in post-Soviet Adjara has much to do with political connections and local authority, and the differences between highland Upper Adjara, with its smaller towns and population more concerned with Islamic piety, and coastal Lower Adjara, with its stronger Christian political presence, are clear. Yet, intermediary spaces are created constantly, as with the several medreses and boarding schools located in Batumi, funded by Turkish groups, and attended by Georgian Muslims from both Lower and Upper Adjara. His ethnography draws from research conducted several years before the great wave of investment and migration from Turkey that happened after the Rose Revolution in 2003-4. It is after this period that the Turkish population of Batumi established itself, many of whom were descendants of muhajirs—Muslim Georgians who left Adjara after it joined the Russian Empire in 1878 and were exiled to parts of the Ottoman Empire, a population I will have ethnographic access to due to my fluency in Turkish.

*Gurbet*, or exile, is a theme of much of Turkish literature, music, and poetry. It is a common theme of the lives of the many Turkish people in Batumi, both the business owners and the wanderers who come here for extended periods of time, leaving Turkey for some, often illicit, reason or another. “*Geziyorum*” they offer as an explanation—‘I’m wandering around, aimlessly’. What is now known as the Turkish neighborhood of Batumi, the old quarter, was historically the Greek and Armenian quarter, and is centered at the Ottoman-era Orta Jame mosque (Khalvashi 2015). Most businesses of this neighborhood are Turkish restaurants, small massage parlors, some of which double as brothels, and small casinos that pale in comparison to the large, higher-stakes casinos in the luxury hotels along the beach. The streets are populated by a small but consistent group of mostly Turkish men who live in a temporality of waiting—waiting for customers, for someone they are meeting, for the time to come when they can go back to Turkey and their *gurbet* can end. As Ozel Oktay writes, up to the Soviet Union and the closing of the border, the frontier at Batumi had long been crossed in order to escape taxation or interrogation for a crime (Oktay 2010, 487). Today, this fact of exile exists in two directions in Batumi—the descendants of the exiled Georgian Muslims returning from Turkey as patrons, investors, and religious authorities, and the Turks who come to Batumi to escape prosecution or simply to wander and indulge in the vices of drinking, gambling, and sex in a space of waiting and a time of aimlessness.

Stefania Pandolfo, in relation to her work on the field of memory and Islam in Morocco, writes of the Arabic *al-ghurba*, from which Turkish *gurbet* is derived, as estrangement, related to the direction of the west, *al-gharb*, and the “direction of alterity,” “the direction of time and forgetting” (Pandolfo 1997, 41). *Gurbet* is also the condition of possibility of language—an initial separation that allows the subject to speak “of” something, the separation of subject and object, but that however, in speaking, through the symbolic power of language, the absent object is made present, if deferred. This fact of speaking from a place of exile, from a space of alienation and separation, is also what is marked in evidentiality—the grammatical marking of one’s perceptual or mental estrangement from the content of one’s narration, from the subject matter of which one speaks.

The economic ramifications of this condition of *gurbet*, or exile, into and out of Adjara are evident in the growing and reestablished economic, political, and cultural connections between Adjara and Turkey. Ter-Matevosyan (2014) details the many points of economic cooperation between Georgia and Turkey, highlighting the special case of Adjara. He writes, for example, that between 2004 and 2014, 20,000 Turkish citizens of Georgian descent moved to the Batumi area and were granted or are eligible for Georgian citizenship (119). In addition, Turkey in the last ten years has funded the construction of more than 100 new mosques and prayer houses in Adjara. These relatively new relationships across the once-closed border between Turkey and Adjara bring to the fore interesting contrasts and questions as to the issues of Turkish and Georgian national identity and their basis, which runs variously from ethnicity and language to religion and migration in different constellations that crisscross in the cultural hybrid post-imperial space of Batumi and, more broadly, Adjara.

My understanding of historical witnessing and the category of the witness are informed by Freud’s psychoanalytic take on collective historical memory in *Moses*, in addition to Stefania Pandolfo and Cathy Caruth’s work on the at once impossible and yet pressing task of bearing witness to that which is beyond language. For Freud, this paradox of tradition, that it at one demands expression and yet can only persist by distorting its form and making itself unrecognizable, seems to depend partly on language, as he places importance on the narrative

transmission of the tradition of Moses, similar to the importance placed on language in much of his more strictly psychoanalytic work on dreams and traumatic symptoms. Pandolfo, in “Testimony as Counterpoint: Fragments in the Aftermath of Culture,” writes of the demand to bear witness found in the Islamic tradition, in which “being without witnesses is not a figure of speech. It is abandonment itself, beyond all relation, memory beyond any connection to language.” As Pandolfo points out, testimony is a crucial concept in Islamic law—witnesses must give testimony when summoned to do so. Subjectivity itself is dependent on others’ testimony—it is grounded by this testimony, “the fact that others will attest for me, and that I exist as a proof in their witnessing” (96-97).

Here, Pandolfo is writing of one of her informant’s compulsion to bear witness despite having lost her grounding that guarantees her subjectivity, an informant who, as a result of a family conflict, undergoes a psychic crisis and seeks to be healed through Islamic cures as well as in psychiatric institutions. A crisis of the self is, for her informant, a crisis in history that is traceable back to specific events she recounts in different ways throughout Pandolfo’s time in the field. At one point, the only way she is able to bear witness to her crisis of self is through song, and Pandolfo analyzes her verse for the ways in which it is able to make space for a new kind of voice that, in its immediateness, opens up the possibility for a new kind of subjectivity to be born from the crisis.

Cathy Caruth, in her book *Unclaimed Experience*, is interested in trauma and the encounter the Lacanian concept of the real as foundational for any sense of history. Interestingly, Caruth argues that the encounter with the radical alterity of the ‘real’ can *only* be indirect, since for her an event is traumatic not because one has experienced it, but rather because one has ‘missed’ it and does not experience it as integrated in conscious, chronological time. Instead, one experiences it *indirectly* in the unconscious, a realm that is not assimilable to historical, chronological, secular time and is rather the time of the divine—a time outside of time itself.

I treat the linguistic acts of speaking and narrating as acts of bearing witness, through which the speaker configures a web of indexical relationships between herself, the material narrated, her audience, the time of speaking, the time of the events narrated, and the mode of access she has to these memories.

## **The City as Archive, Locus of Desire**

*In mental life nothing which has once been formed can perish—that everything is somehow preserved and that in suitable circumstances...it can once more be brought to light.*

Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, pp. 16-17

Thus begins Freud’s exploration of the suitability of the Eternal City as an adequate pictorial representation for the preservation of memory in the unconscious. He writes that a visitor will see different iterations of the city walls, variously with gaps, being excavated, and intact. This visitor will find that only “ruins” remain of the most important buildings—their place taken “not by ruins themselves but of later restorations made after fires or destruction.”

And so we find Batumi, a marshy fishing village turned major port city of the Azeri oil boom turned Soviet resort town on the Black Sea. The city’s grid seems to begin at the harbor itself. From the old sector, one can see oil tankers docking at the port, and large oil storage facilities lie just beyond the ships towards the Batumi railway station. These streets are lined with small two-story homes and apartment buildings surrounding cobblestone courtyards. Many

of these buildings, moldy and with peeling paint, have small balconies on the second floor overlooking the street, and cats run in and out of the alleys.

The sole mosque in Batumi is located here as well, just a few blocks from the water. Known as the Orta Jame, Turkish for the “middle mosque”, this mosque was built in 1866, just before the victory of the Russian Empire over Adjara. It is the only surviving mosque from this era, and apparently was given this moniker because it stood between two other mosques on either side. The blocks directly surrounding the mosque are some of the densest in Batumi, and have casinos, massage parlors, and Turkish restaurants of all kinds. Many new ones opened and old ones closed during my year in Adjara. Once one leaves the direct vicinity of the mosque neighborhood, which is functionally also a red-light district, most of the people on the street are Georgians instead of Turks and Arabs.

The areas to the west and south of the mosque neighborhood bear the mark of the neo-classical architecture of the early Russian period, interspersed with Soviet-era apartment blocks dotted with colorful paneled balconies. There is a long promenade along the rocky beach, known as ‘*bulvari*,’ which is packed with tourists during the summer. Seasonal beach clubs which charge entry spring up out of nowhere once the tourists begin to arrive. The city extends southwestwards from the harbor, sleepy and rainy in the winter, alive and muggy in the summer, and the cobblestone grid continues, with Soviet apartment blocks beginning to outnumber the two-story homes the further southwest you go. At the furthest reaches of Batumi, approaching the airport, lies much of the new construction in the post-Rose Revolution boom, including a “new” *bulvari*. High rises and shopping malls are more common out here, and among this new construction lies the second Batumi mosque which has not yet been approved by the city and so congregants meet and pray in a makeshift structure covered with tarp in between parking lots.

From this southwestern most point in Batumi, one can either continue south along the coast past small coastal villages towards the Turkish border, or east along the road through Khelvachauri, past the many auto shops and wedding halls, towards the mountain districts of Adjara: Keda, Shuakhevi, and Khulo. I would come to know this road very well, the road to Khulo, during my year in Adjara.

## **Desiring the Field: Notes on Failure**

### ***The first invitation***

My research started from a moment of failure, in a sense. I had intended to do field work in Turkey, focusing on the use of evidential markers in historical discourse in Turkish, and conducted pre-field work in both Istanbul and Trabzon, a small city on the Black Sea in northeastern Turkey. It was during the month I spent in Trabzon in 2016 (coincidentally, it was the month that preceded the failed coup attempt that summer) that I took a week-long trip to the Republic of Georgia, crossing the border by land. When I walked around Batumi, I came across a street near the port with many Turkish restaurants with Georgian women outside beckoning me in Turkish to come in and eat. These restaurants were scattered among other businesses targeting Turkish tourists: namely, as I mentioned above, brothels and casinos, with the Orta Jame as a central focal point. At the time, I figured it might be an interesting alternative site for fieldwork in case the Turkey thing fell through, but I didn’t think too much about this then.

As part of the long aftermath of the failed coup attempt of the summer of 2016, a Turkish employee of the American Consulate in Istanbul was arrested on suspicions of being a Gülenist and having ties to the coup effort, in October of 2017, just as I was in the middle of a research visa application to conduct my dissertation field work in Turkey. In retaliation for this arrest,

Trump suspended all visas to Turkish citizens, and Erdogan responded in kind. After this visa freeze, I was unable to receive any response from the Turkish Consulate and was left without a visa or even perhaps any active application at all.

My fleeting project idea on a spontaneous trip the same summer of the coup became my way out—the solution to the sudden impossibility of my project in Turkey. I figured I would study the same thing? Georgian had similar grammatical features to what I was interested in in Turkish, after all, and I assumed I could spend time with the Turks in Batumi and see what that was all about.

Of course, failure is in the eye of the beholder... what seem to be failures at first glance can actually contain the seed of a research breakthrough, leading to what we might call “accidental findings, gaps, tricksters and hackers.” The failure of an expectation to manifest, of the progression of historical-time towards its telos... which can also act as the catalyst for a new trajectory to form, a new beginning, a new concept.

So I went to Batumi in the beginning of November 2017 with little more than an intuition to hang out in the Turkish area I’d come across before. I spent this first month working on my Georgian with a grammar book I’d brought from home, just in case. I would spend my days at a café going through grammar lessons, reading articles on Georgia to orient myself on previous work in anthropology on the area, and watching TV in my drab apartment on one of the main squares.

I also ate many meals this first month in one of the Turkish restaurants in the area around the port and the mosque—the area I had encountered before where there are many Turkish men hanging around going to Turkish cafes, small casinos, and Thai massage parlors—the area in which I had placed my fieldwork hopes and fantasies, my desire for a field. I was verging on desperation to cling to a Turkish-focused project as a kind of logical continuation of what I had been working towards during graduate school, a project focused on the use of evidentiality in historical narratives, but now about the contentious Ottoman legacy of Batumi and perhaps Turkey’s purported irredentism and other forms of soft power. A sense of desperation to prevent that project idea from definitively resulting in failure, even though it had been geopolitically derailed and I now found myself in this sleepy port town in Georgia, so close and yet so far from Turkey.

I soon learned that the world around Ottoman-era mosque in Batumi mostly revolved around two things: sex tourism and gambling. Most Turks there were either men who crossed the border from the northeast of Turkey for the weekend or just a night to drink, gamble, and have sex; or they were fugitives of the law in Turkey and were waiting around in Batumi until they could return home, killing time by drinking, gambling, and having sex. The setting felt seedier than I had expected, but I decided to give it a shot since it was interesting in its own way, even if it was far from what I had gone there intending to study. In a sense, I forced myself to want to study this because it seemed to be the only way of not letting my previously planned project fail, of somehow completing it, even if in an altered form.

A friend came to visit near the end of November, we toured in buses and vans around Georgia a bit, and upon my return to Batumi I met a young man named Mete, who would lead me to my first great failure in the field itself. I got off the minibus after dropping my friend off at the airport, and as I was walking from the bus stop to my apartment, I decided to pass through the Turkish neighborhood around the Batumi mosque and have some Turkish food for dinner. It was a typical winter day for Batumi—a drizzly mist sat over the city, pierced by cold winds blowing in off the Black Sea increasing my discomfort.

I peered into a Turkish köfte shop and. I caught the eye of a young Turkish man sitting in the shop. As I walked away he came out to the street and asked me in Turkish if I had a light. I said I didn't. He asked me where I was from, I told him I was American. He said he owned a club and that I should go, and invited me to sit with him and have tea in the kofte restaurant. I immediately said no thank you I have to go home, and turned to leave. This is what I would've done without a second thought back home, but here in Batumi I was supposed to be doing fieldwork, and I thought to myself—hey, maybe this is an opening. It hadn't felt like I'd done any 'real' fieldwork activities yet, hiding in my grammar book and anthropology articles. I decided to go back to the kofte restaurant against my best judgment, and have a tea with him and see where it would lead.

The köfte shop was empty except for this young man and the old Turkish kofte chef. He said his name was Mete. He was from Trabzon, he said, the largest city in the eastern Black Sea region of Turkey, just a four-hour drive from where we were, and where I had conducted a bit of field work the summer prior in preparation for my year in the field. I thought it a fortuitous coincidence and tried to ask Mete more about his life, where he was from in Trabzon, how long he had lived in Batumi, why he had come there, but he seemed much more interested in talking up his club to try to get me to go. I even told him the name of the neighborhood I'd stayed in the summer before, but he didn't seem to recognize it. Instead, he gave me the card to his club, called "*Club Escape*," (in English!) located in a more recently developed part of Batumi on the other side of town. He told me that there were a lot of girls there, Armenian girls, Ukrainian girls, Azeri girls and Uzbek girls. He said beer was only 10 Georgian laris, or about 3 euros, and that money wouldn't be a problem. He gave me his number and told me to write him when I got home.

The next few nights Mete texted me endlessly asking me when I would go with him to Club Escape. He would text me pictures and videos from the club to entice me, offered to pick me up and drive me there himself. The club seemed really depressing, but part of me thought I needed to go if I was going to be able to get to know Mete any better—I thought maybe we could become friends afterward, or at least I could get an interview with him. I was also very nervous about what would be expected of me in such a club—would they expect me to pay a woman to strip? to pay to sleep with one of the women? I had prepared myself mentally to remain closeted in the field, but this was a dilemma I hadn't quite anticipated—an unexpected way in which I might have to prove my masculinity right at the onset of fieldwork.

In the end I decided to go, for the sake of the field. I figured I would never actually feel like I'd started fieldwork until I took up an opportunity like this one just to see where it led. After all, I'd learned in grad school coursework that one of the most constant things about fieldwork is its failure to meet expectations. I figured I should be open to wherever this relationship with Mete would go. On the advice of a friend, I decided to tell Mete that hiring anyone for sex work would cross ethical lines as I was actually there as a researcher from an American university...surely he would understand?

So Saturday night comes along and I tell Mete that I'll go with him tonight. I meet him outside a big casino and get into a minivan with two people in the front seats who barely register my existence--the driver says '*merhaba*' or hello in Turkish, and the woman says nothing. They are both dressed up and I assume they are coming with us. I try to start to talk to Mete about him, i ask him about his trip to Trabzon, his club, how long he'd been in Batumi (5 years), when he opened up the club (4 years ago). Mete speaks with the driver in Georgian, which surprises me—

my understanding had been that most Turks living in Batumi know no more than a few words and phrases in Georgian.

We pull up to the club. Mete says “*Bu benim,*” “this is mine,” stating again that this is his doing, his enterprise. I tried to clarify by asking “*sen mi kurdun?*” “you founded it?” and he says “*evet,*” “yes” and we get out and the other two aren’t coming with us after all and they drive away. We go to a booth and sit down. The club is small, with two main areas. On the left is a dance floor with some tables on it, and a large mirror covering one wall. Along two other walls are booths that are occupied by men who I assume are Turkish. The other half of the club has a few more booths, the cashier, and the bar. In the middle of the dance floor there is a lone woman looking directly at herself in the mirror smiling and dancing, dressed for a night out.

I order a beer. The waiter asks me where I’m from and I say I’m American. Mete orders a chip plate, a peanut plate, and a fruit platter, along with his own drink--a whiskey and Red Bull. I have a lot of things I want to ask him but we are sitting across from each other and the music is too loud so it doesn’t make much sense to talk. It’s as if they don’t want people to talk, the music is so loud. I notice another woman, blonde, has started to dance facing the mirror, looking at herself as well, and soon a woman comes out in a thong and a leather harness, an employee places an armchair in the middle of the dance floor and she dances on it, exaggeratedly, almost comically writhing on the armchair. The men in the booths are all looking at her. After her dance she goes to each booth one by one. When she comes to mine I’m not sure what to do so I just sit there trying not to look at her too much and smiling a little bit, trying to seem nice, trying to convey somehow with my body language that I was sorry for her, that I know maybe she was trafficked here, that I wish I could help her find something else, find a way back home, or something, that I wasn’t there for the fantasy that drew the other men there, but I didn’t say any of this of course and eventually she speaks into my ear in what I believe was Russian, I responded in Turkish saying I didn’t understand, could she please repeat, and this continued a couple times until eventually she said “money, no?” and I said no and she moved on to the next booth, in which sat a group of what looked like Turkish businessmen in their 50s or 60s.

She leaves, more women come out fully dressed, except at all times one to three of them were dancing facing the mirror wall and smiling. Men started to join them from the booths, but I wasn’t sure what any of this would lead to. One woman started to flirt and dance with a handsome younger man, but after just a few minutes of this she joined the rest of the women on the side of the dance floor, and the younger man didn’t seem to know what to do so he danced with another woman nearby until the same thing happened and he was the only one left dancing, and he too started to dance on his own, looking at himself in the mirror and smiling. Meanwhile, Mete had come and gone several times, talked with many people in the club, seemed to be attending to different duties of the business somehow. When he sat with me in the booth he was looking intently at his phone reading messages. I was somewhat relieved once I realized he probably wasn’t expecting much from me besides for me to have gone to his club and to pay the bill.

Eventually I decide I had stayed there long enough to fulfill my duty...Mete asks me if I want anything else, and I say no just the bill. I go to the cashier—he says my total is 460 lari (about 175 USD). Well shit, I think to myself—it all makes sense now, this was all just a giant scam, a racket. I try to resist: I ask to see the itemized receipt, i try to explain that actually the whiskey and Red Bull, which apparently cost 150 lari was not mine but Mete’s. “Who’s Mete?” the cashier asks, and i say well he was the guy who brought me here, he said this was his club, and I realize I sound like a big idiot and I’m just going have to pay. Another guy comes up and

asks me what the problem is, so I start to explain about Mete and he asks “and where is Mete now?” and I said i don’t know—after I told Mete at the booth that I was ready to leave, he disappeared. The man says well then, what’s the problem. Suddenly, two tall, broad-shouldered, pot-bellied men are on either side of me, pushing up against me and asking me what the problem is so I just pay so I can leave and go home. I give the man my credit card. He asks me where I’m from, I say I’m American, he asks where my American passport is, I say it’s at home and he laughs. He tells me his name is Ridvan, that actually it’s his club, and somehow gets me to sit down again at a table near the cashier with another beer, another plate of chips and another plate of peanuts. He looks at me in the eye and says “*Hiç Ahmet, Mehmet yok burada*: here there’s no Ahmet, no Mehmet...*Kimseye inanma*: don’t believe anyone.”

When I finally get home I see Mete has blocked me on WhatsApp.

It was so unclear to me what fieldwork was, and how I should go about “doing” it, that I forced myself to do things I never would have done in my normal life. Everything about my encounter with Mete seemed interesting and perhaps even fruitful, up until the moment in Club Escape when I realized Mete had disappeared and I was left with the bill. To me, Mete was a figure of possible opening, a potential for a relationship that would lead to “real” fieldwork. I decided to give him what he wanted because in turn, surely he would give me something I wanted. However, to him I was just another dumb tourist, but an American one with a fat wallet. All my worrying about Mete’s expectations of me as a man in his club, my fantasy of being outed for not performing masculinity properly, and my concern with not feeling like I would be exploiting him, leading me to decide to go to the club and hold up my end of this fantasy bargain in my mind, seemed so absurd in retrospect and I felt duped by my own eagerness to find a way “in” to the field—perhaps duped as well by the romanticism of such ethnographic scenes as Geertz’s famous opening of his article on the Balinese cockfights.

CODA: Over the next couple months I saw Mete a few more times in the streets of Batumi, only at night—he was always walking somewhere with purpose, looking at his phone. One time we caught each other’s eyes and I confronted him, shaking and nervous, stuttering my speech: “What happened that night Mete?” I’m not sure what I was looking for from him by bringing it up, but I felt like I needed some kind of justice, some closure to my fieldwork fantasies and hopes I had invested in him. He was a figure for my anxiety, my insecurity as a fieldworker, a specter of my imagined failure. He approached me and became my hope, my way to a project, to a purpose for being in cold, rainy, wet Batumi for the year to come. So I asked him, confronting my past fantasy: “What happened that night, Mete?” He said “what do you mean?” and smirked at me...

In late December, not long after this night transpired, I told a friend in Batumi about what had happened. He was furious on my behalf, and offered to help me get in touch with the police to try to recover the money that had been extorted. When I declined, he said he wanted me to interview with a relative of his who works for the local news magazine *Batumelebi*. The article<sup>1</sup> refers to an ‘American researcher’—I chose to be anonymous because I was nervous about someone reading it and tracking me down. I had this eerie feeling that I had bitten off far more than I could chew and was now reaping what I’d sowed in my wide-eyed eagerness.

## **From Failure, A Field** *The second invitation*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://batumelebi.netgazeti.ge/news/109488/>

In the wake of this experience, I felt defeated and frankly scared—I didn’t know how safe it was for me now in Batumi, if I would run into any of these people again or find myself in other similar situations that I wouldn’t be able to extricate myself from, in the name of following “leads” towards a field. For a month or so, I laid low and worked hard through my Georgian grammar, traveling to Tbilisi as well over Christmas. I ultimately decided to contact a Georgian imam that Tamta Khalvashi had put me in touch with, remembering that she’d said he spoke Turkish too. My Turkish would hopefully prove useful still but not in the way I’d anticipated.

I reached out to this imam, named Mahmudi, on Facebook Messenger. He was out of town in Istanbul but said we could meet when he got back to Batumi. We ended up meeting on a Saturday at the beginning of February 2018, on the street outside his office, just across Chavchavdze Street from the intercity bus station. I was having trouble finding the building number he’d given me, when he emerged from the sidewalk crowds towards me, a very tall and cordial man, and asked me if I was Ricardo.

We entered the apartment building where his office was, and in the dark stairwell a neighbor called to him to ask him to help her put a dresser in her van in the back courtyard. After this, we went upstairs to the office of his organization that focused on Muslim Georgian affairs, and he offered me tea and cookies. I told him about my research interests, about how I was interested in the present day remains of the Ottoman period in Adjara, and he was interested to see what I had found so far, and I said not much basically... I asked him about the *muhajiroba*—because he critiqued the idea that Georgianness and Christianity are coterminous, the nationalist idea that there can be no such thing as a Muslim Georgian. Mahmudi explained that it was Russia who was trying to encourage Muslims to leave so that they could clear out the area and take it over more effectively, but that eventually they were allowed to stay, unlike the Meskhetian Turks, just east of Adjara, who were deported by Stalin to Kazakhstan.<sup>2</sup>

Mahmudi said that he was the first *hoja* to go to Turkey and study *ilahiyat*, or Islamic theology, after the fall of the Soviet Union. He went in the mid 1990s and stayed for five years before coming back to Adjara to teach *ilahiyat* to other Adjarian Muslims. Most of the *hojas* and translators I would come to meet during my fieldwork were originally Mahmudi Hoja’s students. Mahmudi had founded several organizations over the years, fostering educational and civic opportunities for Georgian Muslims. During the time of my fieldwork, he held a weekly Quran reading group in Batumi for university students at Batumi State University. His organization also ran two boarding schools in Khulo for high school students, one for boys and one for girls, to learn the basics of Islam and the Quran, in addition to preparing them for the national university entrance exams.

Mahmudi invited me to dinner that very night at his family’s apartment in Batumi, not far from the “new” *bulvari* and the makeshift second mosque. He came to pick me up, and we drove towards the road to Khelvachauri, to a part of Batumi dominated by Soviet apartment blocks and parking lots. Once we walked up the stairwell of one of the apartment buildings, I met Mahmudi’s wife and youngest son. His older son was in Istanbul for studies. His wife made us my first Adjarian dish, known as *sinori*, or rolled pieces of lavash flatbread baked with butter and cottage cheese. I spoke with Mahmudi’s son in English, which was quite impressive, and Mahmudi told me more about the activities of his organization and the volunteers they’d hosted from around the world, particularly to help teach English.

After dinner, Mahmudi invited me to Khulo—he proposed I leave from Batumi the next day, taking a shared minibus, or *mashrutka*, with his son, and spend a week at the boys’ boarding

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<sup>2</sup> I will speak more about the specter of the Meskhetian Turks in Chapter 2.

school and help tutor English. The invitation took me by surprise, and I was elated as I'd been thinking about taking a trip to Khulo anyway to visit. It felt brash to leave everything in Batumi and head up to the mountains for a week the very next day, but I realized that the only thing I would really be leaving was the little routine I had made for myself to fill the hours, of studying Georgian, reading articles, and visiting a different restaurant or café each day. But as it turned out, I was running out of new places to eat at anyway! Mahmudi dropped me off back at my apartment and encouraged me to consider his invitation, and the next morning I accepted.

That Sunday afternoon, Mahmudi picked me up again, with his son in tow, and we waited along the road to Khelvachauri for the Khulo *mashrutka* to pass by. Mahmudi flagged it down, and his son and I boarded the already crowded, dark van. The drive would be about 3 hours, with many stops along the way—people getting off and getting on, others flagging us down to have the driver deliver something for a relative. The road is extremely windy and at some point my ears start popping, but it's too dark for me to see anything out the window. Eventually, it stops and Mahmudi's son tells me we've arrived. I grab my bags, and follow Mahmudi's son slowly through the dark courtyard, as it's quite hard for me to see. There is a lit entrance and I stumble on some rocks or roots sticking out of the ground on the way—it's too dark to tell what it was. Finally we are at the entrance, and we are welcomed by Jamil, Mahmudi's cousin and the director of the Khulo boarding schools. Jamil invites us up the stairs into his apartment.

I sat in the living room while his wife cooked dinner and the kids were tended to by his other young cousins. Jamil is the director of the dorms here, and he speaks Turkish too because he studied psychology in Mersin, after one year of Turkish lessons in Istanbul with a private tutor.. We spoke in Turkish. It seems most of the younger men who are at all involved in religious affairs speak Turkish rather well. He told me that the dorms offer tutoring from 4 to 9 in the evenings in order to help the students pass the university entrance exams, and that the students generally do quite well, leaving Khulo to study in Batumi or Tbilisi after finishing high school. The students all come from the surrounding villages, some from quite far away towards the Beshumi mountain pass. They generally stay for two weeks, returning to their home villages every other weekend. The students whose villages are too far for the daily commute to their local village school attend the central Khulo school instead, here in the town center.

After dinner, I slept in and woke up to the breathtaking, snow capped mountainous landscape all around us. The next day was Monday, and after school let out in the afternoon, the students slowly trickled in, settling in for their next two week stay at the dorms. I met many people that day who I would end up spending much of the rest of the year with, especially Rolandi, the English teacher, and Beto, who at the end of the week proffered me an invitation himself to stay in his village just up the mountain from the central town of Khulo, and who we will learn more about in the next chapter.

## Chapter 2: Accounting for Origins: Names, Narratives, and Ancestors

### Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed accepting invitations in a dream-like, postmodern urban dystopia of Batumi, at least as it first appeared to me. The experience with Mete at Club Escape really defeated me, and at the same time the writing was on the wall. I fell into the trap of my own desire. Through a second invitation from an imam, Mahmudi, I entered a different social world than that which I had encountered in Batumi, as a guest.

In this chapter, I attempt to use the rubric of the guest and the host, and the field obligations and expectations that ensue from this relation of hospitality, to explore the question of origins as figured by the multiple names of family lines. In the villages of Khulo, where I would spend much of the rest of my time in the field, people tell stories of ancestors who settled in this region from elsewhere, often seeking refuge, and who were offered land and livelihood. Ancestors who are originary guests, entering into relations of obligation and exchange with their hosts that grew thicker with each generation. Ancestors which have left their trace in their name and their land, giving birth to family lines that are crucial social knowledge today.

Here I tell several of these stories, tracing the stakes of narrating one's own origins, of telling a history of oneself in relation to what came before. I explore how the relations and the networks of kinship that arise from these ancestors' descendants provide a basis for narrating origins and beginnings, identities and webs that are remembered and memorialized in names of people, lineages, and places. I interpret these nominal geographies as an archive of events and of social ties forged through offers of aid, refuge, and prestige.

These small events of invitation, gift-giving, and hosting accrue in the long term and across historical rupture. Indeed, the archive they leave behind contains the trace of rupture within itself in its multiplicity and resistance to a logic—particularly in overlapping family names and crisscrossing lines of descent. In this chapter, I attempt to write from the place of the guest who, through a series of invitations, is given access and entry to arrive in a web of relations that themselves originate through the invitation and guest-host relationships, that make up the social world and field of memory of Khulo, Adjara.

I also seek to explore the idea of invitation as origin, and the guest-host relationship as figuring the foundation of a social bond that persists and takes root over many generations to form a social world. Rosalind Morris, in her book *In the Place of Origins*, points out that:

“For every tale of origin, there is an encounter with the absence of origins. For every image of first appearances, there is a vacancy. Invariably encrypted within the tales of commencement is the realization that the origin is not one, that there are only substitutions, displacements, and translations in their stead. [... The] consciousness [of change, of loss] finds difference in the place of origins, but seeks, compulsively, to heal over the breach of that original alterity by theatricalizing origination” (4).

In this chapter, I aim to follow Morris's intuition that the figure of an origin is but a patch over an absence or a displacement, a setting of a beginning where there is really nothing of the sort, a springboard to anchor the self in the face of its lack. How do origins get narrated and claimed across historical rupture, and even *out of* rupture itself, as part of that very rupture?

### The Guest and the Gift—an opening, a beginning, a field

In his book, *Of Hospitality*, Jacques Derrida interrogates the figure of the foreigner and their position as the outsider, the invited one, and the relation that follows from this with the

family providing hospitality, and with the law. The first of the two essays, titled “The Foreigner Question: Coming from Abroad / From the Foreigner,”<sup>3</sup> describes the unique bind of the foreigner receiving hospitality:

“the foreigner is first of all foreign to the legal language in which the duty of hospitality is formulated, the right to asylum, its limits, norms, policing, etc. He has to ask for hospitality in a language which is by definition not his own, the one imposed on him by the master of the house, the host, the king, the lord, the authorities, the nation, the State, the father, etc. This personage imposes on him translation into their own language, and that’s the first act of violence” (2000, 15).

We can see how already the question of the foreigner, the guest, is intertwined with the guest’s subjection to the law, to the State, equated here with the host, who provides asylum and welcomes the outsider across a frontier, into their private home.

In this way, the host is not the only one with obligations—the foreigner is implicated as well. Derrida writes that “from the outset, the right to hospitality commits a household, a line of descent, a family, a familial or ethnic group receiving a familial or ethnic group” to mutual obligations that are not limited to the individual (2000, 23). These familial obligations, through this contract-like relation, allow the two parties “to be called by their names, to have names, to be subjects in law, to be questioned and liable, to have crimes imputed to the, to be held responsible, to be equipped with nameable identities, and proper names. A proper name is never purely individual” (2000, 23). The pact of hospitality, between guest and host, foreigner and the law, is not a neutral one for it requires the naming, the enfoldability of the foreigner into the language of ‘this place here’.

Indeed, Derrida writes that the paradox of hospitality is precisely that it cannot be absolute without breaking its own law: “one of the subtle and sometimes ungraspable differences between the foreigner and the absolute other is that the latter cannot have a name or a family name.” Thus:

“absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner (provided with a family name, with the social status of being a foreigner, etc.), but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I *give place* to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names” (2000, 25).

From here, Derrida discusses the bind of hospitality. Can one be ‘absolutely’ hospitable if one is interrogating the foreigner upon their arrival in order to subject them to the law? When the host asks the guest to state their name, to identify themselves, does this limit the act of hospitality or allow it to take place? Finally, he outlines what we can understand as the dialectic of this relation: “does one give hospitality to a subject? to an identifiable subject? to a subject identifiable by name? to a legal subject? Or is hospitality *rendered*, is it *given* to the other before they are identified, even before they are (posited as or supposed to be) a subject, legal subject, and subject nameable by their family name, etc.?”

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<sup>3</sup> This is an attempt to express the ambiguity in the original French title, *Question d’étranger: venue de l’étranger*.

The Derridian field of mutual obligations that arc into questions of the law and violence, resonate for me with the Maussian conception of the gift. In *The Gift*, Mauss describes the idea of the gift as one of the central tenets of Maori law, as its exchange establishes a field of obligations between the giver and the receiver. He argues that “the gift received and exchanged is binding as the thing received is not inert. Even abandoned by the giver, it is still something of his. Through this thing he has a hold over the recipient in the same way that he, as its owner, has a hold over the thief” (2016, 71). What becomes incumbent on the guest who has been received, who has been offered a drink, a meal, a place to sleep, a wife, land to build a house on, in the *longue durée* of generations? The gift, received and exchanged, weighs on the both the guest and the host<sup>4</sup> as binding to each to the other, as creating a field of mutual expectations that can only be revoked or ignored by risking social death or ostracization. This binding gift is replete, saturated with the desires of each party, each aiming to extract or somehow benefit from the relationship that emerges, that must emerge, from the exchange. In this way, the gift acts as a conduit of desire, a vessel for a projected future together—it inscribes a futurity on the now through establishing obligations to be fulfilled.

*Brief note on desire and the danger of being caught:*

I am thinking with Jeanne Favret-Saada’s ethnography *Deadly Words* and the impossible demands made upon the ethnographer in her study of witchcraft in France: to have access, i.e. for people to speak with you, you must yourself be *caught* as well (and, indeed, you are caught)—as I have been in my fieldwork as well, as my interlocutors sought to locate me in a role (English teacher) and incorporate me into networks of obligation and hospitality that created debts and expectations which I could meet or fail to meet, with social repercussions following both instances. These “catchings” can be a kind of violence as well, as the ethnographer gets caught in all kinds of desires of the “other”...just as they are caught in my own—my own desire of the field.

Having access—in what sense of the term? Access in the sense of perceptual access, or disability accommodations for my hearing and vision loss, access in the sense of social access, relational access, or spatial access to sites that would “produce,” or act as archives of ethnographic knowledge, accessing another through a relation, accessing a place through seeing and hearing it, through feeling it and being guided by another, another for whom that place is home. Access first offered through an invitation, which calls for a response.

## **The Invitation**

Dzirkvadzeebi is a small village in the Khulo district of Adjara. Khulo is the last district as you ascend through the Acharistsqali river valley from Batumi on the coast inland into the mountains. The village is due north of the central town of the district, also called Khulo, sometimes *Daba Khulo*—meaning Khulo Town. It is just over 5 kilometers to the north, about a 15 minute drive on winding mountain roads, or just over an hour by foot through wooded shortcuts. The village has no singular entrance—by foot, a shaded, muddy mountain stream, *ghele*, marks the threshold from Zeda Dekanashvilebi to Dzirkvadzeebi. One rounds the bend and comes out of the trees into Burvili, the first neighborhood of the village. The other neighborhoods are Saqavreti, Tsentri “Center”, Kvemo “Upper”, Ikita “the other side” and Jalabauri. Each neighborhood is made up of seven or so homesteads, or *komli*, and each *komli* has two primary structures—a residential home, and a barn for cows. In addition, each household

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<sup>4</sup> It weighs on both the living and the dead as well, as we will see in Chapter 3.

has farmland made of up several potato fields, along with a small garden plot with other vegetables close to the house. The houses are made of sprucewood, built by hand, usually within the past few generations. A few houses in each village have recently been rebuilt with concrete. The village neighborhoods are quite spread out, and to get from one to another one must sometimes walk up or down steep paths. The school, clubhouse, and mosque are located in the central neighborhood, as is the house of my host Beto.

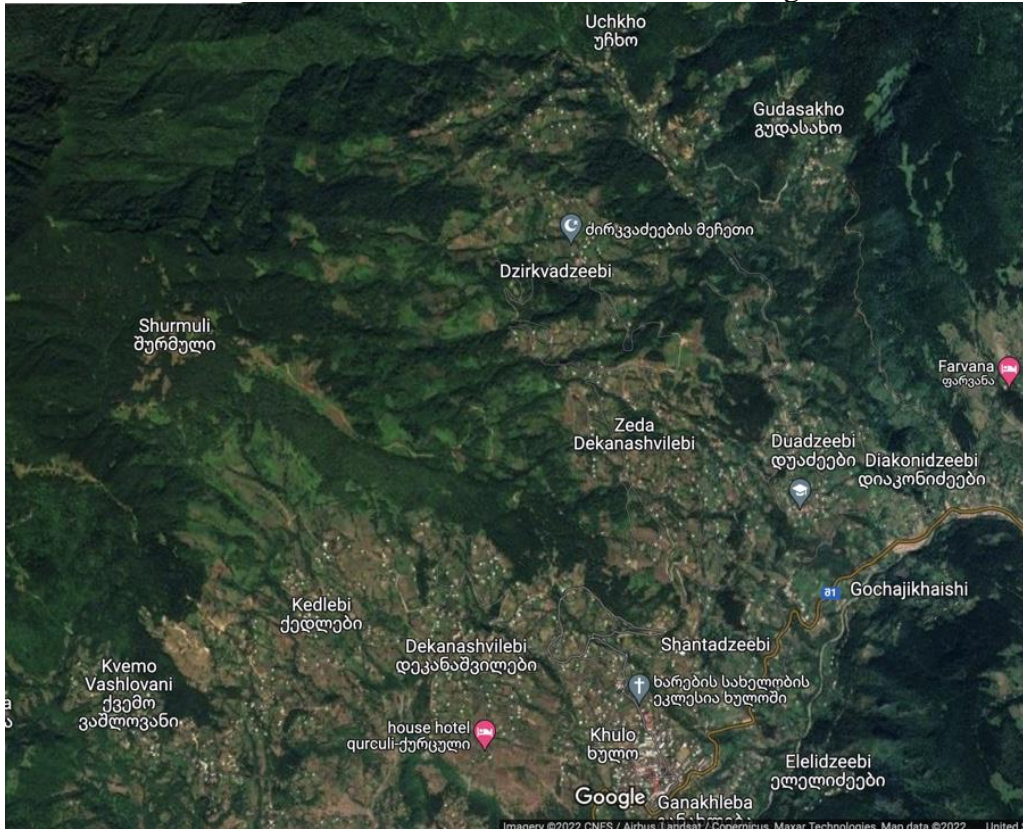
The village is centered around the school, a rather large, two-story building recently painted a bright orange color that starkly stands out against the snowy, bare forest rising up on the mountainside behind it. With one's back turned to the school, one faces Beto and his cousin's house, beyond which lies the valley of the Diakonidzeebistsqali river, a small tributary of the Acharistsqali. The land slopes downwards towards Uchkho, a larger village located along this stream at the bottom of this small valley. From Dzirkvadzeebi's school, Uchkho is not visible but as the opposite mountainside ascends, one small village can be seen across the expanse: Gudasakho, one of the highest villages in the Khulo district.

Looking across the expanse, a stunning landscape of rolling hills with dark trunks breaking up the white carpet, one is struck by the air—fresh, crisp, tinged with the scent of dung even in winter. The cold, cutting breeze is tempered by the warm smiles and excitement of those who have invited you there, your hosts. My host, or *maspindzeli*, was Beto, a high school junior who invited me to this, his village, for a weekend, after he met me at the Quran school, a boarding school for high school boys in the district center of Khulo. Beto would become my closest 'informant' in Adjara, as he was my host and I became his somewhat reluctant private English tutor (later Spanish too...).

The first time Beto invited me to Dzirkvadzeebi, I had just spent a week at the boarding school, upon a prior invitation, that time from Mahmudi, the founder of this network of Quran boarding schools, helping Rolandi teach English to boys and girls grades 10 to 12, in preparation for their national university entrance exams. A network of relationships (expectations and obligations) quickly formed in this node around me. At the end of the week, after taking up Mahmudi's seemingly whimsical invitation thinking it would be some kind of "lead" or "opening" to an ethnographic "site" after a rough first few months in Batumi (learning Georgian, trying to get to know Turks, the whole debacle with "Club Escape"...), Beto turned to me on the stairs of the boarding school and said to me, in his slow, deliberate English, "You will come stay in my village, ok? I invite you." I was ecstatic—here was my moment, I thought, my Geertzian entry to the world of the "local."

I had been to Beto's village a couple times already during that first week I spent at the boys' boarding school in Khulo. Rolandi, the English teacher, was from Dzirkvadzeebi as well (a distant relative of Beto's, I would later find out), and worked as the English teacher at the village school. We walked together one of my first days at the boarding school to the small school building in Zeda Dekanashvilebi, the first village uphill from the Khulo mosque. The small building, just four rooms, was a primary school attended by just four children from the vicinity. The small, wooden building, dark inside, was kept warm by a wood-fire stove, known as a *soba* or *pechi*, in each room. Rolandi would teach at this school a few times a week, giving basic English lessons to the four students—all in the first few years of school. Rolandi is clearly very excited to have me come with him to the school to help with his lessons, but also to show me off a bit to his students and colleagues. He has the students recite the bits of English they have memorized (I would learn later that his knowledge of English pedagogy was quite limited and he had instructed all of his students to repeat this same performance—a rapid-fire interview-style

conversation in which Rolandi asks the student their name, age, number of siblings, parents, parents' ages and professions, where they live, and a few other basic biographical facts). At this point, early on in what I would later come to see as a slightly coerced volunteer gig teaching English, I was quite eager and excited as well to try to help these students learn some English and improve beyond what Rolandi could teach them. My Georgian was also quite rudimentary at this point, so it felt like a relief to be able to speak English with Rolandi from time to time, in addition to Turkish with the imams and other teachers at the boarding school.



Screenshot from Google Maps, featuring most of the villages and towns mentioned in this chapter: Dzirkvadzeebi, Uchkho, Gudasakho, Duadzeebi (part of Okruashvilebi), Khulo, Dekanashvilebi, Kedlebi and Vashlovani.

## On Origins

In her ethnography of mediums and modernity in northern Thailand, *In the Place of Origins*, Rosalind Morris tells us that “for every tale of origin, there is an encounter with the absence of origins. For every image of first appearances, there is a vacancy. Invariably encrypted within the tales of commencement is the realization that the origin is not one, that there are only substitutions, displacements, and translations in their stead” (2000, 4).

I began to travel in between Batumi and Dzirkvadzeebi more and more often as the year went on. This initial stay with Beto’s family ended up lasting five days, even though I had only intended to stay one or two nights (a phenomenon that recurred in my many other times as a guest). About a month after this first visit, Beto had asked me to return to his village during a week-long winter break in February. This would be my second stay in Khulo, and I felt that I was more and more ready, both in terms of my Georgian proficiency and my confidence, to

explore my own desire and ask for more as a guest—I wanted to talk with Beto and his family more about their history in the village and the history of their lineage. During my first stay with Beto’s family, he and his sister Melano had told me that they were known as *Jinali Aghis Shvilebi*, or the sons of Jinali Agha. I didn’t know much at that point what that meant, since their surname as far as I knew was Tavartkiladze, but I was curious to learn more.

Manana, the Georgian teacher at the village school, was Beto’s *bidzashvili*, or cousin on his father’s side—his father’s first cousin. Manana’s father and Beto’s grandfather were brothers. She was unmarried, had no children, and lived alone in her natal home. She was her parents’ only child, and thus never married in order to be able to stay with them and care for them as they aged. They are now deceased.

Manana is a queer figure in the village, as she does not fill the expected role for a Khuloeli woman—she was never *gatxovili*, or married (literally “offered out”), works outside the home at the school as a teacher, and never had children. Beto and Melano often say they don’t like her because she is a harsh, unfair teacher, and because she comes over to their house almost every day, mostly to gossip and yell. She is also the person who Beto, Melano, and their parents told me to ask when I inquired about their family origins. Manana, in her queerness, is a holder of knowledge—a storyteller. Manana, during one of these daily visits of hers, about Jinali Agha.

It was mid-February—the dead of winter. Snow had piled up on the paths in the village, keeping people mostly at home. Many of the paths were not navigable by cars with this much snow piled up, and walking was the only way to get around. Manana came to visit often in the afternoons to have a coffee and gossip with Mzia, Beto and Melano’s mother. One afternoon, I asked Manana if she would tell me the story of Jinali Agha and the founding of the village of Dzirkvadzeebi. I recorded on my phone, and Beto tasked himself with writing down in my small field notebook every single word she said, until we both were brought into her tale and the notebook was left open and idle on the coffee table.

Manana began her story in very slow, careful speech, as if she had told this story so many times that she had memorized exactly which words to say, exactly how the story began and how it should be told. I translate her words below:

Today’s Dzirkvadzeebi is located eight kilometers away from the Khulo district [center]. Before, there was just impenetrable forest and no one lived here. At that time in Georgia, there were the *begis* [Ottoman princes, *bey/beğ* in Turkish]. In Imereti [a region of western Georgia north of Adjara and Guria], four brothers angered an Ottoman *begi*, and the *begi* threatened to kill them. They escaped death and fled down to Khulo and settled here.<sup>5</sup> One of the brothers worked as a *begi*’s stableman. The *begi* had a beautiful daughter who the brother fell in love with. The *begi* wanted this man to go away, so he said [unintelligible] This man (the brother) went and came up to this impenetrable forest and saw a stone [*kva*], an ancient stone underneath which water flowed out, and he understood this would be the place to settle. He constructed a small shack and began to live here. This brother sent a missive to the *begi* declaring his residence and asking for the *begi*’s permission to live here. He then had four children—four sons. One of them was named Jinali, and I don’t know the other three.

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<sup>5</sup> At this point, I asked her when this all happened, to which she responded: “I don’t remember the years, but it was long ago, it was during the time of the Turks’ rule. [*turkebis batonobis dros*].”

At this point, I ask where this stone is located and Manana and Beto tell me that it's just outside Beto's house! Later Beto shows me the stone, and sure enough there is a small stream flowing out from the bottom of this stone still, which is now located in a small, wooden, three-walled storage shed. This source, the purported origin of the settling of this village of Dzirkvadzeebi, is also the folk etymology of the village's name:

დორ - ვვა - ძე - ებ - ი  
 dzir – kva – dze – eb – i  
 bottom stone(?) son plural nominative

--Or, the sons of the bottom of the stone. This etymology, which Manana states in this story, and which I heard many times from others as well, is curious in that the word for stone in Georgian is actually ვვა “*k<sup>h</sup>va*” with an aspirated k, rather than ვვა “*k<sup>h</sup>va*” with an ejective k. This folk etymology is even more curious when one considers that the word *dzirkvi* (დორვვი) with an ejective k’ exists in Georgian as well and means “tree stump, stub or exposed root.” An associated verb with this word as its root is *amodzikva*, meaning ‘to clear a forest of stumps,’ or ‘to root out, extirpate.’ While this alternative etymology would certainly make sense, especially considering Manana’s two references to the “impenetrable forest” that was here before there was any village, this explanation was never offered to me, and instead I was told by many that the pronunciation of the village’s name had simply changed over time, from aspirated k<sup>h</sup> v to ejective k’ ვ.



Dzirkvadzeebi’s eponymous stone, now forming part of the base of a wooden storage shed. The stream that flows out from under it divides the land between neighbors all the way down to the valley below. (March 2018).

With this story of Jinali so far, Manana has established the undeniably Georgian origin of their ancestry—as Jinali’s father fled to Adjara from Imereti, a Christian region of Georgia in which Kutaisi, the historical capital of Western Georgia, is located. Jinali’s father, almost as if by

invitation of a local begi in Ottoman Khulo, settles this land at the water source found flowing out from under a stone. This stream flowing out from the stone, the putative origin of the village Dzirkvadzeebi, acts as a separator, a divider—in its status as source, it demarcates. Today, this stream divides the land between two cousins, both descendants of Jinali: Mohammedi, Beto’s grandfather, and Hasani. On one side of this stream lie Mohammed’s family’s potato fields, and on the other—those of Hasani’s family. This stream continues down the mountainside demarcating the boundary between other families’ land plots, until it finally flows into the larger river at the bottom of this small valley: the Diakonidzeebistsqali river, along which is located the village of Uchkho.

Manana continued with the story of Jinali:

Jinali stood out from the other brothers for being very principled and of high moral standing...He was of such high moral standing, that once when he was walking along, as he had to go to Bakhmaro [a mountain in Guria], they used to cross over to Guria and come back through Ghorjomi, and <sup>6</sup>he gets to a mountain and there is the Russian army, I mean the Turkish army of that time, and there were guards there, a frontier post.<sup>7</sup> And so supposedly he went over there and they spat at him, at Jinali. They spat at him and, how should I say this, he turned around and said “how did you spit at me like that?”—the guards were in a tower, you see, and he couldn’t go up there or do anything like that. He said “how did you spit at me like that?” and he turned around, lifted his foot, and farted at them.

In this story, the only one of Jinali’s life that Manana tells me and Beto, Manana shows how principled Jinali was said to be by telling a story of his harassment by a military outpost at the imperial frontier. It’s not quite clear whether in the end the military was Russian or Turkish in actuality—either way, it was an occupying force patrolling a border that limited movement between territories inhabited by Georgians. He was heading somewhere, the guard prevented him from crossing and spat at him, he farted at them in return, and they killed him, as Manana tells us after:

In other words, he insulted them. And these [guards] never brought out his corpse, and our Jinali is buried there. [Beto asks, confused, “They killed him?” and Manana responds, “They killed him, killed him with a gun there.”]

Manana doesn’t call him a martyr, but he sort of dies a martyr’s death, killed by the imperial army manning the border after insulting them. Jinali’s fart as some kind of resistance seems almost like something out of Monty Python, and Manana hedges and laughs uncomfortably as

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<sup>6</sup> From this point on in Manana’s story, all the verbs switch to the resultative perfective, which in Georgian is evidentially marked as connoting second-hand information or surprise, and is often used in indirect reported speech, or in narrative the veracity of which the speaker does vouch for. For a more in-depth discussion, see Chapter 4.

<sup>7</sup> Here she says *zastao*, from the Russian застава, meaning a frontier post or deployment. This would make sense considering the border between Adjara and Guria was the border between the Russian and Ottoman empires. The forest north of Dzirkvadzeebi towards this border is known as *Qishla*, and is sometimes used for grazing in the summer. This place name comes from the word for ‘military post’ or ‘barracks’ in Turkish (*kışla*).

she is about to say what he did, even asking herself “how do I say this?” He lies buried at the spot of his murder, as his body was never returned to Khulo. Manana concludes with the origin of their family name:

Jinali himself had four children as well. Before he was killed, those four children stayed here, of which one was named Ibrahim. When the Turks killed Jinali on Mount Bakhmaro, his children were given the *gvari*, or the erstwhile *gvari*: Jinali--Aghis Shvilebi [the children of Jinali Agha]. Ibrahim, one of Jinali's four sons, also had four sons: Talibi, Nuri Ali, Murtazi, and Omeri.

Beto interrupts here to tell me that Murtazi was his grandfather Mohammedi's father. Manana herself later explains how Nuri Ali was married to her grandmother, her father's mother, but Nuri Ali was killed by the Shavadzebi—the same people who killed Jinali, she says (she doesn't clarify this contradiction in her story, or perhaps the Shavadzebi manned the frontier post on behalf of one of the imperial powers). As a result, her still childless grandmother was “given” to Nuri Ali's younger brother Omeri and Manana's father was born.

According to this genealogy, Beto and his sister Melano are the fifth generation of Jinali-Aghis Shvilebi, and the sixth generation of descendants of the original settler in these woods where the village of Dzirkvadzebi is now located—Jinali's father who fled from Imereti to Khulo. Their house is still right next to the supposedly eponymous stone. Estimating very roughly, and taking this story at face value, if we assume each generation is about 20 years, that puts the founding of Dzirkvadzebi at about 120 years ago—somewhere in the range of 1900, 22 years after the Russian Empire reclaimed Adjara from the Ottomans in the Russo-Ottoman War of 1878. The family line of Jinali-Aghis Shvilebi would date back only to the killing of Jinali, sometime during his adulthood it would seem. The six generations that have elapsed since the life and death of Jinali Agha, inheritors to his name and propagating in his wake, would potentially only conceive of themselves as a kinline in the aftermath of the great rupture of the end of the Ottoman world in Adjara, and perhaps precisely in response to this very rupture.

A lineage born out of an act of resistance, born out of a killing by imperial powers, probably the Turks. I ask Manana when Jinali became an agha. She tells me that he was made an agha for the very reason that they [the Turks] killed him there on Mount Bakhmaro. What is the meaning of this lineage, or, as Manana calls it, *mashindeli gvari* and what is its relation to their official surname of today, Tavartkiladze?

Manana says in her story that their “erstwhile” (*mashindeli*) *gvari* is Jinali-Aghis Shvilebi. What does this mean? *Gvari* is “surname” in Georgian, and today Beto, Melano, and Manana's *gvari* is Tavartkiladze—a *gvari* shared by most of the residents of Dzirkvadzebi. Today, one's *gvari* is one's legal surname, registered on official documents and used in all public capacities, like school and work. It is one's public facing name, especially when that public is larger, predominantly Christian Georgian society outside of the Muslim Georgian world of Khulo.

So what is the status of the erstwhile surname “Jinali-Aghis Shvilebi”? What Manana calls their *mashindeli gvari*, or their surname of “then” (*mashin*), is known as one's *oghli* in common Adjarian parlance. These “erstwhile” surnames would have been adopted at some point during the period of Ottoman rule, or during the 50-odd years between Ottoman and Soviet rule. *Oghli* is of clear Turkish provenance: in Turkish, *oğul* means son, and many Turkish surnames

even today end in *-oğlu*, or “son of.” Michael Meeker writes that even in the late Ottoman period in what is now Turkey, Muslims very rarely had surnames and they were usually limited to local notable families who bore surnames often following the formula “*ancestor’s given name*” + *-oğlu* or *-oğulları* in the plural (*A Nation of Empire*, 2002). What is striking in Adjara today is that nearly every Muslim or formerly-Muslim Adjarian has an *oghli* that is still remembered, and still used in non-official, non-state contexts, and is a marker of kinship by bloodline as opposed to kinship by neighborhood, or by village origin.

In all of Adjara, most people have two last names. One is a Georgian last name that is registered in official identification documents. This last name, as is the case with Tavartkiladze, does not generally indicate “actual” kinship—rather, different Georgian surnames are usually associated with a village neighborhood. At the time when Adjarians en masse adopted Georgian last names, whole sections of villages, neighbors, adopted the same Georgian last name, while maintaining the memory of their Ottoman-era (or perhaps post-Ottoman, pre-Soviet era) family names, including the stories of the ancestors these family names refer to. These two different family names give rise to two different ways of talking about kinship, relatedness, and the entanglements that ensue therefrom.

As an example, two people with the same *gvvari* can marry, but they must not share the same *oghli*. In order to determine marriageability, they must know the *oghli*s of their four grandparents, and all four must be different from their fiancé(e)’s four grandparents’ *oghli*s. If they share at least one, they cannot marry (or it would at least be taboo) because they would be considered too closely related. Often people who share the same *oghli* will also bear the same *gvvari*, but not vice versa: many different, unrelated family lines today bear the same *gvvari* by virtue of their place of residence. For example, nearly all the residents of Dzirkvadzeebi share the *gvvari* Tavartkiladze, but among them are upwards of 14 different *oghli*s. *Gvvaris* come to indicate a kind of kinship that in practice refers to neighborliness, or the relation of being neighbors. As such, *gvvaris* are often associated with larger locales like whole valleys, villages or neighborhoods, whereas *oghli*s are associated with a small cluster of homesteads within a single village neighborhood.

Tavartkiladzēs dominate in Dzirkvadzeebi, and the story of this name, a story which coexists with the origin story of the *oghli* and the ancestor this patronymic refers to, is that it comes from Guria, and that when the forebears of today’s Adjarian Tavartkiladzēs adopted this name, they were actually “returning” to their original Gurian surname which was the one that went into hiding so to speak during the period of Ottoman rule. Guria, as mentioned earlier, is the region just north of Adjara—historically Christian and undeniably *Georgian*, always on the other side of the imagined boundary which makes Adjara feel ‘other.’ The two names index two distinct origins, two distinct possibilities of return.

The double naming system implies a doubling of kinship, of belonging, and of place of origin. At the same time as these family names act as mnemonics of kinship and origin, they also arc into two different temporalities – the temporarily of the rupturing of the Ottoman world, remembered as one’s *oghli*, and the temporality of/citizenship in the Georgian ethno-state, registered as one’s *gvvari*. In the next section, I will explore how this doubling of names allows for a multiply-temporal narrating of origins and belonging in a different section of the village that bears a distinct *oghli* and *gvvari* from the rest of Dzirkvadzeebi.

## **The Erstwhile, Ersatz Village Nobility**

In Dzirkvadzeebi, nearly the whole village adopted the last name Tavartkiladze, forming a group of neighbors bearing at least fourteen different Ottoman-era family names, except for one neighborhood: Jalabauri. This neighborhood is located downhill from central Dzirkvadzeebi, following the stream that flows from under the eponymous stone, just before one crosses a patch of forest to enter the next village, Uchkho, at the bottom of the valley. Jalabauri has about five houses, all with the *gvvari* Abuladze, as well as the same *oghli*—*Kibaroghli*. I was curious about the distinctiveness of this neighborhood’s family names, and set out to learn more from its residents. I would find that their nominal distinction belied a web of marriage alliances that tie them intimately to the rest of the village and its *oghli*s. Finally, I discuss the story of their *gvvari*’s origins, and analyze how these two origin stories coexist and generate a sense of multiple pasts coming together to settle in the present.

I came down to Jalabauri for the first time in June 2018, about six months into my field work, on the invitation of Donari, the history teacher at the Dzirkvadzeebi village school whom I had met and talked with many times during my days at the school helping Rolandi the English teacher. I did not quite know the way, and followed a road downhill past several homesteads, eventually crossing through a passage thickly overgrown with bushes and weeds out into a large clearing of wildflowers. I could still make out a path, and I continued to follow it as it wound back and forth down the mountainside, until I turned one last bend and finally came out onto another settled area. The first sign of life I came upon were graves, then potato fields, and then finally homes.

I asked one of Donari’s neighbors, Otari, which house was hers. Otari was the adult son of another teacher at the village school. He told me Donari’s house was one of the last ones in the row, and then invited me to visit him in his home afterwards. As I arrived at Donari’s front door, I noticed it was ajar. I peered in and didn’t see anyone, so I called out her name a few times. After the second time, Donari appeared in the back doorway of the living room—she was on the balcony tending to some of her several beehives. She invited me into her house and showed me the hives on the balcony, and I could see that her house, along with the other houses of Jalabauri, were on a steep decline from the pathway I had come on down to the fields behind the houses, which were at a much lower altitude as the mountain side flattened out into the Diakonidzeebistsqali river valley.

We sat in her living room while a Turkish soap opera played on the TV in the background, and she offered some snacks and compote. She told me about the founding of the Jalabauri neighborhood. Apparently, an older brother of a large family got married and was looking for land to settle on, as traditionally only the youngest brother stays with the parents on their land. He cleared some woods here at the bottom of Dzirkvadzeebi, and was the founder of Jalabauri. Donari told me that everyone in Jalabauri has both a unique *gvvari* and a unique *oghli* with respect to the rest of Dzirkvadzeebi: their *gvvari* is Abuladze, an extremely common Georgian surname, and their *oghli* is Kibaroghli. Donari tells me that *kibari* means proud or arrogant in Adjarian Georgian. Indeed, in Turkish, *kibar* means polite, or noble, and comes from the Arabic *kibār*, meaning “the big ones,” or “the noble ones.”

Donari tells me that she herself was born in Javakheti, the region just past the Beshumi mountain pass at the eastern border of Adjara. Similarly to the founder of Jalabauri, her father moved to Javakheti from Khulo in order to find land, as he was an older brother and land was scarce in the Khulo valleys. Her maiden *oghli* was Karahalioghli, while her *gvvari* was Shavadze,<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> I am not certain if Donari’s Shavadze ancestors have any connection to the Shavadzeebi that Manana cites as having killed Jinali Agha.

another common Georgian name. She explained to me that her predecessors took on the name Shavadze by analogy from their *oghli*: because *shavi* means “black” in Georgian, as does *kara* in Turkish. She told me that she lives here now, in Jalabauri, because she was “married here” (*gamotxovili*, lit. “offered out hither”).

She suggests we stop by a neighbor’s house—the grandparents of Lasha, one of the students at the school whom I’d met several times by then, because they were from Jalabauri and could tell me more about this neighborhood. Lasha’s grandparents invited us in, and we sat along with Otari, whom I had run into when I first entered Jalabauri, as the Georgian national news played in the background on the TV. At the time there were major protests against the ruling party in Georgian cities in response to allegations of corruption and the lack of justice and accountability in a murder case in Tbilisi that implicated the son of a former official at the Prosecutor-General’s office, and Lasha’s grandfather remarked that he thought the government should resign.

Lasha’s grandfather told me his name was Mehmedi, and his grandmother was named Gulbatoni. They are both from Dzirkvadzeebi as it turns out—Mehmedi was from Jalabauri, the same land plot of his current house, whereas Gulbatoni was from Central Dzirkvadzeebi, from a family line whose group of houses lie just past those of Jinali-Aghis-Shvilebi. This family line, as Gulbatoni told me, bore the *oghli* of Jibexioghli. She told me that *jibexi* was an Adjarian word meaning “lame” or “crippled.” They told me how they had been married for some 50 years, and that they met originally through a *shuamavali*, or an intercessor—here, a matchmaker, who sent Gulbatoni’s message to Mehmedi that she was interested in him. Interestingly, *shuamavali* is now the Georgian word used to refer to the Prophet, rather than the Adjarian word *peighamberi*, a borrowing from Turkish *peygamber*.<sup>9</sup>

This older generation of Dzirkvadzeebi residents often married within the village, but across village neighborhoods. Back in Central Dzirkvadzeebi, Beto’s neighbors two houses away share the same *gvare* as Beto, Tavartkiladze, but have a distinct *oghli*: Molakochoorghli. The grandmother of this household was married into this Molakochoorghli homestead from Jalabauri—her given name was Gulchichegi {from Turkish *gölçiçeği* or ‘rose flower’) and her maiden *oghli* was indeed *Kibaroghli* like the other Jalabauri residents.<sup>10</sup> I learned later that Gulchichegi’s mother was the paternal aunt of Mohammedi, Beto’s grandfather. So, Gulchichegi’s mother was Jinaliaghishshvilebi as well, and then she was married “out” to Jalabauri, and where Gulchichegi was born. Gulchichegi’s older sister was married “out” back to the Jinaliaghishshvilebi and is the late wife of Hasani, Mohammedi’s neighbor and cousin we met earlier.

Today, this kind of intravillage marriage and crossing of family lines is exceedingly rare, as most women are married out to other villages, where there is very little likelihood of marrying “back” into the family lines that one’s own ancestors descended from. However, at the same time, this closely spun web of kinship means that the sharing of Tavartkiladze as a surname of much of the village, even if a latter-day development arising from new kinds of statecraft and

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<sup>9</sup> For a deeper analysis of the practice of translating Islamic terms into Georgian in contemporary Adjara, see Chapter 4.

<sup>10</sup> Gulchicheghi was suffering from dementia at the time, and passed away soon after I left Georgia, in the beginning of 2019. One time when I visited her, she told me that it was the Molakochoorghlis who founded Dzirkvadzeebi, but this account was strongly discredited by others of the Jinaliaghishshvilebi line.

subjectivation under Russian rule, belies actual kin relations that obtain between the different family lines through generations of intersecting marriages and village co-habitation.

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Later that year, in October 2018, I visited Donari again in Jalabauri on a gloomy, rainy day. The paths were muddy and had become quite slippery. I had come down hoping to speak again with Lasha's grandparents, but they were not home. It turns out they were in Batumi because Lasha's mother was sick and was seeking care at the hospital there. Lasha, staying in his home alone now, was solely responsible for their cows, and he had told me at school that he was very busy now with both school and the homestead. At a neighbor's wedding the week prior, he had asked me to come visit his family in Jalabauri again, as I hadn't been in a long while. Unfortunately, he wasn't home when I stopped by, and his neighbor Otari told me that he had probably taken the cows out to pasture in the mountains above the village—quite a far way from Jalabauri below.

As Lasha was out, I decided to stop by Donari's house again, and was greeted by her husband Goderdzi. Donari was in the kitchen, and came in to say hello. Goderdzi worked as a policeman in Khulo, like Beto's father and many of the men of Khulo. Indeed, most employed men in Khulo worked as police or security officers in some capacity. The next most common formal employment sectors were education, and finally transportation. Goderdzi and I talked about his job and he lamented the amount of time he is away from their home. Donari prepared snacks and compote for us to enjoy while we talked.

Donari told me that the origin of the neighborhood's name "Jalabauri" came from an old Georgian word, *jalabi*, itself most likely from Turkish *çelebi* meaning 'gentleman,' or an educated and well-mannered person. Donari read the definition of *jalabi* out loud from a Georgian dictionary: "in Old Georgian, *jalabi* means a big family, *jalabi*. And from there comes the word *Jalabauri*—a big family, *jalabi*." This big family, as Goderdzi told me, was the Kibaroghli clan itself. As it turns out, the first person to settle in what is now Jalabauri, that older brother Donari told me about the first time I visited, moved from the original Kibaroghli homestead in Upper Dzirkvadzeebi, past the mosque and past where Rolandi the English teacher lived. Goderdzi told me how the Kibaroghli family once had a large wooden house there, where all the Kibaroghli brothers lived.<sup>11</sup>

With this story, Goderdzi narrates a kind of origin for this cluster of houses here, and their kin ties to each other, in addition to a few cousins who still live in Upper Dzirkvadzeebi, along with other cousins in *Ikita* ("that side," or "the far side") Dzirkvadzeebi, descendants of another brother who found land there and settled, in the most remote part of the village, furthest north and around another mountain, not far from the Babanuri forest where the men of the village go frequently throughout the year to chop down enough spruce to use for firewood to last everyone through the winter as there is no gas this far away from Batumi, in addition to sourcing fir with which to build houses and furniture.

Goderdzi then gives a completely different and separate story of the origin of their *gvari*, Abuladze. He begins by saying that this *gvari* comes from *Alme*, the local name of a village west of Daba Khulo (the central town) officially known as *Vashlovani*. Both village names come from words for "apple": Turkish *elma*, and Georgian *vashli*. As Goderdzi tells me, sometime about two hundred centuries ago, a woman from Alme was married to a Kibaroghli, into the original

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<sup>11</sup> This tale of an *oghli* line originating with a large wooden house on their original land but brothers having to move away and the eventual destruction of this large, wooden, originary home, seems to be quite common among the residents of Khulo.

Kibaroghli family homestead of Upper Dzirkvadzeebi. She and her husband were not able to have children, and so they adopted her brother's child, who came from Alme as well. This adopted son brought the name Abuladze with him, and his descendants today all carry the surname Abuladze, while the other descendants of the Kibaroghli line bear the surname Tavartkiladze—while all of them claim Kibaroghli as their *mashindeli*, erstwhile *gvari*, or *oghli*.

The old house of the Kibaroghli family was a big, black wooden house on the mountainside of Upper Dzirkvadzeebi, Goderdzi and Donari tell me. At one point, when different brothers were dividing up the land, and two *bidzashvilis*, or paternal cousins, came down and bought this land from its landowners who were in the neighboring village of Okruashvilebi. A few other *bidzashvilis* moved down the far side of the mountain, to Ikita Dzirkvadzeebi; some *bidzashvilis* have settled in Batumi. The two brothers who came down this way and founded Jalabauri, were two *dedes*—or ‘grandfathers’ in both Turkish and Adjarian Georgian: Goderdzi's grandfather, and Otari's grandfather. Otari's sister, Dali, was married to another neighborhood of Dzirkvadzeebi known as Saqavreti—the only such intravillage marriage I knew of in their generation.

The residents of Jalabauri thus bear two family lines that refer back to two different narratives of kinship, two different narratives of beginnings. Their *oghli* arises from a story of a large house from which all descendants issue, while their *gvari* arises from an adoption, an exchange, a sharing of kin through non-biological means. The first lineage, Kibaroghli, is a trace of another time, another empire, and another kin network that is no longer legible today in the logic of the Georgian state. The second lineage, Abuladze, is a trace of a non-biological gift, a transfer of kin, and a different origin from that of the rest of the Kibaroghli descendants who took on the Georgian surname Tavartkiladze. Indeed, Jalabauri is the only neighborhood of the village of Dzirkvadzeebi in which there are no residents with the last name Tavartkiladze. All five of the families are Abuladze, marking their descent from the adopted son from Alme / Vashlovani about two hundred years ago. Interestingly, it is this descent that becomes registered in the Georgian governmental apparatus of identity documentation.

What to make of the fact that the unregistered, “undocumented” Ottoman, or near-post-Ottoman, family name of Kibaroghli is the one inherited from the family adopted *into*, whereas the officially registered and documented family name of Abuladze is the one inherited from the family adopted *from*? One kind of kinship, one kind of origin becomes legible; the other is dissimulated. They become laminated with differing degrees of visibility, like a lenticular image (lenticular kinship?) according to which from one angle you see the ancestors and their descendants, spreading out from large, semi-mythical originary multi-generational homes, on the frontier of empire, both spatially and temporally; and from the other angle you see Georgians with Georgian first names and Georgian last names, a handful of which are shared by large swaths of neighbors, citizens of the Republic of Georgia. Like the adoption of the first Abuladze, these citizens were adopted by the republic and renamed, with origin stories from other parts of Georgia as they were folded into the citizenry of the nascent nation in the wake of the fall of the Russian and Ottoman empires...

### **Lexical Ghosts: Traces of Elsewhere**

I was in Dzirkvadzeebi and Khulo for much of Ramadan during 2018. I stayed alternately at the Mahmudi's Quran School at the Khulo mosque and with Beto's family in Dzirkvadzeebi. Generally, when I was picking up Adjarian Georgian, it was quite evident when Adjarian words derived from Turkish borrowings, following an assimilation into Georgian phonology. This was

the same for words associated with the month of Ramadan: Turkish *ramazan* was Adjarian *ramazani* (cf. Standard Georgian *ramadani*), Turkish *teravih* was Adjarian *teravihi*, Turkish *iftar* was Adjarian *iptari*. One word, however, was quite surprising: Adjarians called the morning meal before the beginning of the day's fast *yaslughi*. In Turkish, this meal is known as *sahur*, from the Arabic *sahur* or *suhur*.

I heard Beto's family members refer to *yaslughi*, as well as the students at the Quran School. The hojas at the school were quite amused when I began to use it myself, as they were whenever I used local Adjarian words in my spoken Georgian. However, no one I asked could give an account of where this word was from—it was simply the word they used for the morning meal. *Sahur* was not used at all in Adjarian. The word seemed to me to be clearly of Turkish origin, but there was no such word that corresponded that I could find in any dictionary.

The ending of this word, *-lughi*, features a common sound shift in Georgian words borrowed from Turkish: word final *-k* in Turkish becomes *-gh-* in Georgian, followed by the nominative case ending *-i*.<sup>12</sup> This points us to Turkish *-luk*. In Turkish, *-luk* is a very common productive suffix that creates abstract nouns from adjectives (e.g. happy: *mutlu*, happiness: *mutluluk*), or purposive adjectives from nouns (e.g. document: *vesika*, fit for a document: *vesikalik*).<sup>13</sup> In addition, *yas* is a Turkish word meaning “mourning” or “lament.” However, such a word as *yaslik* or *yasluk* seems not to exist in Turkish, at least not in any dictionary or in the knowledge of any native Turkish speaker I knew personally.

At the time, Turkish Airlines operated a daily flight between Batumi and Istanbul. One had the option, however, of booking the flight instead from Hopa, a small coastal town just across the border. For this flight from Hopa, you check in at a Turkish Airlines office in the Hopa seaport, and board a bus which takes you back across the border into Georgia, past passport control and customs, straight to the Batumi airport, where you go directly to check your bag and board the plane to Istanbul. Through this arrangement, you pay a domestic (hence much cheaper) fare. I thought myself to be very clever for figuring this out once when I was on my way to meet a friend visiting me from the US in Istanbul. I booked the flight from Hopa and planned to spend the day in the small town before I had to check in.

I took a *mashrutka*, or a shared minibus following a specific route, from Batumi to the border and crossed on foot, and boarded a Turkish *dolmuş* (i.e. the Turkish equivalent to a *mashrutka*) to Hopa on the other side. I was craving *mantı*, or Turkish dumplings, and found a restaurant in the center that specializes in them. There, I met a man, Enver, who was also having lunch and we made conversation about who I was and what I was doing both there and in Batumi. He told me that he too was Georgian—he lived in Hopa but was from Borçka, a village inland from Hopa and one of the few regions of Turkey along the Georgian border where Georgian is still spoken natively. Indeed, Georgian nationalist irredentists claim this region, known to Turkey as Artvin, as being part of the historical Georgian region of Tao-Klarjeti, also known as Zemo Kartli, or Greater Meskheta.

Enver invited me to visit him and his family one day in Borçka, and we exchanged numbers. I was never able to make it to Hopa again, but when I was mulling over the possible origins of *yaslughi*, I texted him to ask what word he uses for the morning Ramadan meal. He said that in Turkish, they say *sahur*, but that in the Georgian village they call it *sevrur*. I asked if

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<sup>12</sup> Another such example is Turkish *kaymak*, or ‘cream,’ borrowed into Adjarian as *kaymaghi*.

<sup>13</sup> As in most Turkish suffixes, the vowel changes according to the phonological rules of vowel harmony. *-lik* can surface as *-lik*, *--lık*, *--luk*, or *-lük* depending on the final vowel of the preceding syllable.

he had ever heard of *yaslughi*, and he replied “ah yes my paternal grandmother used to say *yasluğ*”, spelling it with the Turkish “soft g.” How interesting, I thought, but I could not find this word anywhere else. I knew now that the word was not limited to Adjara, and that in Georgian-speaking villages across the border in Turkey it was used by older Georgian-speaking generations as well. What itineraries this word bore witness to remained as yet unclear and inscrutable.

In the continuation of my fieldwork, as Ramadan ended, this word slipped from the forefront of my mind and I quite forgot about it. I forgot about it, that is, until about three years later when I came upon it again in my notes while working on one of the other chapters of this dissertation. My ambition to come to the bottom of this mystery word returned. After many fruitless Internet searches, the idea suddenly came to my mind that perhaps this word was from Meskhetian Turkish.

Meskheti is a historical region of southwestern Georgia, located just eastward and inland from Khulo, over the Beshumi mountain pass. Meskheti, today part of the Samtskhe-Javakheti state of Georgia, was once home to Georgians, Turks, Armenians and Kurds. The Turks of this region, who mostly identify as Ahiskan Turks,<sup>14</sup> from the Turkish pronunciation of the Georgian city Akhaltsikhe, speak an eastern Anatolian dialect of Turkish closely related to that of Kars. These Turks claim descent from medieval Ottoman settlers of the region, and, like Adjarian Muslims, practice Sunni Hanafi Islam. During Stalin’s rule, Ahiskan Turks were deported mostly to Kazakhstan as their loyalty to the Soviet Union was considered suspect, and many Adjarian Muslims settled in the villages they left behind.

In any case, I found several small glossaries of Meskhetian/Ahiskan Turkish<sup>15</sup> online, and lo and behold, one of them featured both *sevir* and *yasluğ* as words meaning Turkish *sahur*. These glossaries also featured many of the other words commonly found in Adjarian Georgian that I had assumed to be borrowed from Turkish. Perhaps not ultimately surprising, but this discovery shook up the assumptions I had made about language contact and imperial life under Ottoman rule. I thought of the stories of marriages and adoptions across family lines and villages creating a multiplicity of crisscrossing ties and obligations. I thought of practices of migration and labor and resource allotment on both sides of the Beshumi pass, and hundreds of years of contact between these two communities of Sunni Muslims, one speaking Georgian the other Ahiskan Turkish, and wondered about the degrees of multilingualism and the porousness of identities rooted in notions of difference based on language, ethnicity, and nationality.

The existence of the word *yaslughi* in everyday spoken Adjarian Georgian belies the multiply layered contact with Turkish, as Adjarians would have had contact with imperial, written Ottoman Turkish, Istanbul-based varieties of spoken Turkish which are much closer to today’s spoken standard, and Ahiskan Turkish spoken in villages across the mountain pass. Each of these kinds of contact would have occurred in very different spheres of interaction and language use. While local notables may have had a command in reading and writing documents in the highly Arabic- and Persian-inflected Ottoman Turkish, most villagers would have had more daily contact with spoken Ahiskan Turkish, an Eastern Anatolian variety. Villagers in Khulo and other parts of Adjara may even have intermarried with Ahiska Turks, forming an intricate web of kinship networks on both sides of the Beshumi pass, not unlike the networks seen in Donari’s own story of having been born and raised in historical Meskheti by displaced

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<sup>14</sup> In Turkish, *Ahıska Türkleri*

<sup>15</sup> In Turkish, *Ahıska Türkçesi*

Adjarians who had settled an old Ahiskan Turkish village, only to return to Khulo through an alliance of marriage between two families.

A whole world indexed by a single word, embodying a trace of what is today disavowed—an intimate meshing with Turks (probably this is precisely the reason for contemporary Adjarians’ strident disavowal of any cultural or historical identification with the Turks). It strikes me as well that this uniquely Ahsikan word remains to describe a meal taken only one month of the year in extreme domesticity—*yaslughi* is so early in the morning that there are usually no guests who come for that meal, barring longer-term guests visiting from farther afield, like me. Echoing the histories of names of people and lineages, the biography of words also gives their origo, bearing witness to an itinerary along the way to the present, even as these origins and itineraries are dissimulated and forgotten.

### **Kinship without an *oghli***

One morning when Beto and Melano were already at school, I asked their mother Mzia about her *oghli*. I had remembered that she told me once, early on in my fieldwork, that she didn’t have an *oghli*. At the time I thought little of it, but this fact became more striking to me over time as I learned how nearly universal it was to have an “*oghli*”-style family name. In addition, a cousin of hers named Suliko, who we will meet in Chapter 3, told me he didn’t have an *oghli* either. The day before, I had been visiting with neighbors who shared Beto’s *oghli*, Jinaliaghissvhilebi, and met a woman from Mzia’s village. This woman told me her *oghli*, Ali-Babu-Shvili, and mentioned in passing that Mzia and her family didn’t have an *oghli*. After this interaction, I decided to ask Mzia directly about her family and why they didn’t have an *oghli* when it seemed everyone else I met in Khulo did.

That morning I told Mzia how I had met this woman from her village and asked her *oghli*. As I was saying “Ali...,” Mzia interjected with “Ubuanki?” I struggled to understand what she was saying and thought I had misheard. Mzia was confused and said “She would’ve told you ‘Ubuanki.’ What *oghli* did she tell you? I said “Ali-Babu-Shvili.” Mzia became pensive. “Ali-Babu-Shvili? You sure she didn’t say Hojishshvili?” I said no. “She didn’t say Hojishshvili? Or Ubuanki?...I don’t know Ricardo. That’s how I know them, as Ubuanki.”

This wasn’t the first time that someone’s own report of their *oghli* differed from what others knew their *oghli* to be. Perhaps then *oghli*s are socially determined, not necessarily solely inherited. Or perhaps some names are given to one’s own line which sound more official or like a lineage (“Ali-Babu-Shvili”) as opposed to a kind of nickname, perhaps given by others (“Ubuanki”).

I told Mzia that this woman mentioned to me also that Mzia’s family didn’t have an *oghli*. For this guest, Mzia’s family’s lack of *oghli* was something noteworthy, something to tell a visiting researcher about—it was a salient social fact. I asked Mzia about this, and she said it was true, that her family didn’t have an *oghli*. As far as their *gvari*, they were Shavadze. She then said that Shavadze was both their *gvari* and their *oghli*. When I asked her why her family, along with her *taianti*, or mother’s brother’s son, Suliko, had no *oghli*, she said that it was because her family were “*mosulebi*”—a perfective participial adjective derived from the verb *mosvla* meaning “to come.” They had come from elsewhere; they were more recent arrivals to Khulo. She said her family had come from “that place, what’s it called...from Akhaltsikhe.” Akhaltsikhe, as we saw above, is the purported origin of the Ahiska Turks: the city of Akhaltsikhe, in Georgian meaning “new fortress,” was “Ahiska” to the Turkish ear.

Mzia continued: “We are a small family, the Shavadzeebi. There are only about six households of us, all in Duadzeebi [a neighborhood of Okruashvilebi, near where Suliko and his family line live, the Kochalidzeebi, who we will meet in the next chapter]. We are small because we are *mosulebi*.” I asked her when they came to Khulo from Akhaltsikhe, and she said she didn’t know. She interspersed “*ra vitsi*”, “What do I know?”, a lot into our conversation, hedging most of the things she said about the story of ancestors and her family line lacking an *oghli*. She then said, “earlier, earlier [a long time ago], you know, my great-grandfather would say his own great-grandfather had come from Akhaltsikhe.” According to this narrative, Mzia’s family line would have arrived in Khulo four generations back, some 80 to 100 years ago. After this, she says again that the neighbor’s guest was right to say that Mzia’s family has no *oghli*, but she insists: “We are Shavadze. That is who we are, we have come [from somewhere else].”<sup>16</sup>

Shavadze is an extremely common surname, and I ask her about this: “But there are a lot of Shavadzes!” She is quick to respond: “Yes of course! in Gudasakho, in Uchkho especially there are many. But they are not ours, they are not our *gvare*.” She implies here that despite sharing the same *gvare* of Shavadze, there is a difference between her family line, as they came later to Khulo and have no *oghli*, and those who claim some kind of origin to this area and to an *oghli*-marked family line, like Donari Shavadze who we met earlier. All of this complicates the idea of *gvare* and what it represents—as it turns out, it is much more than a secondary name adopted by a group of neighbors. In Mzia’s case, in the absence of any *oghli*, it becomes the primary name of her kinline and as such she must distinguish *her* Shavadzes from the others.

### **The Specter of Iskender Ependi: Ottoman Imperial Ancestral Prestige**

In this section, I discuss the story of Iskender Ependi, an exemplary ancestor of the Jinaliaghishshvilebi clan, whose story bears witnesses to other lifeworlds, the world of Ottoman Adjara and its connection to the metropole, Istanbul, through religion, education, and marriage. The story of Iskender Ependi was first told to me by Manana, then repeated by others, narratively figuring the resumption of an imperial space-time in the present post-Soviet capitalist landscape through the trend of seeking education in Turkey and the contemporary role of the *hoja*. Iskender Ependi’s story of return, death, and burial in Adjara ultimately binds him to this land after a life of wandering the “well-protected domains.”

On that same snowy winter day that Manana told us about Jin Ali Agha and the founding of Dzirkvadzeebi so many generations ago, in a past under Ottoman rule, she mentioned in passing someone named Iskender Ependi, and then stopped herself, saying that was a whole other story. My ears pricked up, as this name felt so out of place or, perhaps more accurately, out of date. Ependi, the Georgian pronunciation of the common Turkish title *Efendi*, was striking to me, as did the common Turkish name *Iskender*, from the Greek Alexander.

Manana asked Beto if I was interested in hearing about Iskender Ependi, and Beto said to me “You know, Iskender Ependi was in Turkey.” I turned to Manana and asked her who Iskender Ependi was. “You remember how Jinali Agha had four sons? Well one of those sons was Gulai, and Iskenderi was one of Gulai’s sons.”

Manana continued: One day, Iskenderi, who was a well-known and well-respected *hoja*, or religious teacher, up and went to Turkey to pray. As I said earlier, Jinali Agha and his descendants were known to be of very high principles. While he was living there, a *pasha*—not a *begi*, but a *pasha*! Higher than a *begi*!—offered him his daughter in marriage. When Iskenderi was leaving the mosque one day after Friday prayers, he saw his new wife out and about in a

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<sup>16</sup> *Mosulebi vart*—or, “we are those who have come.”

phaeton!<sup>17</sup> He went home and wrote a letter [to the pasha] that he was coming back to Adjara because someone had just died, and he returned by sea. He arrived in Kobuleti [just north of Batumi on the coast]. Then, that pasha sent people off to Adjara in pursuit of Iskenderi to bring him back to Istanbul. Iskender wrote a second letter to his wife, saying that he didn't need a wife who went around town in a phaeton. He sent someone to deliver this letter, and stayed in Kobuleti.

At around this time, a ship arrived at the border in Batumi—a ship from Turkey that turned out to be the pasha's ship. Word spread that the pasha was coming. The pasha had mercenaries and spies, as everyone did back then, and they informed him that Iskenderi was in Kobuleti. The man who was sheltering Iskender told him, I will save you if you marry my daughter. Iskender told him, I will marry her. Then, Iskender's father-in-law dug out a big hole, as if for a grave.

The army came to the family's house, and Iskenderi hid. The army came to the door and this man [Iskenderi's host] came out and told them, "Yes, he came here but he was very sick and died right there. The grave is dug there, if you want you can dig it out." Now, the Turks didn't dig the grave out, they didn't dare. The Turks turned and left. After this, Iskender spent a few years in Kobuleti, but never had a child there.

It was after that that the Communist Regime came in [to Kobuleti] and began to persecute the Muslim way of life. They began to forbid prayers and reading [the Quran]. Iskender escaped from Kobuleti to seek refuge in Keda [inland from Batumi towards Khulo]. In Keda he also got married, which would be his third wife. He stayed there for some time and had two children, and later this wife left him, and now, you know who they are, in Chelta [village near Batumi], Osman Ependi, and some others, they're from this family line.

He fled from there and came up here to Khulo, leaving his home and family. When he came up here, people from Ghorjomi [a cluster of villages over a mountain pass from Dzirkvadzeebi] came down and told him "we will give you land, we will give you a woman," and he went up and settled in Ghorjomi.<sup>18</sup> He settled in Ghorjomi and they gave him a house, land, water, everything, and he began to live there. He began his hoja career there [as well]. He was a hoja there, Iskender Ependi. He had one son and five daughters: Seniye, Berine, Mubini, Meriemai, and I forgot [the other daughter]. Iskender Ependi's children.

Mahmudi Hoja [the head of the organization that runs the Quran Schools which I write about in Chapters 1 and 4] is our relative and [his] paternal aunt is Iskender Ependi's and [Beto's] grandfather Muhammedi's relative. Muhammedi's mother's brother's son is Mahmudi Hoja—his *taishvili* [from Adjarian *taia* meaning mother's brother, from the Turkish *dayı* of the same meaning.]

When he had Muhammedai [his sole son], during that time Iskender Ependi died and they carried him up and buried him above the mosque—he's buried in Ghorjomi. He and his wife [*xanumi*] both. They had Muhammedai, and Muhammedai himself has four daughters and one son: Ghuzedini, whom you've probably heard of. Ghuzedini and four daughters. This

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<sup>17</sup> The verb Manana uses here, *gulaobs*, has a very interesting and revealing dictionary entry: "(man) lives it up; (woman) sleeps around."

<sup>18</sup> In Georgian, verbs of motion require a prefix that indicates direction, including up or down, and away from or towards speaker and addressee. The prefixes for up or down used in each context is determined by whether the motion is up or down a mountainside. Since Ghorjomi is higher in elevation than Dzirkvadzeebi, one "goes up" to Ghorjomi, and "comes down" to Dzirkvadzeebi. I try to keep these vectors in my English translation here.

Muhammedai, they all left him there, they up and left—it was the *muhajiroba* then. They went to Turkey to work. They went with some cousins from here and left. One is in Inegöl, another is in Qezeli [not sure what place in Turkey this refers to]. Ghuzedini went there, married a woman from there, and began to live there. Ghuzedini left his father [*babu*] in Ghorjomi, and had [in Turkey] two sons and one daughter.

I asked Manana about when their last name changed from Jinaliaghishshvilebi to Tavartkiladze. She responded: “We became Tavartkiladze during the Communist period, because it was forbidden to bear Turkish *gvaris*. The Turks were banished and all of Adjara adopted Georgian *gvaris*... Before the Communists we were Jinaliaghishshvilebi, and after the Communists we adopted the *gvari* Tavartkiladze, and we also adopted Georgian first names. See Muhammedai sitting over there, Beto’s grandpa, his name is Soso [nickname for Iosebi, Georgian for Joseph]. My name is Aishe [she laughs when saying this], but we adopted Georgian names and mine is Manana. As far as the old names go, I’m Aishe.<sup>19</sup>

A lot of people were secretly under [Turkish] influence during the Communist period still, but we knew that if we had their names, if we had Muslim names, we would have been burned alive. That’s why we have two names!”

I asked her why the name *Tavartkiladze* specifically: “Why were we named Tavartkiladze? There’s a reason for that. It didn’t just happen willy nilly. There’s a reason and it’s just that I can’t remember it, and I don’t want to lie to you.”

Iskender Ependi was an itinerant wandering hoja, traversing the well-protected domains of the Ottoman Empire from end to end, following invitations and offers as they came in times of need, and abandoning obligations to spouses and children and fathers-in-law along the way. His itineraries have reemerged in today’s post-Soviet Adjara, with hojas traveling to once-imperial centers for education and returning to Adjara as learned teachers. Those who offered Iskender Ependi a home to stay in and a family to marry into act as hosts seeking to create a tie with their hopeful guest and appropriate his prestige into the standing of their family line through the gesture of hospitality.

He is figured as a foreigner, but one from within, a queer figure both inside and outside of typical roles. Itinerant and educated, Iskenderi, like Jin Ali, engaged in imperial structures of power and prestige only to reject and insult them, and eventually returned to Khulo to live out his life as a hoja. Both of these ancestors are interestingly buried elsewhere—not in their natal village, but rather in the site of their demise when coming into conflict with other imperial and local powers. We will discuss graves and their role in cementing a relationship to the land in the next chapter.

[“The specter of Iskender Efendi: ‘Presencing’ Ottoman imperial ancestral prestige in a post-Soviet landscape of global capital”...wrote this potential title a long time ago...]

### **Cheers to our *Oghli*!**

Much later during my time in Khulo, in October 2018—just over a month before I would leave and come back to the States—I was staying in Dzirkvadzeebi for a longer period of time,

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<sup>19</sup> Some people use their Muslim given name more often, like Muhammedi, while others use their Georgian name, like Beto and Manana. Still others use both depending on the context, like Beto’s father, known as Aslani in the village and in his family, but Otari at work as a security guard at the Khulo mayor’s office. Beto’s Muslim given name is Mevludi, while Melano’s is Meriemi.

and one Saturday, Beto's family hosted an impromptu feast that ended up lasting all day. Beto's dad Otari is a police officer and works in security at the mayor's office in the central town. Just as the afternoon was starting to drag on, two of Otari's colleagues popped their heads in the front door: Temuri, who was also Otari's maternal cousin, and Otari's boss Misha. I'd been laying on the couch passively watching whatever was on the TV but with the arrival of the guests it seemed like everyone in the house suddenly sprang into action. Like a switch was flipped, Beto and his family, especially his mother Mzia, were now hosts and there every word and action were directed by the gravitational pull of their guests and the unspoken expectations between them.

Beto and Melano went to the door and greeted their dad's colleagues, Beto's grandpa woke from his afternoon nap and walked out with his crutches as he had retired his prosthetic for the day, and Mzia implored Temuri and Misha, and me too as I was the Perennial Guest, to sit at the table as she began to whisk out small plates of food from the kitchen that she must have been preparing for just this occasion. Otari sat with us at the table too after retrieving wine and chacha from the cellar, and Misha, who had a very big personality, took on the role of the *tamada*, or the toastmaster of the *supra*, the feast.

Misha poured us all a small glass of the amber wine that Otari acquired by the barrel each year from a friend with a vineyard near Batumi in exchange for potatoes, and the four of us held up our first glass as Misha began his first toast, or *sadghegrdzelo*.<sup>20</sup> Misha toasted to Mzia, and to the hosts of this *supra*, and thanked them for welcoming us in their home and sharing their bounty with us, and the four of us men went around repeating a short version of the same toast to Mzia and our hosts, and then we each gulped down the glass of wine in one go, always leaving just a little because drinking the whole glass means the *supra* is over or that guest is done.

This *supra* ended up lasting over six hours, into the night, and Beto's neighbors from across the courtyard joined later on too. We were drunk and Beto got his guitar out and we sang the song he'd taught me. At one point, Misha made a toast to their ancestors, those who had settled on this land and founded these villages. This led to a series of interesting toasts that I will discuss below.

Nearly three hours into the feast, the *tamada*, Misha, began to toast to what he referred to as our "*jishi-gvari*", combining into a pair these two distinct markers of kinship under distinct historico-political regimes. *Jishi*, the Ottoman surname indicating 'blood ties', the group one marries out of, and *gvari*, the Georgian surname adopted by whole villages or village neighborhoods, indicating land ties and neighborliness (the quality of being neighbors?)—the two often overlap but not always.

Misha toasts to "our *jishi-gvari*," saying "May God not deprive us of our *jishi-gvari*, may God not deprive us of our roots. We have blessed the graves of which roots we come from, ...but if a man, a Georgian man sits down at the table and doesn't toast to his *jishi-gvari*, his *modgma* [stock], his *jilagi* [breed], I will make that man's mother cry [idiomatic insult]."

A bit later on, Misha references the founding ancestor of the village of Dzirkvadzeebi in his toast: "You know what's beautiful about us? Look, we are sitting here now, Otari, his wife [Mzia], his son Beto playing the guitar here, I know that it was a representative [or member] of this family who came up from Khulo and settled here. This representative was in Khulo and then came up here, and that man gave us the means for us to be able to say our roots are here today,

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<sup>20</sup> Literally meaning "for a long day" i.e. a wish for a long life. (*sa-dghe-grdzel-o* parses out to *dghe* day, *grdzel* long, and *sa<x>o* adjectival circumfix, 'for x').

for this representative here [Beto] to have a guitar now and sign a song, so let's toast to these roots, which our tradition, our love, joy, connection, and multitude come from."

At this point in my research, I had mostly known the Ottoman surname as an *oghli*, as many people referred to it as such with me. With these toasts to *jishi* and *gvvari*, I was a bit stumped and I asked Misha what the difference was between these two. Misha told me that *oghli* and *jishi* were one and the same, but *gvvari* is different. Otari picks up from here: "*Gvvari* is different. Now, *gvvari*, you know I am Tavartkiladze? Well my *oghli* is Jinaliaghishshvili." Misha takes over again: "Ricardo! Come! Shall I explain it historically? Adjara is an autonomous region, and the Ottoman Turks conquered it in the 1800s, at the end of the 1700s. Ottoman rule lasted for 300 years in Adjara. No offense to the Turks, but the Ottomans brought in their surnames (*gvvarebi*). You know how I am Iakobadze? I have this Georgian *gvvari* Iakobadze, but the Turks named my *jishi* Qavazoghli. This is a Turkish *gvvari*...But 300 years later, when they left, this traditional *gvvari*, from there [the Turks], remained, but the Georgian *gvvari* wasn't erased.

We see once again the ways in which names act as markers of historical places, figures, and periods. In Misha's account here, names are given, names are remembered, and names are returned to. For him, his Georgian *gvvari*, Iakobadze, predates his Turkish *oghli*, and is what his family lines return to in the aftermath of the Ottoman period in Adjara. And yet, the *oghli* is remembered as well—a marker of kinship of a different valence, from a different angle than the ur-lineage of the *gvvari*.

Temuri adds his two cents here: "And this *oghli* comes from that, it's a remainder/leftover/trace<sup>21</sup> from Turkey. The Turkish *gvvari* stayed on<sup>22</sup> as *oghli*." Misha: "Yes, the *oghli* is left over from the Ottomans. And for these 300 years, just imagine—300 years! America's history is only 300 years long—Adjara was conquered for 300 years and it didn't lose [its] tradition." I asked why this Ottoman name is considered *jishi*, as opposed to the Georgian *gvvari*. Temuri explained: "*Jishi* is a Georgian word. In Turkish it means *oghli*, and the Turks ascribed to us their Turkish *gvvarebi*. And they remained / were left as *jishi*." Misha picked up from here: "This was like *jishi*. I mean, *jishi* is a Georgian word, and *oghli* is a Turkish word. The Turks left, the Communists came, and us, we **returned** to our *gvvarebi*. And now we have our *gvvarebi*."

They debate the accuracy of that sketch (Misha says that the Russians came before the Communists...Beto points out that Georgia was independent briefly too...then they shift to America's geopolitical interests in Georgia...all in a span of a few minutes) and then Misha turns to me to help me understand: "So what is *jishi*. What *gvvari* are you?" "Rivera." "Rivera, and in the world is there someone else who is Rivera?" "Yes, many!" "Many, but are they your something? [*sheni aris rame?*]" I don't understand exactly what Misha is asking me, and Temuri rephrases the question: "Are they your relative [*natesavi*]" "Oh I see—no, not most of them. There are many Riveras in the world but the majority are not my relatives." "So this 'majority' [of Riveras] that aren't your relatives are not of your *jishi*. In other words, they have been conferred this *gvvari* for other reasons. This is how *jishis* differentiate themselves. In my village...I am Kedelidze, and there are Kedelidzeebi, but they are not my *jishi*." So they are not your relatives?" "Right, they are not relatives. They are of my *gvvari*, but not relatives. In other

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<sup>21</sup> *darchenili*, adjective participle derived from the verb *darchena*, meaning 'to stay, remain (behind)'—the same verb used to talk about a guest's stay.

<sup>22</sup> *darcha*—the perfective aorist (past) form of this same verb *darchena*.

words, we attribute difference to *jishi*. My *jishi* is mine, his *jishi* is his, but both he and I are Kedelidzeebi. In this way we differentiate ourselves from each other.”

Misha adds: “In other words, someone has to remember that this is my paternal uncle, and their ancestors were brothers or paternal cousins, and so on and so on. We need a genealogical tree. There has to be a link/connection/union [*kavshiri*] and someone must remember this.”

It’s an odd set of overlapping claims here, as we’ve seen throughout my discussion of names and family lines in this chapter. Misha, Temuri, and Otari outline an understanding of kinship and names as both indicating some kind of truth, truths that coexist. The *gvarebs* is indisputably Georgian and is the name that was *returned to* when the Turks left [*chven, chven gvarebs davubrundit*: “we returned to our *gvaris*”]. Temuri even tells a story, very similar to the story of Jin Ali Agha’s father, according to which his ancestor was one of three brothers who killed a nobleman [*batoni*] and had to flee to Adjara. One brother settled in Maghlakoni, in Evgenidzeebi [a neighborhood of Maghlakoni, a village just outside of Batumi], one brother settled in Beghleti, and the other in Iakobadzeebi. Both names are purported to be traces, leftovers of other times, while the use of each can alternately be considered a “return” as well—although Manana’s account of how Adjarians adopted Georgian names so as to disavow any Turkishness would indicate that perhaps, if true, this newly adopted Georgian name is remembered as an origin because the remembering it as it “actually” was would undermine the reason for adopting the name in the first place.

## Conclusion

Guests become kin, names adopted become origins returned to. My own status as a guest was transformed to a kind of kin as well: soon before my departure, Mzia asked me to be Beto’s *kirva*, or circumcision sponsor, as he apparently hadn’t had one when he was circumcised as a child. I accepted, which I learned comes with its own set of obligations—I am supposed to attend Beto’s wedding with a gift of gold. This guest-host relation, as we have seen, inscribes a future relation as well, an eventual return of the favor bestowed, and a future relation between individual and individual—both now subject to the same law, bearing the same kind of name that is recognized by this law. The nominal archive, the archive of names left by all these transfers, offers, and itineraries leaves today a densely intertwined web of social ties and the obligations that come therewith.

In the next chapter, we will examine the relations that arise between individuals, family lines, and the land they live on, focusing on the potent figure of the grave.

## Chapter 3: Funerals, Traces, Transitions: Transhumance from Here to There

### Introduction

This chapter is an extended ethnographic meditation on land and place-making in Khulo, and the relationship between self, land, and community. In the previous chapter, I discussed narratives of origins and kinship, and the guest-host relation from which a social network grows through the longue duree of mutual obligation and expectation. Here I ask, how do these social networks grow roots into the land as both the source of life and the portal after death?

I begin by describing the labor relation of Khulo residents, or *Khuloelis*, to the land they live on through an ethnographic account of a summer spent in Beshumi, a high mountain pasture on the eastern border of Adjara which becomes impassable in winter. I talk about attending the midsummer festival known as *Shuamtoba*, when Khuloelis come from all over Georgia and abroad to celebrate every year. I use this description as a springboard to analyze the relations between Khulo residents and the land through the prism of labor and seasonal movements as dictated by the resources needed.

I use this field of movement to analyze a material opposition between here and there, between home and elsewhere, as a field of shifting perspectives. Then, I turn to a funeral that occurred not long after *Shuamtoba*, in Dzirkvadzeebi, of one of Beto's neighbors and, at the time of her death, the oldest resident of the village. In my ethnographic description of Shorena's funeral, I analyze the ceremony as another site of movement and return, both of Shorena's kin, neighbors, and larger social network to Dzirkvadzeebi, as well as Shorena's own movement from this life to the next.

I continue with a close analysis of the sermon given at Shorena's funeral, which provides us the keys to understanding the relation between the here-and-now and the there-and-then in both the material and the immaterial planes. We will see how Shorena's death ends all possible obligations or debts that the living hold with her, and the survivors must pay them off to her next of kin in order ensure her passage into the beyond. This sermon acts then as a coda to the previous chapter, showing how the ties that bind living people come to an end with death, and take on another kind of anchoring to the land through the gravestone.

I end this chapter with an exploration of the gravestone as an element of the landscape of Khulo that materially transforms the land into an archive of memory and kin. I write about gravestones across historical ruptures, as on object that bears witness to a life and also provides the portal to both the afterlife and to other temporalities that together construct the present.

### Beshumi and The Seasons of Labor

It is mid August, 2018, in Dzirkvadzeebi, a small village in the Khulo district (*raioni*) of Adjara, just north of the town (*daba*) Khulo, when we hear that Shorena, the oldest resident of Dzirkvadzeebi, has passed away. The days are hot and humid, the mountains are lush and green, and bugs fill the air. As in every summer, the village has emptied out—the elderly have gone high up to Beshumi to take the cows out to graze in the high summer pastures abutting the Turkish border and the mountain pass to Adigeni, a district of neighboring Samtskhe-Javakheti settled by Meskhetian Turks prior to their deportation to Central Asia during the Stalin years. The young have gone down to the coast, to Batumi to enjoy the sea, or over the border into Turkey to work on the hazelnut and tea harvests. The hard work of tilling and sowing has mostly

ended and now we enjoy the fruits of this season's crops. Most Khuloelis<sup>23</sup> have recently come down from Beshumi where at the beginning of August they celebrated *Shuamtoba*, the end-of-summer festival that marks the last part of the grazing season in the high mountain pasture.<sup>24</sup>

Summer, August especially, is a time of great mobility and transience in all directions: up and down from the *mta* 'mountain' = Beshumi to the *bari* 'valley' = Khulo, and up and down from the *kalaki* 'city' = Batumi, in addition to the movement between Batumi and points across the border in Turkey (Kemal Pasha for shopping, and other small towns all along the eastern Black Sea coast of Turkey that employ Georgian seasonal laborers, particularly in Artvin and Rize). Summer labor movements contrast with those in winter, where people are much less mobile and generally move in between two sets of destinations: city and village, or town and village. As shown in the table below, Khulo is referred to in various ways depending on the season and the kind of mobility dictated by that season, and the destinations it contrasts with geographically.

SUMMER						
<i>Turketi</i> Turkey	↔	<i>kalaki</i> (city) Batumi	↔	<i>bari</i> (valley) Khulo	↔	<i>mta</i> (mountain) Beshumi
WINTER						
<i>kalaki</i> (city) Batumi	↔	<i>sopeli</i> (village) Khulo		<i>daba</i> (town) Khulo	↔	<i>sopeli</i> (village) e.g. Dzirkvadzeebi

I too went to Beshumi for *Shuamtoba* with Beto and his family. It seemed I saw nearly everyone I had met so far that year in Khulo during that week on the mountain. I met acquaintances' families, including those of the many students at the Quran School and other village schools where I had been conducting fieldwork. I learned how many of them were actually both close and distant cousins, and met for the first time family members who had moved to Batumi from the Khulo valley and only came up to the mountains on such occasions as this festival, as well as for other holidays and funerals from time to time. One of the families I visited was that of Suliko, a Khuloeli I had met that spring during a trip to Istanbul, where he is pursuing his doctorate in Islamic theology, or *ilahiyat*, at a major university. As Suliko lived in Istanbul with his wife, the month of August was one of the only times each year he came home to visit his family in Khulo.

*Shuamtoba* is a time of great joy and anticipation for Khuloelis, especially children. It is one of the few times a year that one sees all of one's extended family, and everyone stays together for a whole week—at one point there were 14 people staying at Beto's family's house during *Shuamtoba*! Beshumi is a place associated with grandparents as well, as it is generally the grandparents' duty to tend to the cattle for the summer in Beshumi, with their children and grandchildren visiting periodically as needed to help out. However, during *Shuamtoba*, houses are full of cousins, people have bonfires and drink together into the night, and grandmothers

<sup>23</sup> In general, Georgian demonyms are formed by adding the suffix *-eli* to the place name (e.g. Batumi – Batumeli, Adjara – Adjareli, Tbilisi – Tbiliseli).

<sup>24</sup> *Shuamtoba* literally means 'middle' *shua* 'mountainness' or 'mountain-season' *mtoba*

make special dishes only possible with the fresh cheese, milk, and cream produced by the cows grazing all summer on the Beshumi pastures.



Cows grazing on Beshumi's pastures, with some of Beshumi's neighborhoods visible in the distance (June 2018)

I am staying at Beto's family's house in a neighborhood of Beshumi called *Nachadrevi*. This place name, as I was told by one of Beto's cousins, comes from the Adjarian Georgian word *chadri* which means 'tent.'<sup>25</sup> In Georgian the circumfix<sup>26</sup> *na>... <ev* added on either side of a word refers to a place that used to be this word. Thus *Nachadrevi* means something like "a place that used to have tents."<sup>27</sup> This area of Beshumi is one of the furthest away from the center, which is known as *Laigiri*. To get there from the marshrutka stop, one must walk along a small river fed primarily by snow runoff that in places has cut a small canyon in the earth. One follows this small river through other neighborhoods, such as the eponymous Beshumi and, just before *Nachadrevi*, *Verxvnali* (from *verxvi* 'aspen' and *nari* 'grove') and *Xari Yataghi* (*xari* 'ox' and *yatak* Turkish 'bed').<sup>28</sup> If you head in the opposite direction from *Laigiri*, you arrive at *Didi Yeyla*, or 'big pasture'—*yeyla* from Turkish *yayla* with the same meaning, past which are more neighborhoods unknown to me. The woods and other natural features have names as well.

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<sup>25</sup> Compare Standard Georgian *karavi* 'tent'. *Chadri* in Standard Georgian means 'chador' or 'burqa.'

<sup>26</sup> A circumfix is an affix that consists of two parts, one placed at the beginning of a word, and the other placed at the end, usually indicated with angle brackets (e.g. X>...<Y)

<sup>27</sup> Compare *Nakalakevi* in Samegrelo, the site of an ancient Colchian city (*kalaki*).

<sup>28</sup> Compare Turkish *Öküzyatağı yaylası* on the border between Rize and Artvin, with the same meaning of "ox-bed pasture."

Particularly striking is a spring about a two hour walk into the woods called *Pasha Puari*—from Meskhetian Turkish *paşa puvari*—meaning “pasha spring.”<sup>29</sup> Like *yaslughi*, which we encountered in the previous chapter, this lexical trace in the place name of a spring indexes a past Meskhetian-Adjarian shared linguistic world.



Some houses and potato fields of *Nachadrevi* (June 2018)

Proper names such as these are traces, indexing another time, other landscapes and uses of the land that have left their mark in language. These place names are “borrowed” from another lifeworld, another history external to the land but which transforms the land into places, and places into an archive. Place names turn the land into a vessel for memory, a landscape that bears traces of the past through linguistic reference to it and economic use of it. Names congeal time as relics of the past that persist in the present in knowledge, in memory, and in utterance. They ballast the land so that it becomes more than itself—it becomes a materially and temporally saturated archive.

Beto told me once, while we were in Beshumi discussing the names of all the different neighborhoods, that the place names of Beshumi had always seemed very strange to him, and that he didn’t know what any of them meant or why each area was called the way it was. Beshumi is located high in the Lower Caucasus range, on the western side of a mountain pass that is impassable in the winter because of the snow. This mountain pass was an important thoroughfare and trading route in the Ottoman period, at a time when water sources and passable routes determined movement and relation to place, in addition to pasture and farming. *Pasha puari*—a spring along the mountain pass perhaps where local Meskhetian Turks and Adjarian

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<sup>29</sup> Compare Standard Turkish *pinar* to Meskhetian Turkish *puvar*, both meaning “spring, source.”

Georgians would meet on the high pastures with their cattle in the summer, when both regions fell within the dominion of the Ottoman *eyalet* of Çıldır.<sup>30</sup> Today, Beshumi is not so much a summer trade route as it is a transhumant<sup>31</sup> summer settlement and mountain resort, one that Khuloelis keep fond memories of and look forward to every year—the beautiful mountains, the green pastures, the fresh cheese and milk, the beautiful waterfalls and lakes to swim in and cool off, seeing everyone all in one place, extended families reunited from the many parts of Georgia that Khuloelis have moved to (places like Adigeni, Zugdidi, Ozurgeti, Tsalka, Marneuli, and of course Batumi and Tbilisi). Beshumi is like a summer homeland, a destination of return for the local diaspora of Khuloelis.

Beshumi also provides Khuloelis with precious resources. Beto and I head into the woods several days to mow grass to turn into hay for the cows to eat in the winter back down in the valley. The pastures are plentiful and provide much needed fodder for the cattle for which the smaller grassy areas in the more densely populated valley do not suffice. The scarcity of land in the valley is part of what has pushed many Khuloelis to move to other parts of Georgia. Traditionally, the youngest son stays with his parents in their village home, and the other sons must obtain their own parcels of land and build houses on them, while daughters are married off.

The directionality of such transactions is apparent even in the Georgian verbs used for marrying: Husbands ‘bring wives’

*tsol.is mo-qvan-a*  
 wife.GEN *mo* (motion towards speaker/addressee)-lead-INF

While wives are ‘offered out’.

*ga-txov-a*  
*ga* (motion out and away from speaker/addressee)-offer-INF

To say “I got married,” women would generally say:

*ga-v-txov-d-i*  
*ga* (motion out and away)-1.sg-offer-PASS.PAST  
 “I was offered out”

In these two phrases, used more commonly than the verb ‘to marry’ *dakortsineba*, directional “preverbs,” or perfective verbal prefixes, presuppose a transactional geography between the husband’s family, the wife’s family, and their respective homesteads. outwards, out of her childhood home). Husbands “bring” wives to their homesteads, to their homes, to themselves, as indicated by *mo-*, a verbal prefix or infix that indexes motion towards the speaker, the addressee, or both. Wives are offered “outwards,” out of their natal homesteads, out of their villages, out of their families, as indicated by the verbal prefix *ga-* that indexes motion outwards from an enclosed space.. One can also use the joint prefix *gamo-* with the verb *txova*, if the motion is towards the speaker, the addressee, or both. For example, when a woman is speaking

<sup>30</sup> This begs the question of whether they met as Georgians and Turks or as Christians and Muslims, and how this encounter informed the ethnogenesis of Adjarians as Adjarians or as Georgians during the Ottoman period.

<sup>31</sup> From *trans-* “across” and *humus* “land”

from her husband’s natal home, she might say “*gamotxovdi*,” meaning “I was offered out, married out to this place here, where I am speaking right now.”

Through these locutions, a nexus between kinship and place, between land and social relations is articulated. A linkage between social identity and land is linguistically anchored, as women move from one village to another and become bound to a new family line. Through marriage, both women and men multiply their social and material obligations with each other—and men do so without moving anywhere at all.

In the villages in the valley, the lone parcel of land on which your house stands is not all the land one needs to build a life. Each family line has grasslands for their cows to graze, both in the village and in Beshumi, or one of the other *yeylas* (not everyone in Khulo summers in Beshumi—some villages have their own high pastures nearby that they bring their cattle to in the summers). You need wood for the winters to cook and to keep warm (there is no gas in Khulo), and so each family line has parts of the woods next to their villages that are ‘theirs’ to cut down. Sometimes there is so little forest in some villages that poachers (*brakonieri*) come and cut down trees on other villages’ property in the middle of the night to avoid having to purchase wood.<sup>32</sup> You also need enough land around your house for a cowshed, a vegetable garden, fruit and nut trees, and as many fields of potatoes as can fit. Beto’s family has five, which they plant and harvest two times each year, selling the excess yield at a market in Batumi after putting aside enough to feed their family through the winter and to seed the next year’s harvests.



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<sup>32</sup> I was once staying with a family in Gudasakho for a few days, a village across the valley from Dzirkvadzeebi. Once, the two men of the family were gone all night and came back in the morning and said they had gone to Dzirkvadzeebi to cut wood down and needed to do this at night, but wouldn’t tell me why. Not long after, I was walking around the woods and pastureland just above Upper Dzirkvadzeebi with Lado, Beto’s cousin and neighbor, and he pointed out to me with righteous anger all the trees that had been cut down by poachers that year.

High above Dzirkvadzeebi: in the foreground is *etseri*, or weed overgrowth; midground is *sadzovari*, pasture for grazing, and in the background is *tqe*, or forest. (October 2018) (above)

Poached trees in the woods belonging to Beto and Lado's family line (October 2018) (adjacent)



### Family and Labor on the Homestead

Khulo, Beshumi, and Batumi—valley, mountain, and city. The three locales exist together as a field of resources to be collected, fostered, sold, distributed and consumed. In the winter, when Beshumi is snowed in and inaccessible, the field is reduced to two locales: Khulo and Batumi—village and city in this opposition (see chart on p.1). Beto's family spreads out across all three locales in summer as dictated by each member's responsibilities of labor, and returns together to the valley for the winter. The family was made up of Beto, his younger sister, his father and mother, and his paternal grandparents.<sup>33</sup> Beto's father, the main employed member of the family, worked as a policeman in the district center.

Labor on the homestead is distributed as follows:

Beto and his father go to the woods to collect firewood for winter. Beto's mother maintains the house, cooking and cleaning, and also is the primary tender to the vegetable garden. Beto's parents together lead the potato-growing process (tilling, planting, weeding, watering, treating with pesticides, and harvesting). Beto's grandmother is in charge of the cows. She is often the first up, milks the cows, and makes the dairy products (creams, cheeses, milk and whey). When Beto's grandmother is away or is in Batumi receiving cancer treatments, his mother takes over her tasks (Indeed—when his grandmother first fell ill, his mother Mzia felt completely overwhelmed thinking of how much work she would have to do now to maintain the homestead and their cattle). Beto's grandfather, who is disabled, at times helps with milking the cows and chopping wood, but he mostly spends his days chatting with other older men of the village and helping tend to the land and animals as needed. Beto's younger sister Melano helps in the house with cooking and cleaning, attending to the needs of the male members of the household and any guests who visit. When Beto's mother is not at home for whatever reason, the responsibility of preparing food goes to Beto's grandmother—and if she is not home either, then this duty falls on his younger sister's shoulders. Beto is tasked with helping his father collect and chop wood, mow grass to make hay with, take the cows out to pasture, walk the cows from their village up to Beshumi at the beginning of each summer and at the end of the season walk them back down (an all day journey, from before sunrise to after sunset). He is also the assistant

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<sup>33</sup> His paternal grandmother tragically fell ill with cancer during my field year and passed away shortly after I left.

muezzin at the village mosque, reading the call to prayer when the imam is not able, and he and his sister both spend much time focusing on their studies. They both have great ambitions for their careers and futures, often expressing fantasies of living in Batumi or Tbilisi and no longer being tied to the homestead and the land and to the labor that this life requires—fantasizing rather of the village being a destination to visit during holidays, an ancestral home to be maintained from afar rather than a source of subsistence requiring constant attention and exertion. Beto dreams of working in an office and Melano dreams of studying to be a doctor.

In addition to their house in Dzirkvadzeebi, in the valley, along with their house in Beshumi, Beto's family is preparing to move partially to Batumi as well, and the apartment they have purchased was in the beginning stages of construction during the time I was in the field. This was quite common for Khuloeli families that I got to know, especially those who live in villages close to the center and have at least one source of income from a family member who has a salaried job (most commonly as a teacher, a police officer or security guard). So many families have moved to Batumi, in fact, that the villages feel depopulated to those who have lived in them for their whole lives, like Beto's grandfather. He has lived on the same land plot his whole life and reminisces often about how when he was a child and when he was raising his own children, Dzirkvadzeebi was teeming with children and families. These days, in contrast, some grades at the village school have just 4 or 5 students in them. Many houses are sitting empty with the families visiting from Batumi only rarely, no more than a handful of times a year to tend to their land and maintain the buildings as needed to keep them from complete decay.<sup>34</sup>

### **The Burial of Shorena**

It wasn't long after Shuamtoba, the mid-summer festival in Beshumi, that Shorena, then the oldest resident of Dzirkvadzeebi, passed away. I hadn't met Shorena, but she was related to some of Beto's neighbors whom I had come to know recently in the village. At the time of her death, I was in Okruashvilebi, a neighboring village southeast and downhill from Dzirkvadzeebi, at roughly the same elevation as the town of Khulo. Many of the women who had been married into Dzirkvadzeebi's families, including Beto's mother Mzia, are from Okruashvilebi. Some entire family lines trace their origins to Okruashvilebi; because of its larger population and smaller area, older sons needed to find land elsewhere and so many came uphill to Dzirkvadzeebi, such as the ancestors of the village imam Omar Hoja.

I had been invited to Okruashvilebi by Suliko, one of the first graduates of the Quran School at the Khulo mosque who, as I mentioned above, was now pursuing graduate school in Islamic theology in Istanbul. In May 2018, during a trip to Istanbul, I met him for the first time after the head of the Quran School put us in touch. We had lunch in Aksaray and he showed me around his university campus the next day. He invited me to come visit him in his village during his yearly August vacation. Many people throughout my year in Adjara invited me, some rather persistently, to visit them in their villages, as guests are highly respected and considered auspicious—and many say it would bring *sirtxvili*, or shame, on their family if you reject their offer of hospitality.

It was then that Shorena died, on a hot, rainy, muggy day. It had been raining for a few days, preventing Beto and his family from collecting the second potato harvest of the season. Beto told me that day that they would have to wait for the ground to dry again before harvesting

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<sup>34</sup> At the beginning of the pandemic in spring 2020, this movement was reversed—families moved back from Batumi to their village homes in droves and the villages were full of life in a way not seen in a generation.

the potatoes. Otherwise, they would rot. Shorena, the oldest person in the village, lived in central Dzirkvadzeebi, just about five or six houses down the road from Beto's house. The next day after her death, the *tirili* would begin. *Tirili* means "crying," but, here, it is the ritual of lament and mourning at the coffin of the deceased. People from all over Khulo, and even from as far way as Tbilisi, would come to Dzirkvadzeebi over the several days of the *tirili*, up until the day that Shorena would be buried in her *oghli*'s cemetery plot as part of the final day of the *tirili*—the day of her *janaza*, or funeral.<sup>35</sup>

Beto, who usually played his guitar and sang every night, refrained from doing so for the duration of the *tirili* out of respect for the deceased. That night, instead of Beto's music, we heard jackals barking in the woods and crickets chirping in the fields, interrupted only by Omar Hoja reading the *ezani* from the mosque, and the Turkish soap operas poorly dubbed in Georgian that Beto's grandfather watched every night.

Suliko called me that next day, the first day of the *tirili*, to tell me he was in Dzirkvadzeebi to pay his respects and that he and his father would take me back to Okruashvilebi with them. He said I would just stay the night, and we would all come back the day after, the day of Shorena's burial which is the day the majority of mourners would come to pay their respects to the deceased and her family. I got into Suliko's dad's van and we went down to Okruashvilebi on a path I had never been on before. Extremely steep and muddy, it was a direct road between the two villages that circumvented the need to go through the central town.

Suliko's family lived in section of the village known as Geladzeebi, one of the first clusters of houses when approaching Okruashvilebi from Khulo's center. There were five houses in Geladzeebi, and all the residents were paternal cousins of Suliko's, all with the surname Geladze.

As it turned out, Suliko's father told me he was cousins with Beto's mother Mzia. When he told me this, I recalled that she had indeed told me she was from Okruashvilebi and had been married off to Dzirkvadzeebi. Both the Geladzes and Mzia's family lines are among the very few people I met in Khulo to have no *oghli* at all. Neither are really sure why, although Mzia told me at a separate point her ancestors are said to have migrated to Khulo at some point from Akhalkalaki, an Armenian area of southern Georgia just over the mountain pass at Beshumi heading east from Khulo.

Suliko's father also mentioned in passing that a *bidzia*, or paternal uncle, of theirs was buried at the Ottoman cemetery at the Khulo mosque (on which more below). He said this uncle's name was Kemali and he had been a famous hoja, or religious teacher. At this point, Suliko emphasized that many hojas went from villages in Adjara to Istanbul for religious training at that time. He told me that these hojas always came back to Adjara after their studies—that the draw of the homeland (*samshoblo*) was very strong. There is clearly a straight line connecting these Ottoman Adjarian hojas to Suliko, who is pursuing graduate degrees in Islamic theology in Istanbul and who hopes one day to establish a department of Islamic theology at Batumi State University. Suliko sees himself within this same imperial tradition of religious education, desiring now to bring this discipline of knowledge to a Soviet-era public university that matriculates students from all over the Republic of Georgia.

Suliko, the young, aspiring hoja, with no *oghli* but an ancestor buried at Khulo's Ottoman-era mosque cemetery, is anchored differently to this land than most Khuloelis. He bears

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<sup>35</sup> *Oghli*, Turkish for "son of," is an Adjarian word for family line, as the most common ending for such family names is *-oghli*. Others include *-entebi* and *-shvilebi*. For more family lines and names, see Chapter 2.

no Ottoman name himself, but his family lays claim to a connection through the grave of an ancestor. I wonder, since the tombstones at the Khulo mosque cemetery are mostly illegible, if this story of their ancestor Hasan Hoja works to provide the basis for some kind of claim to belonging that normally an *oghli* would vouch for on its own...

The following day, Suliko took with me with him back to Dzirkadzeebi to attend Shorena's *janaza*. Standard Georgian's *dakrdzalva*, "burial", here is *janaza*, from the Turkish *cenaze*. We drive back up the steep, muddy road to Dzirkvadzeebi, offering a ride to an old lady who flags us down on the way. This neighbor and Suliko know of each other, and she tells me she, like most of the residents of Dzirkvadzeebi, bears the last name Tavartkiladze, but her *oghli* is *Mola Hasan Oghli*. When I told her I was visiting Suliko and his family in Geladzeebi, she asked me to visit her too, and said that guests are sent from God—"ghmertidan movlenili".

Dzirkvadzeebi has transformed overnight. There are people everywhere—talking in the dirt roads and courtyards, visiting relatives and friends and taking turns going to Shorena's family's house, where the *tirili* is ongoing. Suliko takes a while to find a place to park because so few spots are left. Suliko, the old lady, and I step in to Beto's house only to find his younger sister Melano all by herself, along with a few other guests. She told me the men, Beto and their father and grandfather, were over at the *tirili*, and their mother was helping prepare the food for all the guests at the *janaza*. Melano prepared food and drinks and tended to all the requests from the many guests who stopped by that day. We accepted Melano's offer of coffee and, once we finished, Suliko and I walked over to the *tirili*.

As we walked, we shook hands with many men we knew, including Beto, and then I followed Suliko into the house of the deceased, up the front steps to a balcony and into a room on the right where the *tirili* was being held. I could hear the mourning women wailing as we approached the room. Inside, a large coffin was in the center of the room on a diagonal, following the qibla in the direction of Mecca. On benches all around the perimeter of the room were Shorena's daughters, granddaughters, and other female relatives, all dressed in black, crying and whispering to each other as guests walked through the room past the coffin and out the door in the back, paying their respects and shaking hands with the men of the family who stood in a line at the bottom of the stairs as they left.

Suliko didn't leave through this back door like the other men, and instead gestured to me to sit with him at an empty spot on the benches just next to the door. He took a copy of the Quran in Arabic from the top of the refrigerator in the kitchen, and began to read from the Yasin chapter. The mourning women quieted down, while men continued to walk through the room and shake hands on their way down the stairs back outside. He read the entire Yasin *sura*, and part of another one, and followed this with a prayer in Georgian:

*Ghmertma gardatsvililis suls miagnos da ik daaxvedros*  
"May God guide the soul of the deceased, and send it there."

"There," *ik*, here means heaven, beyond the here-and-now, a usage of *ik* "there" also seen in the Georgian word *saikio* "the next world," or "the world beyond." *Saikio* literally means "the place of there." The circumfix *sa*)... (*o* added to a root can mean "the place of [root]", as seen in the example *sa-kartvel-o* "Georgia", or the place of *kartveli*, "Georgian," people. After Suliko's prayer, many of the women thank him, commenting on how smart and learned he is, his knowledge and competence providing them assurance that Shorena's soul will indeed reach "the place of there."

We left the *tirili* and ran into both Beto and Rolandi, the English teacher at both the village school and the Quran School at the Khulo Mosque, and together we went to a large blue tent which had been set up in front of Shorena’s house to serve food for all those who had come for her burial. In the tent, I saw Mzia, Beto and Melano’s mother, among others, who had helped prepare food and were serving everyone who had come for the *janaza*. Suliko and Rolandi told me how, at every *janaza*, they always serve fish (*tevzi*), black beans (*shavi lobio*), and an Adjarian cornmeal porridge (*hasuta*). Remarkably, this was the only time I was ever offered fish in my entire year in Adjara. As it turns out fish is only served at funerals. We left right after we ate, as it was very hot that day and it was only hotter underneath that large blue tarp.



The lunch tent at Shorena’s funeral, Dzirkvadzeebi (August 2018)

### **Through This Place Here, We Reach “The Place of There”**

Suliko told me it would soon be time for the *vaiz*, or sermon, and he asked me to lead him to the village mosque, as he had never been. When we arrived, Dzirkvadzeebi’s local imam and muezzin Omar Hoja was reading from the Quran to a large group of funeral attendees, all men. When he stopped, Suliko, who had been looking at a book he picked off a shelf in the front of the mosque, sat where Omar Hoja had been sitting in front of the group, and began his sermon.

Usually Omar Hoja gives the sermons at the small Dzirkvadzeebi mosque. However, by his own admission, his education in Islamic theology is merely *adgilobrivi*, “local,” and he doesn’t know Turkish or Arabic—something pointed out to me many times by residents of Dzirkvadzeebi during my year in Adjara. In the hierarchy of learned hojas, Suliko is higher than Omar Hoja by virtue of his education at a prestigious university in Istanbul, and his knowledge of Turkish and Arabic. In a way, Suliko’s prominence and the respect he receives from others resembles that given to Iskender Efendi, whose story I told in the Chapter 2, and his position as a

well-remembered, lauded ancestor specifically because of his erudition in Islamic knowledge as well as his education and travels in the Ottoman capital. Later, after the prayer, Suliko will yield the pulpit to an even more prominent and established imam—the head imam at the Batumi Orta Jame mosque.

About halfway through his sermon, Suliko begins to talk of “this world” and “that world”, using the word *kveqana*, mostly commonly used to mean “country” in everyday speech. *Kveqana*, or “earth, land, world, creation, country” (literally “sub-field”, *kve-* meaning under or below, and *qana* meaning a field of crops), is prefixed with the nominative or oblique case of “this” *es / am*, or “that” *is / im* and appended with adverbial or adjectival endings, leading to two sets of terms:

*es kveqana // is kveqana* – “this world” // “that world”  
*amkveqnad // imkveqnad* – adverbial form...”in this/that world”  
*amkveqniuri // imkveqniuri* – adjectival form...”of this/that world”

This image of the world as an agricultural field, and the here-and-now as a proximal field, and the there-and-then of the afterlife as a distal field, is striking and recurrent in both Christian and Muslim Georgian idiom. We have seen this use of demonstrative deictics above in Suliko’s prayer after reading from the Quran at the *tirili*: “*ghmertma gardatsvlilis suls miagnos da ik daaxvedros*,” or “May God guide the soul of the deceased, and send it there.” As I mentioned above, Georgian *ik* means “there,” distal from speaker and addressee, which contrasts with *ak* “here,” proximal to speaker, and *mak* “there where you are,” proximal to addressee.<sup>36</sup>

Here, I would like to try to tease out the relationship between the “here” and the “there” implicit in both Suliko’s and the Batumi imam’s use of these terms in their sermons. In the context of this chapter’s extended meditation on land and place-making in Khulo, and the relationship between self, land, and community, I ask: how do these two hojas delineate a relationship between the here-and-now and the beyond? How are the two connected, what anchors this connection, and how can we move from one to the other?

I translate here what Suliko, at this roughly halfway point in his sermon, says, italicizing the demonstratives used in conjunction with the various forms of the word *kveqana* I outlined above. Suliko says that we don’t hear it often, but Islam is not a religion of “this world.” Islam doesn’t just tell us that in *this* world we must study, that we must do the work (*japa*) of *this* world, and that we must prepare for *that* world. He says that of course the Quran, Islam, tell us that *that* world is necessary, that we must get ready for *that* world, but it doesn’t say this at the expense of *this* world. Let’s also establish? *this* world, let us also set up a good life in *this* world... We must live according to the word of Islam, we must act according to Islam’s lawful actions so that we can reach *that* world.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> This three-way distinction is more common in Western Georgian than Eastern or the Tbilisi-based literary standard Georgian.

<sup>37</sup> “mxolod da mxolod ar geubneba rom *amkveqnad* unda istsavlo, *amkveqniuri* japa unda stsio, da gaemzado *im* kveqnistvis. ra tkma unda qurani kerimi, islami gveubneba rom *is* kveqana autsilebelia, *im* kveqnistvis unda movemzadot, magram ar gveubneba *am* kveqnis xarjze. *es* kveqanats moitsqvet *amkveqniuri* kargi tsxovrebats moitsqvet...islamis sitqvrit unda vitsxovrot, islamis kanonieri mokmedebit unda vimokmedot rom *is* kveqanats movipovot.” All demonstrative deictics are italicized.

He ends this part of the sermon by mentioning the funeral for the first time: “Now today there is a funeral (*janaza*),” and goes on to talk about death, that the Quran tells us that every living being will taste death, will pass away and return to God. The path to God lies in the right action in this world. The deictic anchoring of the terms for ‘this world’ and ‘that world’ belie the circular, recursive embeddedness of the one in the other. *Es / am* “this” refers to the here and now, the visible, the lived, the historical and the remembered; *is / im* “that” refers to the there and then, the invisible, the afterworld outside of historical time, located in the time of the divine.

Suliko yields the pulpit to the imam at the Batumi mosque after the midday prayer. The Batumi imam reminds the funeral attendees that we must all ponder death, and be prepared for it at any moment. He tells how the Prophet Mohammed would not pray at the funeral of a debtor.<sup>38</sup> If someone dies not having paid off their debt, no matter how small it is—it could just be some flour, cornmeal, corn owed to a neighbor—they may not enter heaven. The imam calls on God to let Shorena into heaven. He remarks on how good her children are, how good her grandchildren are, what a good family she has. Let us not let her carry any debt with her to her grave, and may God reward her with Heaven. Debt is of this world, not that world, and we must ensure Shorena’s passage into that world by absolving her of all debt that will tie her to such entanglements in the here-and-now. He implores anyone present who has outstanding debts with Shorena to settling them with her survivors, in order to absolve her of these worldly ties. In other words, it is through *this* world that we reach *that* world, but at the same time—our worldly ties can catch us in a bind and keep us from reaching the place of there, the place of the divine. This world is both a conduit to, and an obstacle from, the next, and death is its own kind of transhumant crossing from land to land or world to world: from here to there.

The imam then tells a story of Omar, one of the companions of the Prophet, visiting a town as a guest, and he saw some neighbors bring out someone who had died. The neighbors all said how he was a good person—oh God, give him heaven! And Omar said [in saying this] it became obligatory (*vaajibi*) [that this person would go to heaven].<sup>39</sup> The same thing happened three more times in this town Omar was visiting, and the neighbors ask him why it becomes obligatory. He responds: “God’s Prophet commands that when four people bear witness that some person who has died was good, and asks God to give him Heaven, this person will enter heaven, *inshallah*.”<sup>40</sup>

As if in response to his own story, the Batumi imam then directly asks the men: “What kind of person [was she]? How did you know [her to be], *jemaat*?” And the group, the *jemaat* responds: “*Gadasarevi!*” Amazing!, “*Kargi!*” Good!, and the imam asks God: “May God the Creator give her heaven!” And the *jemaat* responds “*amin*.” This call and response between the imam and the *jemaat* aims to ensure Shorena’s passage to heaven, modeled after the practice of Omar, the Prophet’s Companion. The *jemaat*, members of her family, her village and her larger community, bear witness to her character as a good person, an amazing person, before God in the hopes that God will admit her to *that land*, the place beyond to here-and-now, freed as she is now of earthly debts and the entanglements of gifts and hospitality that leave one caught in a web of duties and expectations.

To this end of freeing Shorena’s soul from the worldly entanglements of this land, the imam continues his pleading with God: “Oh God, turn her grave into the most garden of heaven.

<sup>38</sup> “*valmkone adamianis janazas ar lotsulobda shuamavali*.”

<sup>39</sup> “*tkves rom es ra kai adamiani iqoo, ghmerto jenneti mie, vaajibi gaxdao tkva*.”

<sup>40</sup> “*allahis shuamavali brdzanebs rom romel adamiansats otxi katsi motsmeobas uketebbs rom is kai katsi iqa da ghmerto jenneti mieo itqvis, is adamiani jennetshi sheva inshallah*”

Oh my Lord, do not send her sins down into the grave with her. Oh my Lord, let her praying, reading, fasting, and even the smallest goodness from her life be in her grave as a friend, a neighbor, a shroud.”

Shorena’s death and the burial of her body remains the trace of her historical existence in “this world,” and her gravestone marks her this-worldly connection to the land of her husband’s family line in Dzirkvadzeebi. Her death, her transition from this world to that world, brings about a rupture in this world—people from all across Khulo and points beyond break their routines, stop their late summer labor, and return. A return to an origin, or rather, a journey to a place of worldly transition that renders that place an origin, a destination, through the finality of death. Much like Tamuna who returns every year to Dzirkvadzeebi to her mother’s grave during the Ramazan Bayrami to leave halva and her grave and remember her, despite her life as a Georgian Orthodox Christian doctor living in Tbilisi, people with a connection through kinship and other social obligations make a pilgrimage to this land to help ensure Shorena’s smooth transition from this world to that world and the concretization of one’s connection to this land through burial and the erection of a gravestone in one’s name.

The people of Khulo have come to Dzirkvadzeebi from far and wide to help Shorena transition from “here” to “there,” marking her departure from the this-worldliness of the here-and-now into *saikio*, or the “place of the there.”<sup>41</sup> The funeral encapsulates the multiple straddlings, transiencies, and mobilities that crisscross life in Adjara for Muslim Georgians. As I described above, summer is a time of dispersion across many sites of labor and economic opportunity. Shorena’s funeral is all the more remarkable in its timing, just after the summer *Shuamtoba* festival in Beshumi, her departure from this world turning Dzirkvadzeebi into a destination for the living. Just as they did for the festival, people came in droves from all over for her *tirili* and *janaza*—at least one person from each village in addition to family members from her own home village and the village she married into. Hosting and hospitality are entangled within Quran recitation, prayer, and burial—a final ritual that will anchor Shorena’s physical remains in the land in which she strove to live a pious life and fulfill her role as *rdzali*, or bride, in this family line to which she was “offered out.”

Her burial in the small cemetery plot belonging to her husband’s family line, found on the side of a slope around which the dirt road winds down on its way to *Ikita Dzirkvadzeebi*, the most remote neighborhood of the village, anchors her connection to the land as a way to ensure passage beyond this land, to *is kveqana*—that land. This land, this plot marking her absence, the stone on which is inscribed her name and date of birth and death, become as well a destination for her descendants. No matter where her descendants live, her burial here among the members of her husband’s *oghli* turn her site of departure into a site of arrival for her survivors. It transforms the origin into a destination, through the grave which is itself a portal to the divine.

### **Graves: Person and Place**

During *Ramazan Bayrami*, the holiday at the end of Ramadan, many people come home to their natal villages to visit with family members and old neighbors, and to pay respect to the

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<sup>41</sup> Everyday uses of words like *ik* and *is*, there and that, can make reference to places and things and people within the metaphysical “here,” of course, but the place name *saikio* can only refer to the afterlife, to heaven. It’s striking how, much like the here/there contrasts considered at the beginning of the chapter shifts based on seasonal variations in labor and relations to places, the here/there contrast within the context of the funeral has settled into the distinction between this worldly realm and the divine life beyond.

dead. During one of the days of this holiday, I visited with Rolandi, the English teacher at the Quran School and at the Dzirkvadzeebi village school. He normally lived in an apartment in Khulo *daba*, or town. This year, *Ramazan Bayrami* fell in mid-June, the early weeks of summer when it finally started to be consistently warm and Rolandi was back in his village home in Upper Dzirkvadzeebi, a cluster of houses up a steep dirt road that lead above the school and the mosque.

I was at Beto's house enjoying some halva that Beto's mother had made for the holiday, and which it is customary to leave at one's late relatives' graves, when Rolandi called me to come visit him at his home in the village. He had come to re-open his village home and work on it a bit in order to keep it maintained, and had invited me there for lunch. I headed up the path—one I hadn't actually gone up before, and passed the school, the mosque, and the houses of central Dzirkvadzeebi along the way. At the top of the steep path, I noticed a small, walled-off cemetery with some very prominent gravestones and made a mental note to take a closer look on my way back down.

Rolandi met me on the path just past this cemetery, at the beginning of the cluster of houses. This part of Dzirkvadzeebi, known as *Zemo* or Upper Dzirkvadzeebi, is located on a kind of narrow ridge, as on other side of the houses there are steep slopes back down to other parts of the village. These steep mountainsides serve as pastureland for the cows of *Zemo* Dzirkvadzeebi. Rolandi greeted me with a handshake and a left-cheek kiss, as is customary between men here. He led me to his house, which he had just reopened for the summer, and had boxes of new appliances unpacked that he planned to install as part of his summer renovations—a washing machine and a toilet. The World Cup game between Serbia and Costa Rica was playing on the small television set in the corner of the dining room.

Rolandi made us a simple lunch of bread, cheese, kielbasa sausage, and a tomato and cucumber salad that he whipped up. He poured wine for us and we toasted to his summer renovations. After lunch, he invited me to his neighbor's house for coffee—his *bidzashvili* or his cousin through his father's brother. We walked to her house, crossing a small yard, with a vegetable garden and a few beehives that resembled old dishwashers, and greeted a pair of men working on the larger potato field on the steep slope below that his cousin had hired, as no one in their family lives on this property permanently.

As we approached, a woman a bit younger than Rolandi greeted us from the balcony on the second floor, inviting us to come in. We entered her house, and she came down and introduced herself—she was visiting from Tbilisi, where she has lived for most of her adult life and where she works as a doctor.

Tamuna, as I shall call her, grew up in Dzirkvadzeebi of course, and was in the same year at the village school as Beto's father. Remarkably, her Georgian bore no obvious trace of the Khulo or Adjarian variety of Georgian that is her native language—she spoke extremely deliberately and purposively in a standard, Tbilisi-based Georgian to both Rolandi and me. To my Dzirkvadzeebi ear, she almost sounded more like a newscaster on the evening news that Beto's grandfather would watch everyday rather than someone who was born and raised in Dzirkvadzeebi.

Tamuna told me that she only came back to the village a few times a year at most, but she always came during *Ramazan Bayrami*, to pay her respects to her late mother, making halva to leave at her grave and those of other deceased family members. In every way she seemed like a woman from Tbilisi rather than from the village—from her clothes to her hairstyle to her mannerisms. She apologized for only have Turkish-style coffee (as opposed to what?—I thought

to myself, as this is the only style of coffee that I had ever been offered in Khulo). She was also the first divorced woman I had met, and was raising her son on her own.

I noticed while we were having coffee and eating freshly picked cherries that she was wearing a crucifix. When she stepped into the kitchen at one point, I asked Rolandi if she was Christian and he laughed and said “*ki, monatlulia*”—“yes she’s baptized!” As she sat back down, Rolandi delightedly told her I had asked if she was Christian, and she quite proudly told me all about her story of converting to Georgian Orthodox Christianity. Apparently, her ex-husband, who was from the Western Georgian region of Imereti, was Christian. She told me that she started to read more about Georgian Orthodoxy while they were dating, and eventually got baptized just before they married.

Tamuna told me one of her uncles, a *hoja* now passed away, used to teach her, and her siblings and cousins prayers in Arabic but she never knew that these prayers meant. As an adult, she said, it did not make sense to her anymore to pray in a foreign language she didn’t understand at all. She started to read about the Orthodox faith and said she found it interesting and compelling, and it made “sense” to her that Georgians should practice “their own” faith and pray in “their own” language. Even as many Georgian Muslims push against a nationalist ideology that equates religion with national and ethnic identity, many Georgian Muslims from Adjara, like Tamuna, find these Georgian nationalist arguments compelling and often even decide to convert, particularly when they move to heavily Christian cities like Batumi and Tbilisi.

Tamuna still comes home every year during the end of Ramadan holiday, even if she no longer fasts and has been baptized as a Christian, to pay respects to the dead. She still comes home every year to make halva and leave some at her mother’s grave in the cemetery behind her home where the deceased members of the *Salihoghli* family line are buried.<sup>42</sup> She still comes home every year to care for her family’s home in Dzirkvadzeebi, for no one lives there permanently any longer and yet it is her tie to her ancestors, to her family line, to the memory of her mother. The memory of her mother has a location, and is made physical through her mother’s grave in the *Salihoghli* family cemetery.

In his book *The Graves of Tarim*, Engseng Ho writes of a family lineage of Islamic scholars that has grown into a diasporic network all across the Indian Ocean. This lineage has its roots in Aden, Yemen, which remains the site of important graves of ancestors and saints that have become pilgrimage destinations for their descendants from around the Indian Ocean. As Ho writes, diaspora thus transforms origins into endpoints: “Graves, while they are endpoints for migrants, are beginnings for their descendants, marking the truth of their presence in a land...Graves provide a ready point of return in a world where origins keep moving on” (2006, 3). Here, in the case of Rolandi’s cousin Tamuna, the graves of her mother and other family members serve as a point of return, a marker of an origin even as she has worked hard to leave behind traces of her origins as a Georgian Muslim villager in her cultivated life as an urban, divorcée, Christian doctor living and working in Tbilisi. Her own origins, and those of her son, have “moved on” as Ho puts it, and their home in Dzirkvadzeebi and the cemetery just behind it have become destinations, places to visit in the future, something to look forward to rather than back.

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<sup>42</sup> See Chapter 2 for a discussion and analysis of Ottoman-era Adjarian family names that remain in use today.

Ho writes that “a gravestone is a sign whose silent presence marks an absence” (2006, 3). It is a “dense semiotic object, a compound of place, text, person, and name” (2006, 24). He continues:

“Within the grave is a person. Very close by is a tombstone inscribed with text, representing the name of the grave’s inhabitant. By means of writing, the name is attached to a rugged material object, stone, and thereby made durable in time. The person in the grave and the engraving on the tombstone point to each other in a silent spatial relationship of proximity that exists independently of visitors and reciters. The person who was nameless at birth becomes known as a name attached to a specific body for his or her lifetime, and is known forever as a name inscribed on the tombstone at death. The act of burial fixes this terminal relationship of metonymy in a place. The relationship of place and named person that a grave and inscribed tombstone represent is a base or foundation on which to create potentials. As a compound of place, person, name, tombstone, and text, the grave enacts a passage from silence to vocalization” (2006, 24-25).

Here, Ho analyzes the gravestone as a compound sign linking person, name, place, and text. In the family cemeteries of Dzirkvadzeebi and Khulo, we can see this work that the gravestone does, tying together ancestors, name, and place through the reification, the concretization of the connection between lineage and land.

Both Rolandi and Tamuna share the *gvare*, or Georgian surname, of Tavartkiladze, like most of the residents of Dzirkvadzeebi. Their *oghli*, or Ottoman-era family line, however, is *Salihoghli*, shared by just a few families of Upper Dzirkvadzeebi. The *Salihoghli* cemetery is located at the top of the path that leads to Upper Dzirkvadzeebi, past the first two homesteads located on the end of the upward slope. Once the path starts to flatten, the cemetery comes into view on the left, surrounded by low rock wall. After I leave Tamuna and Rolandi to head back down the mountainside to Beto’s house, I stop in the cemetery. There are about 10 graves, in varying states of upkeep. Two large, shiny gravestones caught my eye first. I approached them, and saw that they were the graves of two family members who had died quite recently. These gravestones seemed to be made of a dark marble, and had an image of the deceased on the marble face in grayscale (one of these graves is visible in the photo below). They also had the names of the deceased, and the dates of birth and death, all written in Georgian. Of course, the names on these gravestones were the deceased’s legal surname—Tavartkiladze rather than Salihoghli.



*Salihoghli cemetery, I (June 2018)*



*Salihoghli cemetery, II (June 2018)*

These two graves were quite prominent, standing out not only for their size and shine, but also for each including a photographic image of the deceased—something very uncommon in villages in Khulo. These two largest graves were among several older, smaller graves that each had a small headstone in the shape of a semicircle about a foot high, on which was written in

Georgian the deceased's name and dates of birth and death as well. These older graves were clearly older and less well maintained, but completely visible to the passing eye. The dates of death indicated that they were from the Soviet period—1960s and 70s.

Just as I was about to leave, I suddenly saw that there were more, even older graves almost hidden here and there among the others! The stones that made up these graves were so broken down and so overgrown with weeds, so nearly consumed by the earth that they would have been imperceptible had it not been for their distinctive feature of having two gravestones—one at the head and one at the foot of the grave. On the headstones, some writing is still discernable, but not enough to make it what it says. Others seem to never have had any inscriptions at all. One perhaps merely bears the year, carved in big numbers across the small gravestone—1935? Hard to say, as the stone is worn down and covered in moss.

The various styles of gravestone, enclosed together in the family plot of a single lineage, each bear witness to a distinct historical period through which the Salihoghli family has maintained its kinship ties and its connection to this land at the top of the village above the mosque. The cemetery bears the traces of the political, economic, and linguistic transformations undergone in each of these periods and in the transitions from one period to another—it makes these transitions visible as a record, an archive of memorialization under distinct times.

The Salihoghli cemetery, as Engseong Ho writes of the graves of the Adeni lineage, is made up of “rugged material objects” that create a “compound of place, person, name, tombstone, and text.” The oldest graves bear writing in Ottoman Turkish, completely illegible to all the living descendants of those buried in these graves. These graves are rendered illegible as well by the violence of time and the elements, making the inscription nearly impossible to make out. Their structure has been undermined and nearly completely absorbed by the land itself, almost completely consuming the grave and erasing the trace that there was ever a grave there at all.

The newest graves, in stark contrast to the Ottoman-era ones, are impossible to miss, and bear the Georgian names of those buried there, including Tamuna's mother, along with the Georgian name Tavartkiladze, which was adopted by most of the village regardless of actual kinship or family ties. Tavartkiladze, however, of course does not refer to a set of blood relations or a family line, but rather marks origin, belonging to a place—the village of Dzirkvadzebi because of a historical fact of adoption. Thus, the Georgian writing on the tombs that are most legible at the same time dissimulate actual kinship—in their legibility they render themselves still illegible in a different way. These graves provide the material for the fantasy of a kind of origin that, in revealing by virtue of its extreme visibility and legibility, erases itself.

### **The Inheritance of the Trace**

Freud, in his late text *Moses and Monotheism*, comes to the following questions in his investigations of the story of Moses: “In what does this inheritance [of “fragments of phylogenetic origin, an archaic heritage”] consist, what does it contain, and what evidence of it is there?” (1939, 152). These investigations lead him to discover a series of distortions in the dominant narrative of the Moses myth—distortions that bear witness to a history of the myth's transmission.

Freud writes of the truth value of these distortions in Moses narrative: “It is the general experience that the human intellect errs very easily without our suspecting it at all, and that nothing is more readily believed than what—regardless of the truth—meets our wishes and delusions half-way.” He writes that the distortions in the myth, much like traumatic symptoms,

contain the truth—“not, however, the material truth, but a *historical truth*” (1939, 166; emphasis added). Just below, he analyzes the monotheistic idea as an example of just such a distortion of an original impression that gains an obsessive quality, and writes that this idea “must be recognized as a memory—a distorted one, it is true, but nevertheless a memory... As far as its distortion goes, it may be called a delusion; in so far as it brings to light something from the past, it must be called truth” (1939, 167).

In this way, for Freud, the distortions in the Moses myth, which he brings to light through a psychoanalytic process on a collective traumatic memory, themselves bear witness to a history, and shed light on a historical truth by virtue of their distorting act. They bear the trace of the work of the drive of history, the drive of a tradition to preserve itself. When it cannot be expressed, when the memory of it is repressed, the drive of history pushes it to distort itself and find another outlet of expression, another form under which it can bear witness but not be recognized. In this way, the marks of distortion on the tradition are themselves traces on a trace, an archive of historical time embedded in the form of tradition itself.

Freud writes of the double work of distortion--to both conceal and to preserve, and to conceal in order to preserve:

“Two distinct forces, diametrically opposed to each other, have left their traces on [the tradition]. On the one hand, certain transformations go to work on it, falsifying the text in accord with secret tendencies, maintaining and extending it until it was turned into its opposite. On the other hand, an indulgent piety reigned over it, anxious to keep everything as it stood, indifferent to whether the details fitted together or nullified one another” (1939, 52).

In Adjara, as in the long history of the Moses myth that Freud elucidates, there have been several catastrophic and world-ending politico-historical changes since the time it fell under Ottoman rule. The tradition of these times dissimulates itself according to the political regime, and we can perhaps see the work of Georgian Muslims as one of elucidation, except their focus is not necessarily to read the distortions to see the historical truth they bear witness to, but rather to provide a corrective to the tradition and change its distorted form to a ‘right’ one. In a way, this is a kind of further distortion, as it sidesteps a grappling with the drive of tradition. Freud writes that the distorted Biblical myth of Moses is a “pious myth, which transformed a remote tradition in the interest of its own tendencies” (1939, 38)—the drive at work according to its own elusive logic, distorting to preserve by virtue of its very illegibility.

When discussing one of the turns of his elucidation of the myth’s distortions, Freud writes that “The poetically elaborated accounts attributed to the Jahvist and to his later competitor, the Elohist, are like gravestones, under which the truth about those early matters, about the nature of the Mosaic religion and the violent removal of the great man—truths withdrawn from the knowledge of later traditions—should, so to speak, be laid to eternal rest” (1939, 77). Comparing a narrative to a gravestone, Freud points out how a narrative both indicates and conceals, points to an absence while at the same time attempting to lay it to “eternal rest.” Despite its best efforts, the narrative’s form, like that of the gravestone, bears witness to the dead body underneath, if one is able to do the work to elucidate it. The dead body is buried underground as truth withdraws and all that is left is the trace in the archive of knowledge of future generations.

Knowledge withdraws, and yet the trace remains, as is the case with the gravestones in the *Salihoghli* cemetery. The writing is there, illegible but visible, or worn away by history, bearing witness to another time, as future generations tend to the stone form during its long and slow process of decay and transfiguration.

### **Pashas of Khulo Past**

The town of Khulo, the center of the Khulo district, is situated about an hour's walk downhill from and south of Dzirkvadzeebi. The town itself is on a mountainside slope and the road from Batumi zigzags up the slope through the town. At the lowest point is the bus station, just above the villages of Vashlovani (Alme) and Ganaxleba (Qadioghlebi). The cable car station is here as well, which traverses the valley and ends at the village of Tago on the other side, but still facing Khulo (*gamoghma* – across and facing speaker/addressee).

The road winds around as it goes uphill, or, if you are walking, there is a long stairway that takes you up to the next flattish area up the mountainside. Here are located local government buildings: the mayor's office, the police station, the state theater, and a small park with benches and a playground, a memorial for fallen soldiers. Continuing uphill, the next landing is where the hospital and the school are, along with a denser cluster of Soviet-era apartment blocks. All throughout are small businesses—a few restaurants and taverns, a *khinkali*<sup>43</sup> house, a few bakeries, two banks, small stores selling clothing and house supplies, an internet and video game café. Just uphill from the hospital is the district courthouse. At this point, town ends and the apartment blocks become homesteads and potato fields again.

This is the beginning of the village of Lower Dekanashvilebi, and this is where the Khulo mosque complex is located, surrounded by small farmsteads on all sides. The mosque complex consists of four buildings around a small parking area, from right to left: the *samorigeo*, or the mosque caretakers' office, with an apartment on the second floor where the head caretaker and school director lives with his family; a boarding school-style Quran school for teenage boys with a dormitory on the second floor<sup>44</sup>; the *abdesxana*, the small building where one can perform the ritual ablutions before praying at the mosque; and, finally, the mosque itself, which the original wooden structure of which dates back to 1829 but was rebuilt with stone after a fire in the 1890s and renovated again in the early 2010s (Pelkmans 2011, 114-115).

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<sup>43</sup> Georgian dumplings

<sup>44</sup> I write about this boarding school, one of my field sites, in Chapter 4.



Khulo Mosque and courtyard, from the alley in between the main office and the boarding school, with Mount Argineti in the background (April 2018)



Interior of the Khulo Mosque (April 2018)

Apart from the mosque, these buildings were all built relatively recently, and are made with concrete, while the mosque interior is made of wood, as are most of the structures found in villages except certain municipal buildings mostly built during the Soviet period. The four buildings circle a small parking lot that fills up on Friday afternoons when many of the men of Khulo and the nearby villages come for the sermon and Juma prayer.

Tucked behind these buildings, just past the mosque and a small apiary, lies a heap of stones that is barely noticeable from the main circle in front of the mosque. From a distance, the stones are visibly old and falling apart, and weeds have grown all around them. As one approaches, one can make out that the stones actually form an enclosure, a low wall, and that some of the stones in the ground in front of this low wall are actually gravestones—from up close, one can even make out Ottoman Turkish inscriptions on some of them. Once one passes the apiary and turns to face east, an entranceway appears in the stone enclosure. There is a wooden plank above the open entranceway, wedged in among the stones, that was presumably placed there to preserve the integrity of the structure.



The Khulo Mosque Cemetery (April 2018)

Jemil, the head of the school and the lead mosque caretaker who lives on the grounds with his family led me for the first time to see this cemetery a couple days after I first arrived at the boarding school here in Khulo, after I told him I was interested in the Ottoman history of Adjara. It was winter, and some of the gravestones were completely covered in snow, while others stuck out here and there. He showed me around the gravestones inside the stone enclosure as well—these were much larger structures completely above ground, with beds of soil on top. I asked Jemil who was buried there, and he told me they were “dzveli pashebi”—old pashas, presumably local notables from the Ottoman period, but that no one was really sure, as no one can read the gravestones since they are in Ottoman Turkish. He lamented the decrepit state of the

cemetery, and commented that the Georgian government often gives out money for restorations and repairs of historical sites, but had never given them any money to restore the cemetery to its proper state and properly preserve the gravestones. Suliko’s father’s great uncle, the late Omar Hoja, is supposedly resting among these ruins...

One of the gravestones, shown below, bears writing still easily legible today. The center of this gravestone bears the following inscription in Ottoman Turkish. I first write the Ottoman, then I transliterate it into Modern Turkish alphabet, and finally I translate it into English.

1. پاشازاده حسن بك  
روحنه فاتحه  
سنه  
١٢٤٦

2. Paşazade Hasan Beg; ruhuna fatiha; sene 1246

3. Mr. Hasan, Son of a Pasha; rest in peace; year 1246



Graves inside the stone walls of the Khulo Mosque Cemetery, with Hasan Beg’s gravestone in the foreground. (April 2018)

The hijri year of 1246 is roughly 1831 in the Gregorian calendar, meaning that the cemetery was built roughly at the same time as the mosque, or at least within the next few years, and both just after the Russo-Ottoman wars of 1828-29.

Gravestones in Turkey still commonly bear the phrase “*ruhuna fatiha*”, inscribed in this stone, but now in the reformed Turkish script that uses the Latin alphabet. In Turkey, a self-styled modernizing “alphabet revolution” has led to a kind of alienation from the Ottoman Turkish language and the consequent development of a nationalistic linguistic ideology that

prioritizes explicitness of meaning to tame the danger of ambiguity and internal otherness (Ertürk 2011). Ottoman Turkish inscriptions on mosques, fountains, graves, and other Ottoman-era structures are found everywhere in Turkey and form part of the visual landscape. However, most Turks lack the linguistic training needed to read these inscriptions, and they remain, just like during the Ottoman period when literacy was the privilege of a select, educated few.

In Ottoman Adjara, like in the rest of the Ottoman Empire, Ottoman Turkish was a written, administrative language that differed quite widely from the spoken Turkish used on an everyday basis. The extent to which non-elite Adjarians had competencies in both Georgian and Turkish (in addition to other nearby languages like Laz, Kurdish, Armenian, and Pontic Greek) is unclear. Mathijs Pelkmans writes that, as Adjara became less peripheral to the Ottoman Empire and more strategically important in the wake of the Russo-Ottoman wars of 1828-1829, more and more Ottoman and Turkish cultural forms were adopted and “circular migration” patterns were established between Adjara and Istanbul. He writes that “young Adjarians would live in Istanbul for several years to earn money and upon returning would be able to set up businesses and support a family” (2003, 39). cf. Suliko and the majority of Adjarian hojas who studied in Turkey have reestablished such circular migration patterns today...

Pelkmans writes that, as a result of Adjara’s tighter integration in the Ottoman Empire, “Georgian became less important throughout the nineteenth century. In the 1870s it was spoken only at home and the men predominantly spoke Turkish in public. Ottoman Turkish was also the literary language, suggesting that Turkish had firmly established its position as the *lingua franca*” (2003, 39). Indeed, even today Adjarian Georgian, as I have alluded to at other points in this dissertation, is saturated with Turkish lexical items that are used in everyday speech and which are not understood by the average standard Georgian speaker in Batumi or Tbilisi. (See chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of Adjarian Georgian and its likely long-lasting contact with Meskhetian Turkish).

Interestingly, Manana, Beto’s father’s childless, unmarried cousin who told us the story of Jin Ali Agha (see chapter 2), would tell me now and again how her late parents spoke Turkish, and they would often speak Turkish with each other when they didn’t want her or her siblings to understand what was being said. Turkish words permeate not only religious discourse but also daily life. A mattress is known as a *dosheghi* (Turkish *döşek*, Georgian *leibo*); homemade butter is called *yaghi* (Turkish *yağ* ‘oil’, Georgian *karaki*—which Adjarians use to refer to store-bought butter); a scythe here is called *tirpani* (Turkish *tirpan*, Georgian *tseli*), and the list goes on.

Paul Manning writes of the encounter between the Tbilisi-based Georgian intelligentsia and Adjarian villagers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century after the Russian Empire took Adjara “back” from the Ottomans and of their campaign to “re-Georgianize” the Adjarian people, who they cast as their long-lost Georgian brothers. A central part of this effort, which in many ways resembled kinds of colonization that stylize themselves as humanitarian, charity-driven civilizing missions, was providing education in Georgian literary language.

The gravestones in the mosque cemetery can be read in this way, as just barely propped-up ruins that bear the inscription of another time, an imperial world that can no longer be read, and that threatens to be consumed by the land.

Of course, Ottoman-era gravestones are not only found in the Khulo mosque cemetery, but all over—if one knows to look. One afternoon in the fall of 2018, I went to visit Lado, Beto’s cousin, and his parents who live just before Beto’s house at the beginning of a path that leads to Upper Dzirkvadzebi. Lado’s family, like Beto’s, are also sons of Jin Ali Agha,

*Jinaliaghishvilebi*. Lado was in town from Batumi, visiting his parents, and he and his father took me on a long walk on the lands above Dzirkvadzeebi, including the entrance to a slowly collapsing cave known as Koroghli’s Cave.

While we were drinking and talking after coming back to their home, Lado’s mother came downhill along the path from Upper Dzirkvadzeebi where most of the pastureland is in the village, and since it was fall and Beshumi was snowed in, the cows were back in the village and returned to graze what was left of the grass here in the different clearings shared by Lado and Beto’s family line. One calf was being a bit stubborn and slipped away from the path to the cowshed. Lado and I caught up with it about 20 yards from the house, near a patch of grass that seemed a bit overgrown and abutted the fence that enclosed the vegetable garden. Lado grabbed a hold of the calf, and pointed out to me some rocks in the dirt below our feet. “You wanna see something really old?” he asked me. “These stones are old graves—my ancestors.” The stones were barely visible, hardly distinguishable from the dirt and grass and other small rocks they were embedded in. These two graves were flanked with two wooden boards, marking them off from the rest of the grassy slope. One of the graves was mostly broken rocks, while the other was mostly dirt, with two wooden Ottoman-style gravemarkers, one at the head and one at the foot of the grave. Lado himself wasn’t sure exactly who was buried here, just that they were his direct forebears who had lived on this land as well.



Ottoman-era graves on Lado Tavartkiladze’s land (October 2018)



Ottoman-era graves among others on Lado Tavartkiladze's land (October 2018)

This small plot of graves, like many of the family cemeteries in Khulo's villages, exhibited at least four different styles of graves all together. Each style of grave, each form of materializing memory, anchoring the corpse in the land through a specific semiotic regime of language and gravemarking, is a trace of the intersection between the *here* and the *there*, the distinct points in historical time that are cut by an intervention of the divine through which a soul departs for *the place of there*.

The land, like the graves themselves, works to dissimulate and absorb the traces of the past. Aiming to preserve, it distorts, consumes, and destroys. The stones become the land itself and the graves can only be seen by those who know to look, those who can see the trace because they themselves are inscribed in it, as Lado is. Engseng Ho, cited earlier in the chapter, writes how graves are a complex symbolic object linking together person, name, text and place. The Batumi imam, at Shorena's funeral, shows us how graves are also the site of contact between this world and the next, a portal anchored in this world, the land, and the entanglements one has through kinship and belonging, but also potentially hindered by these obligations and debts.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to show the complex ways in which land becomes both an archive of historical time as well as a portal to the intemporal. I aimed to analyze how the land becomes saturated, fuller than its own materiality, through an ethnographic analysis of the seasons of labor and ceremonies of burial and their use of, dependence on, and transformation of the land.

In the next and last chapter, I move from the land to its End. We will see how one of the *hojas* of the Quran School in Khulo attempts to direct students' attention to the land as the site of potential signs of the end of time through divine intervention.

## Chapter 4: Time and the End: The Nexus of History and the Divine

### Introduction

In this chapter, I explore how Revaz Hoja, an imam and teacher at the residential Quran School for high school boys in the town of Khulo, strives to mold his students' attention, gaze, and mode of being in the world in such a way that registers the presence of a beyond, another world, "the other scene," that is outside historical time and yet makes its presence known within it. He strives to foster a historical consciousness in his students that is necessarily a consciousness of the divine, a divine consciousness that is necessarily historical—the consciousness of an "other" world (or as Blanchot perhaps more aptly describes it, "the other of all worlds" (1982, 75)). Following Agamben, I analyze this re-orienting to the divine and to the finality of the Day of Resurrection<sup>45</sup> in a post-Soviet world, as a response to the messianic call which makes the divine historical, and brings the students to bear witness to "the time that remains." I aim to explore historical time and divine time, and the relation between the two, as they figure in Revaz Hoja's sermon and discussion with his students on *qiameti*, or the Islamic Day of Resurrection that occurs at an apocalyptic moment of divine intervention that brings this world and this time to an end.

This chapter begins with a conversation with the translator of the mostly common and widely used Georgian edition of the Quran. We discuss his process, and particularly the choices he made around his translation of the Arabic word *qiyamah*, or resurrection of souls at the Day of Judgment, into Georgian *aghdgoma*, which literally means resurrection or rising up, but is the Georgian word for Easter as well, referring there to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This mistranslation results in a misunderstanding regarding the word *qiameti* in the Quran School, to which I will turn at the end of the chapter.

I then discuss Benjamin and Agamben's notions of messianic time and the time of the now to help frame the stakes of *qiameti* within a shifting landscape of history in Adjara. Lastly, I shift to an ethnographic analysis of Revaz Hoja's sermon on *qiameti* and the linguistic devices in Georgian used by both Revaz and the students as they talk about what *qiameti* is, and how we know. My aim is to show how the students' discussion of *qiameti* using Georgian evidential strategies, such as the quotative clitic<sup>46</sup> and perfective verb forms<sup>47</sup>, perform a structure of time, knowledge and citation that mirrors that of *qiameti* and its signs. I hope finally to explore the intertwinedness of chronological time, historical time, and divine time in Adjara through this mistranslation and misunderstanding of the word *qiameti* itself.

My question in this chapter on a sermon about the apocalypse, is the question of time: How does the time of the divine, the time of the other scene, make itself known within chronological time, seizing it within its grip? What is the relation between divine time on the one hand, and chronological time and historical time, both of which we know to be multiple, on the other? How do these temporalities calibrate the here-and-now? How does the teacher Revaz Hoja work to train the students to register the signs of the divine in the present, and what is the orientation entailed in a way of life that attends to the signs in this world of the imminent intercession of the divine that brings this world to an end? Finally, what work does language do

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<sup>45</sup> Also referred to as the Day of Judgment.

<sup>46</sup> A set of suffixes that can be tacked on to any word and repeated throughout one's utterance, indicating that these words are not one's own but someone else's.

<sup>47</sup> The perfective has taken on a 'resultative' evidential meaning, i.e. one sees the result of a process and infers what must have happened, without having witnessed it oneself.

here in registering the divine or indexing a relationship to it, indexing the kind of presence the divine takes on in this world?

### Translating the Quran into Georgian

Near the end of my time in Adjara, in November 2018, I interviewed the translator of the Georgian Quran, Rezo Mikeladze. He works at the government-affiliated All Georgia Muslims Administration (AGAM), a government entity that was founded in 2011 that works to provide educational resources to the Muslim communities of Georgia. The founding of this administration, its practices, and the nature of its relations to the Georgian national government as well as to foreign states are all sources of tension and critique in Adjara (cf. Baramidze 2014).

However, one of the main activities of AGAM is the translation, and then dissemination, of Islamic texts into Georgian. The majority of texts translated by the AGAM are Turkish, sometimes even Turkish translations of Arabic texts, but the Holy Quran was translated directly from Arabic into Georgian and published in 2016 by the Turkish publishing house *Hayrât Neşriyat*.

I met Rezo at the AGAM office in Batumi. We spoke for about an hour that evening, after which he gave me a ride to my apartment in the town center.

Rezo, like most other Georgian Muslim teachers and translators of his generation, studied *ilahiyat* in Turkey and came back to Adjara to help to reorient Georgian Muslim's religious beliefs and practices towards a more standard style of 'Turkish Islam' [cite?]. His translation of the Quran into Georgian formed a crucial part of achieving this goal. As he said in our interview, "The most important thing for us, and what we, the 'new generation' are trying to do is...Look, so long as we bring in and incorporate [into our everyday use] foreign terms [i.e. from Arabic, Turkish, or Persian], this religion will remain foreign to society. In other words, this religion will be estranged from the people, and there will be problems as a result. We, the new generation, are trying to 'Georgianize' the religion as much as possible."<sup>48</sup>

His word choice for 'Georgianize' is striking here: *gadmokartuldes* (unconjugated form: *gadmo-kartul-eba*). Georgian verbs, speaking very simply on an extremely complex topic, are composed of a root, a directional prefix, and a verb stem formant. Here the root is *kartul* 'Georgian,' the stem formant is the most common one: *-eb*, and the final *-a* is the deverbal noun suffix. Of particular note is the directional prefix. Normally, the prefix used with this verb root would be *ga-*, meaning outward motion away from speaker and addressee, and which is the most common verbal prefix used with denominal and de-adjectival verb roots to create a verb meaning "to make something X". However, instead of saying '*gakartuleba*,' (to make something Georgian), he says '*gadmo-kartul-eb-a*'. *Gadmo-* is a contraction of two prefixes: the first, *gada-* meaning across; the second, *mo-* meaning hither or towards speaker and/or addressee. Rezo's use of *gadmo-* as the directional prefix here emphasizes that the move to Georgianize Islam is one that crosses a boundary, and brings the object towards 'us,' the Georgian Muslim community, the speaker-addressee origo indexed by *-mo-*. It is probably not irrelevant that the directional prefix standardly used with the verb 'to translate' '*gada-targmn-a*' is also *gada* 'across,' and sometimes perhaps *gadmo-* across and hither, if emphasizing that one is translating into one's own native language. In other words, for Rezo, the work of Georgianizing Islam, the project of

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<sup>48</sup> "qvelaze mtavari ra aris da chven ras vetsdebit axali taoba. ramden utsxo termins shemovitant chven, ramden utsxo termins davamkvidrebt, sazogadoebistvis ki, es religia ikneba utsxo. anu sazogadoebisgan gautsxo vdeba es religia, ertgvai problema sheikmneba, ai imitom iqo es utsxo. chven axali taoba vetsdebit rom es gadmokartuldes, anu rats sheidzleba."

the new generation of religious teachers, imams, and translators, is a work of translation, of moving Islam across and towards ‘us,’ crossing a frontier and making it one’s own—a work of commensuration.

I ask him specifically about his method when translating certain Islamic concepts into Georgian. Everyday speech in Adjarian Georgian includes many Islamic words, usually borrowed through Turkish, that most rural Adjarians know and understand—even if they are not Muslim themselves. Rezo tells me that these words, used and known in everyday speech, form part of “*kuchis ena*” or street language. Such words, since they are used on the street (or perhaps one might say, in the villages, for they are certainly not heard often in the streets of Batumi), would have no place in any ‘literary’ work in Georgian: “The main task of any [work of] literature is that society, my Muslim community, understand—there’s no way around it. But now on the other hand, not a single person can write whatever he feels like in street language [*kuchis ena*] when creating something literary.”<sup>49</sup>

Because such common Islamic terms as *qiamet* [day of resurrection], *jehennem* and *jennet* [hell and heaven], *namaz* [prayer], etc. are used only in the spoken language of mostly Muslim Adjarians and not in standard literary Georgian, Rezo is committed to excluding them in his translation of the Quran into Georgian. Even if most of these terms are found in the original Arabic of the Quran itself, in Georgian they are marked as non-standard, and are associated with pious villagers. In other words, Rezo sees himself as creating a work of Georgian literature when translating the Quran into Georgian, writing a text that is at once accessible to the Georgian Muslim community and unquestionably falling in line with a national Georgian literary standard.

As a result, Rezo’s translation of the Quran, published in 2016 by a Turkish company in Istanbul, in wide circulation all across Adjara, has led to some significant debate about its accuracy and word choices, even dramatic scenes of miscommunication. One notable example is Rezo’s choice for translating the Arabic *qiyamah*—or resurrection. He explains: “Incorrect terms have become ingrained in our [language]...for example *qiameti* is such a term. If you go and ask, 90 percent of Muslims will tell you that [*qiameti*] means the end of the world [*kveqnierebis dasaruli*]. But this is wrong. It’s not the end of the world, it’s resurrection. When people die, they must rise from the dead right? It means resurrection. But it’s so incorrect that [people] don’t know it’s [true] meaning. They think it’s the end of the world. So already this foreign term, which people do not know, has acquired a different ‘charge’ [*datvirtva*, also burden or load].”<sup>50</sup>

In everyday speech, foreign terms, as Rezo refers to them [*utsxo termini*] are at risk of gaining an incorrect sense, what he calls a “different charge [or load].” For him, foreign words have ‘true’ meanings that are inherent to the lexical item, inherent to the form, no matter which language it is borrowed into—as the meanings of the Arabic words under consideration here

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<sup>49</sup> “zogadi danishnuleba am nebismieri literaturis aris rom sazogadoebam, chemma muslimma temma, gaigos, amashi meore azri ar aris. magram axla meore, arts erti adamiani rodesats vtkvat raghatsas kmnis is adamiani ver datseris magalitat kuchis enaze ra elis”

<sup>50</sup> “chvenshi aris arastsori termini damkvidrebuli magalitat da mogiqvebi, magalitat qiameti aris aseti termini xom, rom gaxvide exla da muslimebis 90 protsents hkitxo getqvis rom kveqnierebis dasaruls nishnavso. magram shetsdomaa. kveqnis dasaruli ki ara—aghdgoma. adamianebi rom gardaitsvlebian, shemdgomisa xom unda aghdges. aghdgoma. magram imdenad arastsoria rom ar itsian mnishvneloba, hgoniart rom kveqnierebis dasarulia. dasaruli araa. anu ukve im utsxo terminma, romelits ar itsodnen, sxva datvirtva miigho.”

originate in the Quran and are specific to Islamic theology. No matter the way that Georgian Muslims use *qiameti* in their daily speech meaning the apocalypse or the end of the world [*kveqnierebis dasasruli*], its ‘true’ meaning, i.e. its referential meaning in the original Arabic, is resurrection, and part of the task Rezo has set for himself as translator of the Quran into Georgian is to correct these mistaken usages of Islamic terms.

This desire to correct mistakes or redirect false practices and beliefs among Georgian Muslims was often expressed during my fieldwork. People often spoke of the Soviet period as a time during which their parents and grandparents did not have access to standard religious instruction, but only knew what was passed on to them in private, at home, by their elders from memory. The translators at the All Georgia Muslims’ Association speak to this purpose as what fundamentally drives their efforts, both the translations of Islamic texts into Georgian as well as the systematic training of local imams in ‘correct’ or ‘standard’ religious theology, beliefs, and practices.

Rezo, the translator, even goes so far as to say that the problem of incorrectly used foreign terms has been solved—at least in the literature, that is. These terms and their usages have been standardized in the texts produced by the All Georgia Muslims’ Administration, although he admits the ‘problem’ may still exist at the level of people’s daily speech...<sup>51</sup>

Interestingly, many Georgian Muslims take issue with aspects of his translation and sometimes find the text more confusing than elucidating. A university student at Batumi State University, whose family descends from Khulo but who grew up in the formerly Meskhetian Turkish town of Adigeni across the Beshumi mountain pass, commented to me that he was often confused by ambiguities in Rezo’s translation and would consult with Mahmudi during his weekly Quran reading groups about parts of the translation that he had trouble understanding, saying that Mahmudi’s Arabic was much better than Rezo’s.

### **The Present, and the Time of the Now**

Walter Benjamin, in the “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” writes in Thesis A that if it is true that there are “causal connections between various moments in history,” such a cause only becomes historical “posthumously, as it were, through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years” (1968, 263).<sup>52</sup> A historian who draws such a causal connection “grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the present as the ‘time of the now’ which is shot through with chips of Messianic time” (1968, 263). I would like to begin by exploring what Benjamin understands as the ‘time of the now,’ or *Jetztzeit*, and what is Messianic time, drawing as well on Agamben, Koselleck, and ibn Khaldun, aiming to come to some kind of grasp of the configurations of, and connections between, historical time and divine time, Messianic time and the present as the time of the now.

Benjamin argues that, for the historical materialist, historical time is not to be understood as linear and progressive but rather as “time filled by the presence of the now.” In such an understanding, then, Benjamin writes that “to Robespierre [for example] ancient Rome was a past charged with the time of the now, [a past] which he blasted out of the continuum of history.

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<sup>51</sup> “dghes titkmis amaze problema ar aris. chvens kveqanashi es problema ertgvarad dasrulebulia da sheidzleba xalxis doneze saubarshi es iqos, mara literaturashi es amotsurulia.”

<sup>52</sup> cf. Jean Laplanche (1998) on “afterwardsness” or the temporality of Freudian interpretation which draws causal connections between a traumatic event or memory and a symptom that may not emerge until after a precipitating event years later.

The French Revolution viewed itself as Rome reincarnate” (1968, 261). The past is not ‘lost for history’—it is charged with *Jetztzeit*, and can be redeemed in the present, the present which is a prism for this past to stake its claim.

The past that is not ‘lost for history’ becomes “citable in all its moments” (1968, 254), and, in being cited, becomes fulfilled or redeemed. The past acts as an example, a model to be repeated or not, learned from or not. (cf. ibn Khaldun and *ibrah*, or examples—and also Koselleck on ‘lessons’ from history, indicating a kind of cyclicity of history, or history folding into itself and repeating, such that an example from a prior time can ‘apply’ to the present—not separated from it, or occurring in another time.)

What is the nature of the past? Benjamin writes of the past as image: “The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. . . For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably” (1968, 255). As image, the past is fleeting, coming suddenly as a flash, and doomed to oblivion unless it is redeemed and recognized in the time of the now. This is the “*weak* Messianic power” Benjamin speaks of: the power to recognize the past in the now and thus redeem it (1968, 254). Giorgio Agamben, in *The Time that Remains*, draws from notes on the archived copy of Benjamin’s manuscript of this text, and writes that “*Bild* [image] thus encompasses, for Benjamin, all things (meaning all objects, works of art, texts, records, or documents) wherein an instant of the past and an instant of the present are united in a constellation where the present is able to recognize the meaning of the past and the past therein finds its meaning and fulfillment” (2005, 142). The Benjaminian past-as-image thus acts as a portal, in which a thing or a trace configures two different times together in a way that redeems and fulfills, that brings to fruition a claim from the past.

According to Benjamin, the true historical time is not linear, but just such a time that folds in on itself: a configuration in which the “fullness” of the past, for a “redeemed mankind,” “becomes citable in all its moments. Each moment it has lived becomes a *citation à l’ordre du jour*—and that day is Judgment Day” (1968, 254). Every image of the past contains a message, a cypher, which can only be redeemed in the present, in the “time of the now.” In the trace discussed above, the present registers this message or cypher *as* a message and sees itself in it.

In a way, the Benjaminian image acts as an index—a thing that exists in the here-and-now but which points to a thing there-and-then, a thing from “elsewhere,” giving this other time a spectral presence within the here-and-now of chronological time. An index too acts as a portal, a single point in chronological time that enfolds other times into it, bringing them to bear on the present, bringing them into the here-and-now in which the index itself is present. Of course, like the Benjaminian image of the past, an index may not be recognized as referring to another time and may flee by unnoticed—but it is there, available to be redeemed, if we are to make use of the “*weak* Messianic power” that we have been endowed with.

An index laminates (at least) two temporal logics into a single sign, presencing the one (there-and-then) at the level of the type, while itself occurring, unfolding, within the other (here-and-now) as a token. I refer here to the “there-and-then”ness of the type to indicate that the type, or the linguistic form, refers to an unspecified before—in the sense I intended when discussing *yaslughi*, the morning meal during Ramadan, in Chapter 2. The type, the linguistic form that is instantiated through utterance, precedes that utterance, precedes the unfolding present. In contrast, the token, the singular instance of the type that is being uttered *now*, is by definition

uniquely of the present. When spoken, its sonoral materiality dissipates instantly and becomes a memory. It does not exist outside of the here-and-now.

A Freudian symptom (for example) occurs in the here-and-now but is of another time—it is of the time of the unconscious, inserting itself into conscious life, into chronological time. The symptom appears not by accord of the will of the hysteric—rather, it bursts through, making itself known in spite of the conscious mind’s will to forget. Bursting onto the scene, it brings the hysteric to another time—as can be seen in Breuer and Freud’s case study of Anna O., who relives the year prior every time she is triggered, through a *condition seconde*, or a hysterical state, that brings her back to the unprocessed memories connected to an original traumatic event (Breuer and Freud 2000, 33). Like Benjamin writes of the time of the now, nothing is lost for the unconscious—there exists not chronological sequence but a logic of the unconscious’ own, an anti-logic of condensation and displacement, interpretable, knowable—but with a limit. What is the limit of this knowability of the other time and its relation to the here-and-now, the nature of its insertion and intervention?

What is Messianic time? What makes this time, the time of the now, *Messianic*, and what is the Messiah? In *The Time that Remains*, Giorgio Agamben executes a close reading of Paul’s Letter to the Romans, exploring in particular the concepts of messianism and Messianic time as ‘the remaining time’ until time comes to an end. He speaks of messianic time as “an enormous abridgment of the entire history,” something exemplified in the idea of ‘recapitulation,’ or ‘reiteration’ which is “actually a citation without quotation marks” (2005, 143). Agamben discusses the Pauline concept of *typos*, as a “figure and prefiguration, or foreshadowing” (2005, 73). This *typos* (perhaps akin to Benjamin’s *Bild*?) is the concept through which Paul “establishes... a typological relation, between every event from a past time and *ho nyn kairos*, messianic time”—a relation which implies a “transformation of time” (2005, 74). This messianic time is a “tension that clasps together and transforms past and future, *typos* and *antitypos*, in an inseparable constellation” (Ibid). Through the messianic, the time of the now, the past is redeemed and transformed in an inextricable configuration with a future that realizes its meaning (cf., again, Laplanche on afterwardsness). This fulfillment of the past through its configuration with a future Agamben describes as ‘recapitulation’: “the fulfillment of time... a kind of summation of all things, in heaven and on earth—of all that has transpired from creation to the messianic ‘now,’ meaning of the past as a whole” (2005, 75-76).

Agamben describes messianic time in two ways. The first is as “a caesura that divides the division between times [past and present] and introduces a remnant, a zone of undecidability, in which the past is dislocated into the present and the present is extended into the past” (2005, 74). The messianic thus intercedes in chronological time, interrupting it and introducing a gap which disturbs the linear order that separates the present from the past through the sequentiality of chronological time. This ‘typological relation,’ according to which a past event becomes a ‘figure of the future’ in which it is fulfilled, implies a “transformation of time”—the “inversion” of both the past and the future within this caesura or rupture of the messianic.

The second way Agamben describes messianic time is through the Pauline concept of ‘recapitulation.’ Paul, according to Agamben, says that “insofar as messianic time aims toward the fulfillment of time... it effectuates a recapitulation, a kind of summation of all things, in heaven and on earth—of all that has transpired from creation to the messianic ‘now,’ meaning of the past as a whole” (2005, 75-76). Time thus fulfilled, recapitulated onto itself in the caesura that divides times, produces a “*pleroma*, a saturation and fulfillment of *kairos*”

[times]<sup>53</sup>...Messianic *pleroma* is therefore an abridgment and anticipation of eschatological fulfillment” (2005, 76). In the time of the now, time is shortened and folds in on itself and looks towards the eschaton by looking toward the past and fulfilling it (a sort of reverse horizon of expectation) rather than prospecting or predicting into the future.

This past, these memories, make a demand on us, they stake a claim in the present (the present understood as the messianic now: “the present as the exigency of fulfillment, what gives itself ‘as an end’” (Agamben quoting Ticonius in 2005,76)). This past, Agamben writes elsewhere, has the character of the exigent unforgettable. Always exceeding memory, this “shapeless chaos of the forgotten is neither inert nor ineffective. To the contrary, it is at work within us. [...] The exigency of the lost does not entail being remembered and commemorated; rather, it entails remaining in us and with us as forgotten, and in this way and only in this way, remaining unforgettable” (2005, 40). The forgotten, as exigent, demands not its realization, according to Agamben, but its possibility—“it demands that it become possible” (2005, 39). The forgotten yet unforgettable—unregistrable within the confines of the archive, existing beyond the form of the archivable—acts as its own archive of the unarchivable (the archive of the unconscious), having a kind of inscrutable agency, a *drive* (working on us from within) and which demands its fulfillment as possibility (or redemption, for Benjamin).

In this way, we can revisit Benjamin’s third Thesis in which he writes:

“Nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history. To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past—which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments. Each moment it has lived becomes a *citation à l’ordre du jour*—and that day is Judgment Day” (1968, 254).

Nothing is lost; everything remains to be fulfilled. In the time of the now, the ‘fullness of the past’ is realized, is possible. This messianic time is the time of history.

Christina Sharpe in *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, speaking of Blackness and state violence in the wake of slavery, theorizes the “orthography of the wake”: “a dysgraphia of disaster...[which] makes domination in/visible and not/visceral...[and] registers and produces the conventions of antiblackness in the present and into the future” (2016, 20-21). For Sharpe, the disaster of global antiblackness, and the production of black death through systemic state violence, acts as a ‘dysgraphia,’ or a kind of anti-writing that is beyond language (beyond *langue*?), that, in its holographic character, determines the contour of present and future acts of state violence all while dissimulating its very existence and legibility to the future it produces. Sharpe writes of the wake of slavery as an anti-writing that works on us in the background, that works on us by determining the ruts of history (much like the ‘other scene’ of the unconscious that, by a mysterious symbolic writing, pushes a traumatic memory to take form in conscious life according to a logic which is completely inscrutable yet absolutely consequential). This dysgraphic rut of history obscures itself all while driving its motion, keeping history in its grip. Freud writes of the will of the unconscious, the drive, bursting onto the scene of the conscious mind, demanding expression—as in a hysterical fit during which the patient is completely seized by a traumatic memory, utterly in the grip of the past. Such is the drive of history.

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<sup>53</sup> Agamben discusses two Greek words for ‘time’: *kairos* and *chronos*. *Kairos* (meaning something like ‘occasion’) is “contracted and abridged *chronos*”—“*Chronos* is that in which there is *kairos*, and *kairos* is that in which there is little *chronos*” (2005, 68-69).

## The Sermon

The lessons had ended and the boys had eaten their dinner of xarcho beef stew and macaroni. Ramadan would begin in a few weeks and the *hoja*, or religious teacher, wanted to help the boys prepare for the month of fasting and reflection in his weekly sermon today. Winter was slowly approaching its end in these quiet mountains; green was beginning to creep back into view, soon to overtake everything in sight. Spring would bring a respite from the cold and the tedium of winter, but it also means the beginning of a long period of hard work. From the first thaw through the summer until the beginning of the next winter, you must work to make sure your family can make it through one more year.

The boys trickle out of the cafeteria to play ping pong or lounge around with their friends in the empty classrooms. The teachers sit in the director's office telling stories and jokes, while Revaz Hoja looks up verses in the Georgian translation of the Quran to use in his sermon tonight. The sun had set over the mountains beyond the valley below the school, the valley that leads to the city and the sea in one direction, to a high mountain pasture, or *ieila*, in the other—a mountain pass where locals take their cows to graze for the summer, and beyond which lie other lands: Samtsxe-Javakheti to the east, an area of southern Georgia settled by Armenians and, formerly, Meskhetian Turks; and Turkey to the south.

This Quran course is a boarding school for high school boys in the mountain town of Khulo, the center of the highest, most remote district of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara. As I've discussed in Chapter 1, Mahmudi Hoja's organization runs these two boarding schools in Khulo, one for boys and one for girls. The students are from villages near and far from Daba Khulo (the central town) and stay for two weeks at the school, spending every other weekend at home in their village. During the day, the students return to their village school or, if their village is too far for a daily commute, they attend classes at the Khulo central school. In the afternoon, they return to the boarding school for Quran classes and test prep for the national university entrance exams. Revaz Hoja, one of the primary teachers at the boys' school, gives a sermon every Wednesday evening, after which the students ask questions and sometimes even debate—reminiscent of the *sobhet* tradition in Turkish religious schools.<sup>54</sup>

The majority of the *hojas*, or religious teachers, in this part of Adjara have been educated in Turkey, studying *ilahiyat*, Islamic theology, at Turkish universities and returning to preach and teach in Khulo. The founder of the organization that runs this Quran school, Mahmudi Hoja who we met in Chapter 1, was the first Adjarian to go to Turkey for religious training after the fall of the Soviet Union. In fact, this was the resumption of a very old trend dating back to the Ottoman period, interrupted by the closed Soviet border, of seeking religious education and training in Ottoman centers of learning—particularly Istanbul and Konya. As such, Turkish has long been the language of religious erudition in Adjara, in addition to being the language of the imperial class. Today, indeed, much Turkish is found in Adjarian Georgian, particularly in religious terminology but everyday vocabulary as well. *Hojas* who know Turkish are esteemed as learned and erudite in matters of Islamic knowledge and practice, and the few *hojas* who also know Arabic are highly respected for being able to read and understand the Quran as well, but these *hojas* are few and far between.

Darkness descends and the time for the sermon has come. The teachers start calling for the boys to come to the large prayer room. The dutiful ones are sitting on the couches that line the perimeter already, while the stragglers get chased and dragged in, told to keep quiet. As the boys trickle in, there is teenage chatter, excited, restless, bored, teasing. The boys are tired—it's

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<sup>54</sup> cf. Silverstein 2011

been a long day of school and studying, and tomorrow they have to get up early enough to head to their villages for their day school and then return to the town for tutoring in the afternoon at the boarding school.

Revaz starts this week's *vaizi*, or sermon, by describing how each week the boys choose the topic for the sermon—usually some aspect of Islam that the boys have questions or doubts about—and that it is their habit to believe that every possible topic is included within the sources of Islamic knowledge. However, as he explains, there are some things, some topics that might not be addressed in these sources—in other words, there might be a limit to what is knowable. Without elaborating too much on this for now, Revaz states that he wants to talk about *qiameti* this week. A central tenet of Islamic belief, *qiameti* is the Day of Resurrection when all the souls in waiting will receive final judgment and the human realm and worldly time will come to an end. The Adjarian Georgian word *qiameti* [კიამეტი] ultimately derives from the Arabic *al-qiyaamah*, meaning 'rising' or 'resurrection,' but is borrowed directly from Turkish *kıyamet*, which refers specifically to the Day of Resurrection in Islamic eschatology.

Fazlur Rahman writes in *Major Themes of the Quran* that the “central endeavor” of the Quran is for Muslims to develop *taqwa*, or a kind of “discernment” that “can enable one to distinguish between right and wrong, between justice and injustice” (1980, 120). The Quran strives to cultivate this “‘keen sight’ here and now, when there is opportunity for action and progress, for at the Hour of Judgment it will be too late to remedy the state of affairs” (Ibid.). There are thus two planes in Islamic cosmology: the here-and-now and the beyond. We encounter the divine at the Day of Resurrection (*yawm al-qiyaamah*) and the Day of Judgment (*yawm ad-din*).

As soon as Rahman has laid out this structure, he goes on to tell us it's not so simple. The here-and-now, the immediately present that-which-is-at-hand, is *not* the ultimate reality. He explains that on the one hand there is *dunya*, or the “immediate objectives, the ‘here-and-now’ of life” which is “*not* ‘this world’ but the lower values, the basal pursuits which appear so immediately tempting that most men run after them most of the time, at the expense of the higher and long-range ends (1980, 108; emphasis added). In this understanding, *dunya* is the phenomenological here-and-now, but this here-and-now is *not* ‘this world’ but rather an illusion that tempts man away from God, from the truth.

In contrast, *akhira* is the true world, the “‘ends’ of life or the long-range results of man's endeavors on earth” and which is the “essence of the ‘hereafter’” (Ibid.). Rahman, referring to a metaphor in verse 13:17 of the Quran, writes that the “show of this foam [of a rushing torrent of water] is the ‘*dunya*,’ the lasting alluvium is the ‘*akhira*’” (Ibid.). The development of *taqwa*, or what Rahman calls ‘keen sight,’ would allow one to discern that which properly pertains to *dunya* from that which is truly part of the higher order of man's endeavors that come to bear on the hereafter.

Revaz, in discussing *qiameti* during today's sermons, aims to bring the students' attention to this *akhira*, the lasting alluvium that remains when all the illusion of *dunya* washes away. In addition, as many imams and hojas talked about during my field work, Revaz Hoja's aim is also to dispel rumor from truth, hearsay from divine knowledge about *qiyaamah*—he aims to separate out what is folk knowledge, corrupted Adjarian traditional Islamic beliefs passed on through periods of oppression and secrecy, from what is true and found in the Quran, in revelation about the Days of Resurrection and Judgment, at least according to his own understanding based on the education he received in Turkey.

In order to “set the record straight,” so to speak, Revaz prompts the students to share what they have heard about *qiameti*, saying: “In all of our families, in our society, people talk about *qiameti*, they say things like *qiameti* has come down on us, but I want to know, what I’m interested in is what you all understand by *qiameti*? What is it? We are all sure that it’s real and we all agree on that, but what exactly do you understand by *qiameti*?” As we will see below, Revaz Hoja here will solicit the students’ knowledge as gathered mostly through hearsay and report—“people talk about *qiameti*” in our “families” and in our “society,” so, he asks, what have you gleaned from what you have heard? What is the knowledge that has been passed down to you through oral transmission here in Khulo, Adjara?

The corruptibility of tradition, the dangers of transmission, the wearing away of time/history on truth/divine knowledge...Revaz hoja aims to provide a kind of corrective to these inevitable workings of chronological time. In the foreword to *The Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun makes a distinction between ‘surface history’ and ‘inner history.’ Surface history is “no more than information about political events, dynasties, and occurrences of the remote past” which serves to “entertain” (1967, 5). The “inner meaning of history, on the other hand, involves speculation and an attempt to get at the truth” (Ibid.). He contrasts the roles of the historian and the reporter. While the reporter “merely dictates and passes on (the material)” without questioning its veracity or subjecting it to scrutiny as to whether it is merely “untrue gossip” or “false, discredited reports,” the historian uses “critical insight to sort out the hidden truth; it takes knowledge to lay truth bare and polish it so that critical insight may be applied to it” (Ibid.). This danger of the reporter blindly repeating falsehoods is a risk inherent to the act of transmission: information will be “suspect [if] the manner in which it has been transmitted is not sound” (1967, 16). Transmission based on mere repetition of information in the form received is subject to the dangers of inaccuracy, falsehood, and corruption. Untruth is an inevitable danger that can be tempered “if the soul is impartial in receiving information” and “devotes to that information the share of critical investigation the information deserves” (1967, 35). “Prejudice and partisanship,” “reliance on transmitters,” “unawareness of the purpose of an event,” and “unfounded assumptions” are all dangers of untruth that Ibn Khaldun discusses that can afflict historical information and self-perpetuate in the form of a calcified tradition (Ibid.).

Revaz Hoja, in soliciting what the students have heard about *qiameti* through hearsay in their families and communities, seeks to subject this second-hand knowledge to the scrutiny and critical eye of Ibn Khaldun’s historian, separating untrue gossip from true knowledge, at least as Revaz himself understands it based on his own training in *ilahiyat*, or Islamic theology, in Turkey. Indeed, the suppression of the conditions needed for proper transmission of Islamic knowledge during the Soviet period in Georgia, leading to a kind of crisis of tradition among Georgian Muslims today, mirrors in some sense similar crises and times of prophetic intervention and realignment in the early history of Islam as described by Rahman. He writes: “Every prophet’s message, then, acts like a watershed upon people to whom it is addressed; it has the effect of dividing them into the categories of truth and falsehood. [...here he cites Quranic verses that discuss sectarian differences among Jews and Christians and continues,] Indeed, the original message gets lost over a long passage of time and the sentence ‘too long a period has lapsed over them’ is repeated” (1980, 139). As Ibn Khaldun says, “Time wears us out” (1967, 3).

Commencing his effort to gather all that the boys know or have heard about *qiameti* and ‘set the record straight’ and undo the work of time on tradition, Revaz turns to the first boy sitting to his right—Beto, the same student whose family hosted me on my many stays in the

nearby village of Dzirkvadzeebi. Revaz asks Beto what he understands by qiameti, or if he had read anything about it before, or heard from someone:<sup>55</sup>

R: ras xvvedbit beto magalitat shenidan devtsqot, uh ra aris qiame—ras xvdebi amidan shen an adre ts'eik'itxe an vinmedan geigone  
*What do you understand, Beto for example, let's start with you, uh what is qiame—what do you understand from that or have you read [about it] before or heard from someone*

1. B: gagonili mak daa  
heard.pp have.1s emphatic particle  
*I've heard of it*
2. **qiameti** is ari rom karoche **qiameti** mova— **qiameti** mova- o da  
qiameti that is which in.short qiameti come.FUT qiameti come.FUT.QUOT and  
*qiameti is what...ok...qiameti will co—qiameti will come and*
3. es **dunia** ganadgurdeba- o daa hoda **Mohamed** sh-  
this world be.destroyed.FUT.QUOT emph. and.so Mohamed (shuamavali?)  
*this world will be destroyed, and also Mohamed (prophet in Georgian?)*
4. **peighambers**-o erti uhh **dua** itsis- o daa  
prophet- QUOT a uhh prayer know.3s-QUOT emp.  
*the prophet knows uhh a prayer*
5. ratsxa **vaiz**-ze movusmine mara stsorad ver mivxvdi ratsxa  
something sermon.at heard.1s but exactly cannot understood.1s something  
*I dunno I heard [this] at a sermon but I couldn't really understand it you know*
6. <R: ho> hoda im **duas** tseikixavs-o da vints mortsmune.a-o  
<R: yes> and.so that prayer read.3s.FUT-QUOT and whoever believer.is-QUOT  
<R: yes> *and so he'll read that prayer and whoever is a believer*
7. am sashinel tsamebas ver gaigonebs da daidzinebs  
this terrifying torture cannot hear.3s.FUT and sleep.3s.FUT  
*won't be able to hear this terrifying torture and will sleep.*

Beto responds, naming the type of his source off the bat in line 1—aural transmission, hearsay: “I have heard of it.” He starts to define qiameti in lines 2 and 3, stumbling a bit, using the filler word *karoche*, from Russian *коро́че koroche* “shorter,” then begins: Qiameti will come, and this world will be destroyed.” Only, at the end of each verb here he appends the suffix –o, which is a Georgian quotative marker, and governs deixis with origo at the time of the

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<sup>55</sup> See Front Matter for guide to Georgian transcription. Here, R refers to Revaz and B refers to Beto. I have bolded Islamic terms used in Adjarian Georgian that are not found in Standard Georgian. These generally are borrowed from Turkish.

original utterance that is purportedly being quoted.<sup>56</sup> Normatively it follows the verb at the end of the clause, but in practice it can be peppered all over, following every single constituent in an utterance highly marked as hearsay (see below for further discussion). Besides marking his statement as reported speech, the quotative suffix also allows him to distance himself from the veracity of such a rumor about qiameti. This is especially notable given that it is Revaz Hoja who is eliciting these reports, a respected religious teacher educated abroad—in other words, whose knowledge of Islam is not limited to oral transmission within the family and village as is the case for many people in this region, including these boys. In this context, Revaz Hoja occupies a position of authority by virtue of his proximity to official, orthodox knowledge. It would perhaps be remiss of Beto to state what he knows about qiameti, no matter the source, without the quotative marker, at least at first, as this would index a certain confidence in the veracity of his knowledge of qiameti, flying in the face of Revaz Hoja’s educational authority and status as teacher.

### Georgian Evidential Strategies

The quotative clitic in Georgian, clause final *-o*, marks quoted direct speech from an either explicitly stated or implied source. William F. Hanks describes the quotative as one of a “cluster of pragmatic effects [that] bears not on the knowledge base of the evidentially marked utterance, but on the source of the statement itself” (2014, 60). This source can be a direct statement, a quotation, a report, or multivocal in the Bakhtinian sense. As Hanks writes, “In all of these cases, the source of the statement lies elsewhere than with the speaker who utters it. These pragmatic effects thus mediate between two speech events, the current one and the one that is the effective source of the statement” (Ibid.). The Georgian quotative *-o* does exactly this work, embedding a prior speech event into the present one currently unfolding at utterance time, mediating between the two and marking their relation to each other. Following Hanks’ use of Goffman’s notions of footing and production roles (principal, author, and animator), we might analyze the quotative as typically marking the following distribution of these roles: principal and author are both speaker at time of narrated event, and animator is speaker at time of current utterance event.

Jakobson, in “Shifters and Verbal Categories,” offers a preliminary, sketchy definition of the grammatical category of evidentiality, setting it up as a specific configuration of the basic elements discussed above. He posits this configuration to be  $E^nE^{ns}/E^s$ , i.e. a relation between the narrated event ( $E^n$ ) and the narrated speech event ( $E^{ns}$ ), with reference to the current speech event ( $E^s$ ). He defines it as follows: “Evidential is a tentative label for the verbal category which takes into account three events—a narrated event, a speech event, and a narrated speech event ( $E^{ns}$ ), namely the alleged source of information about the narrated event. The speaker reports an event on the basis of someone else’s report (quotative, i.e. hearsay evidence), of a dream (revelative evidence), of a guess (presumptive evidence), or of his own previous experience (memory evidence)” (1995, 392). So for Jakobson, evidentials mark a complex configuration of relations between three distinct events: namely the current event of speaking in which the evidential is uttered, the narrated event which is reported on, and a narrated speech event (or some other kind of evidence-bearing perception or experience) that is indexed by the evidential form itself.

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<sup>56</sup> In other words, the reference of deictics such as ‘I’, ‘you’, ‘here’, ‘there,’ and verb tenses is to be resolved with respect to the reported speech event rather than the unfolding reporting speech event.

Michael Silverstein<sup>57</sup> adapts this model, saying that Jakobson's event structure of evidentials can be more accurately schematized as follows:  $E^n/P^{ns}E^{ns}/P^sE^s$ , P designating a participant. With this fuller schema, he incorporates the participants of current speech event ( $P^s$ ) in which the evidential form is uttered, in addition to the participants of the narrated event ( $P^{ns}$ ), which is indexed by the evidential as the source of knowledge about  $E^n$ . In this way, Silverstein attempts to take into account the participants' own relations to each event, as well as the relationship of the participants to each other (both inter-speech event and intra-speech event). After all, what is at stake here is not the relationship of events to each other, but rather the relationship between the participants of these events (taking on a relational quality as in Hanks' relational account of deixis<sup>58</sup>). We can see evidentials here as a marker of the quality of the relationship between two temporally distinct scenes of *énonciation* as defined by Benveniste, similar to forms that mark reported speech. Evidentials mark the relationship of the present 'now' of *énonciation* to an anterior present which acts as the current speaker's warrant to speak of  $E^n$ .

The Georgian quotative is not, strictly speaking, an evidential. Insofar as evidentiality as a grammatical category is defined as the grammaticalized encoding of information source, the quotative can perhaps be considered an evidential—or, at least, an evidential *strategy*—as it marks an utterance the source of which is the speaker of the narrated speech event. Insofar as the term 'evidentiality' is used to refer to a grammatical category more accurately known as 'epistemic modality,' (i.e. the speaker's attitude towards the information being relayed), the quotative does not encode any such meaning directly, although it can of course attain an epistemic coloring pragmatically "because marking the source of information can be regarded as an indirect means of marking an epistemic attitude toward the information itself" (Giacolone and Topadze 2007, 9). [see also Michael Lempert's article he sent me, and Lev Michael's article, and quotative self / quotative other]

An example of a typical instance of the Georgian quotative is as follows. When visiting a household, if one of the hosts asks if you want coffee, you might say "*ar minda*" or "I don't want [any]". This utterance would then be reported to the person preparing the coffee and wondering how many to prepare as "*ar minda-o*" or "I don't want- QUOT". This could also be reported as "*Ricardo-m [tkva] ar minda-o*" or "Ricardo-ERG [said] I don't want-QUOT", marking the speaker of the narrated speech event with the ergative case, the verb of speech either implied or explicitly stated. In this example of the quotative, I (Ricardo) am the principal, for I am the one ultimately responsible for the content of the utterance, and I am the author, for I have selected the words that are being reported. The animator, however, is the host, the one who is quoting my speech and relaying it to the person preparing coffee. In the second alternative formulation I've given above, this person is also the author and principal of the matrix clause (*Ricardo-m [tkva]*), and then there is a footing shift with regards to the embedded clause (*ar minda-o*).

The quotative can also be used when not strictly quoting a speech event but purporting what one might have said, or characterizing a purported speech event even if not strictly quoting verbatim. For example, during one of my stays in Dzirkvadzebi, the village muezzin read the call to prayer, or ezan, at the wrong time, which caused much confusion in the household and led Beto to consult the ezan time calendar published by the All Georgia Muslims Administration which was always at hand. Beto went outside to catch the muezzin as he walked by back to his house, and talked to him. When Beto came back inside, Beto's mother asked him "*shemeshala-*

<sup>57</sup> In a lecture of his course "Language in Culture" at the University of Chicago, Winter 2010

<sup>58</sup> cf. especially Hanks, "Indexical Ground of Deictic Reference."

*o*?” or “I was mistaken-QUOT?” and Beto replied, “*ho, shemeshala-o*”: “yes, I was mistaken-QUOT”. In this case, the utterance marked by the quotative is not in actual fact a quoted utterance, but rather a characterization of something Beto’s mother thinks the muezzin might have said given the circumstances. In this case too, the utterer of the narrated speech event, which itself did not actually occur, is implied too, understood contextually rather than explicitly stated. In other words, the principal of the quotative-marked utterance need not be made explicit to be understood by the participants—but the author here is *not* the muezzin but Beto’s mother. In addition, since Beto’s mother’s utterance is in the form of a question, the matrix clause implied could be rendered as: “Did he say that...” followed by the quotative-marked subclause. This use of the quotative begs the question as to whether there must always be an implied matrix clause, and even an implied principal? It would seem that when the quotative is used on an utterance in which there is no narrated speech event referred to at all, i.e. “when the information source is not specified, *-o* means ‘it is said,’ ‘they said’” (Giacolone and Topadze, 16). And finally, what is the epistemic stance, implied or inherent, if there is one at all beyond that of a ‘neutral quotaton’, of the speaker towards the narrated speech event marked by the quotative?<sup>59</sup>

What is apparent in any use of the quotative is an indexing of another speech event, another moment in time, witnessed or imagined, enfolded into the current speech event at hand at the time of speaking (Benveniste, Jakobson). The quotative allows the lamination of two different times together, the one referred to and repeated or characterized, and the one unfolding in the present—two different times unfold together in a new configuration. One is the here-and-now of the unfolding present, the other is an ‘other scene,’ a ‘beyond,’ not palpable to the senses in the here-and-now but able to be made present and indexed as other through the use of the quotative.

Now let us return to our discussion of the sermon, paying special attention to the use of the quotative marker and the ways that multiple temporalities are scaffolded in speech in the hoja’s discussion with his students about the End Times. In response to Revaz Hoja’s question as to what the students know, or what they have heard, about qiameti, Beto starts off by reporting the rumor that the world will be destroyed. He then begins to describe something he has heard that the Prophet Muhammed will do when qiameti comes: he says in line 4 “the Prophet Mohammed uhh knows a [certain] prayer,” purportedly quoting another speaker’s words from another speech event as indicated by the final quotative *-o*. Before he goes on, he interjects into his own report a hedge in which he identifies the exact the source of this quote, and at the same time further marks his inability to speak authoritatively on such matters. He says in line 5 “I heard [this] at a sermon but I couldn’t understand it correctly,” beginning and ending this hedge with “*ratsxa*” meaning “something” but used commonly as a filler word like “sorta,” “kinda,” or “like,” and which inserts uncertainty or approximation into the utterance it accompanies. We can analyze his hedges, use of the quotative, and insertions of the filler word *ratsxa* as all marking an attitude towards the information he is reporting vis-à-vis his addressee (Revaz Hoja) as well as all the overhearers in the room (all of his fellow students, other hojas and employees of the school, and me).

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<sup>59</sup> There exist two other quotative clitics in Standard Georgian: *-metki*, indicating the speaker’s report of his or her own past speech or thought (normally limited to clause-final position) and *-tko*, which I will leave out of my discussion because it is not found in Upper Adjarian Georgian varieties.

After this hedging, Revaz responds “yes” in line 6, and Beto continues his description: “and so he will recite this prayer and whoever is a believer won’t be able to hear this terrifying torment and will sleep.” We see that Beto’s description of qiameti is more precisely a description of what will happen when qiameti comes, of certain events associated with it, signs in the here-and-now indexing the arrival of divine intervention, at least according to what he has heard. He only obliquely describes qiameti itself in line 7, referring to it as a “*sashineli ts’ameba*,” or a terrifying torture. We could perhaps parse his answer to the hoja’s question into three sections: a first section, maximally marked as reported speech with the *-o* suffix, a middle section bookended by “*ratsxa*” that qualifies his authority and identifies the source of the information he is relaying, and a third, final section that eventually sees the disappearance of the quotative *-o* in the final clause along with a shift from phonological features found in Upper Adjarian Georgian verb forms to that of standard Georgian (compare *ts’eikitxavs* in line 6 to *gaigonebs* and *daidzinebs* in line 7)<sup>60</sup>—perhaps Beto begins to speak a bit more authoritatively and in more standard Georgian after his multiple hedges and quotative markers have sufficiently marked him as a non-expert, nothing more than a reporter of others’ words.

It’s interesting to note that Beto states explicitly in line 5 the source of the information he is marking as a quotation (“I heard this at a sermon but I couldn’t understand it correctly”). Before this hedge, his utterance is maximally marked as quote, as the words of another embedded in his own, a lamination of two speech events. His usage of the quotative is informed by the participant roles in each of these speech events. In the narrated speech event, he was presumably one listener among many faithful attending a sermon given by an imam at a mosque (no further specifics are given). Now, he is reporting as a quotation the words of this imam that Beto was a passive recipient of, embedding them in his own speech, in a sense embodying the role of an authoritative messenger speaking on topics that require much training and education to understand. It would no doubt have been remiss of Beto to speak about the signs of qiameti without some kind of hedging or quotative particle. Such a phrasing would have been read as a display of brash bravado, in particular when in the setting of the weekly school sermon, and prompted to provide this information by Revaz Hoja himself—an imposing figure in the school with a strict pedagogical style who studied Islamic theology in Turkey. Tellingly, once Beto has identified the source of the information he is reporting, and once he has been encouraged by Revaz Hoja that he is on the right track, he stops using the quotative particle and even shifts from ‘Khulouri’ regional Georgian to Standard Georgian, which to Beto and his peers is registered as urban literary Georgian, particularly Georgian as spoken in Batumi and Tbilisi. In a way, at this point Beto is now ‘off the hook’ for any inaccuracies in his report on what he knows about qiameti, as he has marked any knowledge he has as coming from a sermon which he has not understood well, as well as identified the words he is uttering as quoted from this sermon, buffered finally by a sign of approval and encouragement from the teacher.

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<sup>60</sup> In the variety of Georgian spoken in Khulo, the vowel of the Georgian directional preverb changes according to the vowel of the version infix that comes between the preverb and the verb root. This infix is either *-a-*, *-i-*, *-u-* or *-e-*. Version generally indicates ‘for whose sake’ the action is undertaken, or indicates the indirect object. In the examples seen here, in “Khulouri” Georgian, a preverb ending in *-a-* (*ga-*, *da-*, *ts’a-*, etc.) will see this vowel change to *-e-* before version infix *-i-*. As another example, the preverb vowel will change to *-u-* when followed by infix *-u-* indicated third person indirect object agreement (eg. *gaugonebs* becomes *guugonebs*). In Khulouri, the final two verbs Beto utters would be instead ‘geigonebs’ and ‘deidzinebs’.

In addition, we might consider the ways in which the students use the quotative clitic when speaking of what to their knowledge are the signs of qiameti when prompted by their learned hoja to mark this knowledge as not their responsibility, that they are not necessarily vouching for its veracity—and that to do so would be to occupy a role reserved for the hoja himself in this situation. Janis Nuckolls argues, in “From quotative other to quotative self,” that the so-called ‘indirect’ evidential in Pastaza Quichua does not strictly indicate indirect source of information (such as hearsay), but rather is used by speakers to posit that the statements uttered is attributable to the perspective of an ‘other,’ usually an ‘other’ speaking subject of a narrated speech event, as opposed to both themselves *qua* speaking subject of the unfolding speech event and themselves *qua* speaking subject of the narrated speech event as well. She writes that the so-called ‘direct’ evidential clitic *-mi* is actually used by speakers to “focus the assertion-making perspective of a speaking self who may belong to a speech event or to a narrative event” rather than making any claim that the source of knowledge is direct, first-hand witnessing (Nuckolls 2014, 69).

### The signs

As I alluded to above, what Beto ends up reporting is less so describing qiameti itself, the Day of Resurrection, but rather the signs that occur in this world to indicate the imminent arrival of the final divine intervention. These signs are known in Arabic as *‘alamah*—in Adjarian Georgian *alameti* [ალამეთი]. The hojas use *alameti* in their discussion but the students are not familiar—and Revaz Hoja glosses this as *nishani* [ნიშანი], the Georgian word for ‘sign,’ and alternates between these two words throughout the sermon and discussion. Fazlur Rahman writes of the ordered quality of nature and natural processes as being “the prime ‘sign’ (*aya*) or proof of its Maker,” and critiques that people “do not realize that the universe is a sign pointing to something ‘beyond’ itself, something without which the universe, with all its natural causes, would be and could be nothing” (1980, 69). The mere existence of an ordered universe with natural processes driven by self-sufficient causes is to be taken not as ultimate and God-less, but rather as the very proof of God, the very sign that indicates the existence of God and His power. Nature indexes God by virtue of being the product of His will. In this way, Rahman refers to nature’s “incomprehensible vastness and regularity” as a “natural sign” of God, which He is just as well “capable of diverting, suppressing, or temporarily suspending the efficacy of natural causes” (Ibid.). However, as discussed above, one must in the first place develop *taqwa* in order to correctly and accurately interpret nature as a sign of God. Rahman writes that “a ‘sign’ in the religious sense points beyond itself to its Author” but that “in order to determine the meaning of a sign, one must have, in addition to reason, a certain disposition, i.e., the capacity for faith” (1980, 70). In the context of the sermon in the Quran school, Revaz Hoja has the reason, the knowledge, of what phenomena are to be interpreted as *alameti*, or signs specifically of qiameti, and he and the other hojas strive to inculcate in their students the capacity for faith needed to be able to determine the meaning of such signs in daily life, the faith needed to see the sign of the divine in the ordinary and everyday.

A Quranic sign signifies its Author by virtue of having been created by Him, the way a painting acts as a sign of its painter, or bears his or her signature or trademark style. As Rahman writes that one must have a capacity for faith or some knowledge of the divine in order to correctly read nature as a sign of God *par excellence*, so Peirce tells us that “the Sign can only represent the Object and tell about it. It cannot furnish acquaintance with or recognition of that Object...namely, that with which [the Sign] presupposes an acquaintance in order to convey

some further information concerning it” (1955, 100). In order to be able to apprehend the signs of the divine *as* signs of the divine, one must already have an acquaintance with the divine, with God—this is *taqwa*, a disposition that orients itself to the very ‘beyond’ that the sign points to by virtue of being the creation thereof.

What is the temporality of the *alameti*, of the sign that indicates the consumption of this world into the divine finality, of the interruption of historical time by divine time? Ibn Khaldun, writing of prophecy and revelation, states that “learning the message from the angel, reverting to the level of human perception, and understanding the message conveyed to him—all this appears to take place in one moment, or rather, in a flash. It does not take place in time, but everything happens simultaneously...” (1967, 78).

Revaz Hoja continues going around the room, encouraging each student to share something they have heard. He assures the shy ones or the ones who say they know nothing about *qiameti* that there must be something they have heard that they can report, just like other students who at first said they knew nothing. Eventually he comes upon Badri, a bright and eager student who answers:

Metnaklebad, anu, *qiametze gimigonia* mara gagonili is makvs rom anu *qiametshi es samqaro (coughs)-o* da amis mosvliis dro aravin ar **itsis-o** magram aris varaudebi uh rodiss **mov-a-o** magalitat rodesats rom dedis mutselshi uh bavshvi **mokvdeba-o** an ar **daebadeba-o** xeebi **gaxmoba-o** da raghats aseti tsinapirobebis shemdeg modis **qiameti-o...**

More or less, well, *I’ve heard* about *qiameti* but what I’ve heard is that, well, in *qiameti*, this world [will be destroyed?] and no know **knows** the time it will come [*amis mosvliis dro*] but there are presuppositions [*varaudebi*] when it **will come** for example when babies **will die** in the womb or **won’t be born**, trees **will dry up** and like after these preconditions [*tsinapirobebi*] will come **qiameti**

I have bolded the words that Badri has suffixed with the quotative *-o* in the original Georgian, and italicized the one verb in the perfective, which in Georgian has the meaning of an ‘indirect’ evidential, very similar to the Turkish historical perfective suffix *-miş*. The structure of Badri’s answer outlines and distinguishes the kinds of knowledge one can have about *qiameti*, establishes what he knows, and reports this knowledge to Revaz Hoja in front of a large audience consisting of all his fellow students, other teachers, and me. First, he hedges his response with ‘*metnaklebad*’ and ‘*anu*’, meaning ‘more or less’ and ‘in other words,’ respectively. Then he says that he has ‘heard’ about *qiameti*, with this verb in the perfective. In Georgian, the historical perfective has gained a resultative meaning and is used as an evidential strategy to express information one knows based on the results of an action (Boeder 2000). Boeder writes that the modern perfect has come to gain the following evidential meanings, depending on the context of use: non-witnessedness, inference, admirative (surprise, unexpectedness), irony, hearsay (in certain cases), and tradition (narrative traditions in particular).<sup>61</sup> When the perfective is used in an embedded clause, it can indicate an evidential stance not on the part of the speaker but rather of the subject of the embedded clause, allowing for multiple perspectives and kinds of knowledge to be laminated into a single clause. Finally, when the perfect is used a sentence with

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<sup>61</sup> Indeed, at other points in the sermon, Revaz Hoja uses the perfective when narrating a story of an episode from Prophet Muhammed’s life. Notably, in these instances he does not use the quotative *-o*.

negative polarity, it indicates non-volition. In contrast, if a verb with negative polarity is in the simple aorist, it indicates that the subject intended not to perform the action. For example:

a. im ghame-s ik darchnen, magram Irmisa-s ar dasdzinebia  
that(Obl) night-Dat there they.stayed(Aor), but Irmisa-Dat not he.has.fallen.asleepCPerfi  
'That night they stayed there, but Irmisa did not fall sleep.'

b. Irmisa-m im ghame-s ar daidzina  
Irmisa-Erg that(Obl) night-Dat not he.went.to.sleep(Aor')  
'Irmisa did not go to sleep that night [because a dragon was expected to come]'.<sup>62</sup>

In a., Irmisa was not able to fall asleep but would have liked to (non-volitional, verb in perfective), while in b., Irmisa purposefully did not sleep because he needed to remain alert to watch out for the dragon (volitional, verb in aorist). Finally, the perfective is also used to indicate something like 'at least once,' or that the action has occurred repeatedly and there is no one specific instance being presently referred to.

Returning to Badri, when he says, using the perfective, '*qiametze gimigonia*' 'I have heard about qiameti,' we can understand him to have this final use of the perfect in mind: "I have often heard about qiameti, on many occasions." The perfective here may also potentially be doing double-duty as an 'indirect' evidential strategy, in such a way that Badri distances himself from vouching for the veracity of what he is about to report that he has heard about qiameti. Following Nuckolls, we might say that Badri is setting up a report of knowledge belonging not to the speaking self, but rather to the quotative self. We see a 'quotative self' in the next few sentences of Badri's answer: 'this world [**will be destroyed**?] and no one **knows** the time it will come [*amis mosvliis dro*].' While the first verb is unclear on the recording, from context it seems he is repeating what other boys have reported as well—in qiameti, the world will be destroyed (bolded to indicate the quotative suffix in the original Georgian). Then, he says that 'no one knows the time it will come', or, literally, the time of its coming. The quotative self Badri posits acts as the source of this knowledge, the knowledge of the limits of possible knowledge of qiameti, i.e. knowing what man cannot know. We know *what* (the destruction of the world), but we do not, we cannot know *when*. We cannot know its *time* [*dro*].

The question of knowledge, what can be known of the divine, is the question Revaz Hoja started the sermon with: This week's topic is "the source of knowledge of Islam. It's possible the source of knowledge of Islam comprises more or less everything, but maybe not every topic is titled. So, therefore, a second topic is whether or not the source of knowledge of Islam is enough for us to know where or how to look [for this information]." In other words, at the base of Revaz Hoja's discussion with the students this day is the nature of the limits of Islamic knowledge—what we can know and how we can know it, and the nature of the knowledge we can have about what we cannot know—especially considering the peculiar kind of knowledge that is the knowledge of the divine.

Ibn Khaldun speaks of revelation, one of the main sources of knowledge of the divine, as occurring outside of chronological time. Revelation is a kind of non-corporeal, or even *extra-corporeal*, knowledge. Prophets, unique in their openness to revelation by virtue of God having "freed them from the lets and hindrance of the human body, by which they were afflicted as human beings . . . thus move toward the angelic, sloughing off humanity at will, by virtue of their natural constitution" (1967, 78). In this unique place between the human and the angelic

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<sup>62</sup> Adapted from Boeder 2000, 302

realms, prophets have access to the openings, the porousness of time that allows them to hear messages from the divine. Such messages are relayed outside of chronological time: “Learning the message from the angel, reverting to the level of human perception, and understanding the message conveyed to him—all this appears to take place in one moment, or rather, in a flash. It does not take place in time, but everything happens simultaneously” (Ibid.). The time of revelation is like the time of the now—in the divine message, ‘everything happens simultaneously’; there is no linearity, no chronology of events; it occurs *outside* of time. This message is then ‘reverted’ to the level of human perception and understood by the prophet, but this is a process of translation, interlingual *and* intersemiotic, for the message from the angel is not given in human language, linear by its very nature. As Ibn Khaldun makes clear, revelation “causes pain” for it “means leaving one’s humanity, in order to attain angelic perceptions and to hear the speech of the soul.” The soul is choked when “it leaves its own essence and exchanges its own stage for the ultimate stage” in order to receive the message (Ibid.).

Revaz Hoja and his students of course are not prophets. The hoja and his students have access to the divine message only through its multiple renderings and translations into human symbolic systems—an access bound by the inherent limits to the knowability of the divine. In the case of qiameti, this limit applies in particular to the time of qiameti, which Badri spoke of above. In the latter part of his sermon, Revaz Hoja tells a story of the Prophet in which an unfamiliar man approaches him and his companions and questions him about Islam. This man asks the Prophet about the fundamentals of Islam, about iman or faith, about the hajj. Finally, the stranger asks the Prophet when the deluge [*tsarghvna*, the same Georgian word used for the Great Flood of Noah] will come. Revaz Hoja narrates, “The Prophet answered this [question] saying, ‘I don’t know the answer to this question better than a fortuneteller,’”<sup>63</sup> omitting the quotative clitic completely. After this, Revaz Hoja says, “Later his companions asked the Prophet who was that **man** [quotative appended here], [and the prophet replied] That man was Gabriel in the form of man. He came to teach you Islam through my tongue/language,”<sup>64</sup> again not appending the Prophet’s speech with the quotative suffix.

Firstly, it is interesting to note what this story portrays about the possibility of knowledge of the divine, and particularly about qiameti. In Revaz Hoja’s telling, even the Prophet cannot know the time of qiameti—he *cannot* know this, not any better than a fortuneteller could predict this (presumably based on an interpretation of divine signs in the here-and-now...). Even a Prophet who regularly receives revelations from God is limited in what he can know, and he knows this limit himself. Secondly, it is remarkable that Revaz Hoja does not use the quotative here when reporting the speech of the Prophet, but does use it when reporting the speech of his companions. It seems that to use the quotative on the Prophet’s speech would have some pragmatic effect of distancing or questioning, which would be acceptable when it comes to his companions, but not his own words. Perhaps one can conclude that the use of the quotative thus also depends on the nature of the narrated speech event, whose speech is being reported, and what they are saying. Revaz Hoja’s story conveys the absolute limit of knowledge about qiameti as reported by the Prophet himself—appending the quotative clitic to this report would perhaps have the undesirable effect of putting this limit into question, doubting whether the Prophet had actually said such a thing, and whether such a thing is true. By not adding the quotative to the

<sup>63</sup> “Peyghamberma amaze upasuxa rom am kitxvis pasuxi mkixavze upro kargad me ar vitsi”

<sup>64</sup> “Bloxan hkitxes sahabeebma peyghambers rom vin iqo is **katsi-o**, <cough> es katsi jebrailli isselami iqo adamianis pormashi shetsvlili, imitom movida tkventan rom islami estsavlebina chemi enit”

Prophet's reported speech, Revaz Hoja also inhabits the authority and certainty of the knowledge of the divine that the Prophet has received through revelation, through his communication with the angels of God.

Let us return to Badri's answer about the signs of qiameti. Because of the absolute limits to human knowledge of the finality of time, of the time of the divine, Badri registers that what we do have access to are its signs, the forms it takes in this world in order to 'revert to the level of human perception,' as Ibn Khaldun describes revelation. I include his answer here again for reference:

Metnaklebad, anu, qiametze *gimigonia* mara gagonili is makvs rom anu qiametshi es samqaro (**coughs**)-o da amis mosvlis dro aravin ar **itsis-o** magram aris varaudebi uh rodus **mova-o** magalitat rodesats rom dedis mutselshi uh bavshvi **mokvdeba-o** an ar **daebadeba-o** xeebi **gaxmoba-o** da raghats aseti tsinapirobebis shemdeg modis **qiameti-o**...

More or less, well, *I've heard* about qiameti but what I've heard is that, well, in qiameti, this world [will be destroyed?] and no know **knows** the time it will come [*amis mosvlis dro*] but there are presuppositions [*varaudebi*] when it **will come** for example when babies **will die** in the womb or **won't be born**, trees **will dry up** and like after these preconditions [*tsinapirobebi*] will come **qiameti**

Badri states that no one knows the *time* qiameti will come, but there are suppositions, or guesses, about what it will come. The examples he then lists of some of these guesses are all signs (*nishani* or *alameti*) that would indicate qiameti's imminence: babies will die in the womb, they will not be born, and trees will dry up. Each of these cited suppositions of the signs of qiameti are appended with the quotative clitic *-o*, indicating that Badri himself heard these being stated at a past moment and is quoting these past speech events here. Because he does not make explicit who he is quoting, we can interpret the *-o* suffix as indicating an unspecified source: "they say," or "it is said"—i.e., a kind of hearsay report. Badri cites the suppositions, or predictions, enfolding their past telling in the present speech event, continuing a chain of transmission of knowledge through oral report, quoting here not a specific person at a specific time but rather a tradition of knowledge of the divine, a tradition of an understanding of divine time.

The horizon of time is finite, and the approach of this finality is indexed by the signs, the *alametis*, or, as Badri here calls them, the "preconditions" or "prerequisites" [*tsinapirobebi*]. In order to know the signs, recognize them *as* signs, and heed their import as traces of divine intervention into human time, one must have developed *taqwa* and the 'right' understanding of this tradition of knowledge, of knowing the divine through knowing the *alamets*. A tree drying up and a stillborn baby—both unremarkable occurrences, such that to know if they are an *alameti*, a sign of divine intervention bringing time to an end, one must be able to distinguish, to read them against the whole backdrop of the world and interpret them as the recapitulation of past revelations.

### Utterance Time and Historical Time

The use of the quotative thus embeds the perspective of an other, witnessed or imagined, staging a kind of encounter of perspective and voice through a formal apparatus that contains the mark of another time within the present unfolding time of utterance. Benveniste's theory of linguistic time is helpful for grounding a sense of this mark of another time. According to him,

linguistic time differs from both physical time (the phenomenological sense of duration, of becoming later) and chronic (or historical?) time (calendric, sequenced, measured time intervals) in “Language and Human Experience.” He defines linguistic time as “organically linked to the exercise of *parole*”<sup>65</sup> and as “defined and ordered as a function of discourse” (1974, 73). Linguistic time has as its “generative center and axial system” the present moment of discourse, such that this central axis of the present is “reinvented each time someone speaks because it is, by definition, a new moment not yet lived” (1974, 73-74). All temporal oppositions marked in language are with reference to this present of *énonciation*, the present of utterance (something that is by definition true of all deixis—the default origo or ‘zero point’ of reference is the current, unfolding speech event). Indeed, Benveniste goes on to say that “the only time inherent to *langue* is the axial present of discourse, and that this present is implicit” (1974, 75). Insofar as any past reference is in actual fact in reference to that which is no longer contemporaneous with the moment of discourse, and any future reference is future insofar as it is prospected and not yet present at the time of discourse, tenses are not absolute values but rather relative to utterance time. “These two references do not refer to time, but to perspectives on time, projected backwards and forwards from the present point” (Ibid.).

This radical, moving present of speech, the centering axis of linguistic time, is contemporaneous with the time of *énonciation*, a concept Benveniste outlines in “The formal apparatus of *énonciation*.” In this essay, Benveniste defines *énonciation* as “putting *langue* into operation by an individual act of its utilization” (1974, 80). It is “the very act of producing an *énoncé*” —the action of utterance and not the text of this uttered speech (Ibid.). *Énonciation* is an act of transformation: “before *énonciation*, *langue* is but the possibility of *langue*. After *énonciation*, *langue* is put into effect in an instance of discourse that emanates from a speaker, an aural form that reaches a listener and that in return incites another *énonciation*” (1974, 81-82). In this way, according to Benveniste, temporality is “produced in reality in and by *énonciation*. From *énonciation* proceeds the establishment of the category of the present, and from the category of the present is born the category of time. The present is [thus] truly the source of time” (1974, 83).

Benveniste posits that one of the unique qualities of utterance is its status as the only true way to realize and live the ‘now’: “[The present] is that presence in the world which only *énonciation* makes possible, because, even if one were to want to ponder it, man has no other way of living the ‘now’ and of making it actual than by realizing it by inserting discourse into the world” (1974, 83). Agamben writes of this now, made possible only through *énonciation*, as messianic: “the messianic—the ungraspable quality of the ‘now’—is the very opening through which we may seize hold of time, achieving our representation of time, making it end” (2005, 100).

With this understanding of utterance time, or the time of Jakobson’s E<sup>s</sup>, it becomes possible to understand the quotative as generative, as a realignment of time, and as a lamination of a past (/or other) time into the time of the now—and as such parallels the time of the now (*Jetztzeit*) that is Messianic time, or the time that time takes to *end*, through divine intervention. Agamben discusses the Hegelian concept of *Aufhebung* as it describes the ‘divine nature’ of language that “transforms sense certainty into a negative and a nothingness and conserves this nothingness, converting the negative into being... Inasmuch as the ‘now’ [the moment of *énonciation*] has already ceased to be once it has been uttered (or written), the attempt to grasp the ‘now’ always produces a past, a *gewesen*, which as such is *kein Wesen*, nonbeing.” Limiting

<sup>65</sup> I.e., the execution of *langue* by an individual in a specific utterance event (Saussure 1972).

myself to Agamben's glossing of these concepts and arguments from Hegel (as I am [un?]fortunately unfamiliar with them myself), it seems that there is something about the ever-shifting axial center of language, the ever-shifting ungraspable time of the 'now,' that ceases to exist the moment it comes into being, that carries a divine power for Agamben's Hegel—the divine power to “preserve” nonbeing in language and “posit” it as such (2005, 100). This operation of language on being and nonbeing is crucial. As Agamben further discusses, since language, through shifters [i.e. deictics] “refers to its own taking place...[it] produces the sensible expressed in it as a past and at the same time defers this sensible to the future. In this fashion, it is always already caught up in a history and a time” (Ibid.). In ‘referring to its own taking place’ through deixis, language is caught in between different kinds of time—the (only) one inherent to it, at least according to Benveniste: the linguistic time of the now of *énonciation*; the time of its unfolding: physical time, or what Agamben would call ‘chronological time’; and finally historical time (different from chronological time!!).

The quotative can thus be considered a linguistic device that enacts the recapitulation of time, the fulfillment of the past in its own future instantiation. The quotative retrieves a past ‘now’ and enfolds it in the current, unfolding present to fulfill its meaning, giving it a new time in its own foretold future (???). Agamben models messianic time using a sestina poem, a fixed verse structure of six stanzas with six lines each. The line endings of the first stanzas are repeated in a rotating fashion in the subsequent stanzas. He writes that the poem acts as a “soteriological device”, a device of salvation, that “transforms chronological time into messianic time” “through the sophisticated *mēchanē* of the announcement and retrieval of rhyming end words (which correspond to typological relations between past and present),” or in other words, through the recapitulation of a past form into the now, fulfilling the full meaning of the past form through its reuptake through rhyme. In this way, just as messianic time is shown to be “the transformation that time undergoes when it is taken for a remnant, so too is the time of the sestina the metamorphosis that time undergoes insofar as it is the time of the end, the *time that the poem takes to come to an end*” (2005, 82-83). Agamben's recapitulation, then, can be understood as the fulfillment of the drive, the drive finding expression—the dysgraphic writing of the past being read. He writes: “What is essentially messianic and *historic* is the idea that fulfillment is possible by retrieving and revoking foundation, by coming to terms with it” (2005, 103-4).

In the ninth thesis, Benjamin writes of the figure of Angelus Novus as the angel of history. “His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread.” The angel of history “is turned toward the past,” witnessing it in all its ruin, unable to turn away. He perceives “one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed.” But a storm from Paradise “irresistibly propels him into the future... This storm is what we call progress” (1968, 257-258). The image Benjamin gives us is one of a failed recapitulation of the past, a missed fulfillment that the angel of history wants to repair, to “awaken the dead and make whole what has been smashed,” but this is not possible in a historical time that moves ever forward (or, here, backwards) into the future in chronological, linear fashion that makes no allowance for a recuperation or fulfillment of remnants of the past. The ruin of Progress could be understood, in the case of the poem Agamben analyzes, as leaving each line's final word in the lurch, denying them rhythmic or rhyming reuptake in the name of moving forward. The angel of history wants to make whole, fulfill these remnants in the time of the now, but progress abandons them to oblivion (or, as Agamben says, to the “forgotten but unforgettable”).

Benjamin writes of “messianic time as an enormous abridgement of the entire history” (Agamben 2005, 143). Messianic time is like an image, Benjamin’s *Bild*, which Agamben defines as “all things... wherein an instant of the past and an instant of the present are united in a constellation where the present is able to recognize meaning of the past and the past therein finds its meaning and fulfillment” (2005, 142). The past becomes “citable” in all its moments, and only through citation does it become fully legible “at a determinate historical moment”—“the image in the now of its recognizability” (2005, 145). The quotative does this work—restoring a past (real or posited) utterance and fulfilling its meaning in a new now, forming a constellation between the narrated, cited speech event and the unfolding, citing speech event. As Benjamin writes in a note, “image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation” (Ibid.).

In giving reports on the *alametis*, the students embed a past speech event within their own, as speaker, thus recapitulating the past speech event and fulfilling it in the now—just as what they are reporting are the signs that mark the fulfillment of a prophecy of the ending of time. For the students, with *taqwa* developed and their attention attuned to the signs of God’s intervention into historical time through Revaz Hoja’s instruction, as Benjamin states for the Jews “experienced in remembrance,” “every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter” (1968, 264). The *alametis* are like fragments of the ruins of history, signs that must be recovered and restored to their proper significance—ruins that must be restored to their proper place in order for Messianic time to be registered, experienced (cf. Benjamin and the Angelus Novus discussed above). The quotative formally sets up this encounter, this porousness of the now, bringing the past and its ruins in constellation with the now of speaking, the only time inherent to language—the time of the Messiah.

Insofar as the *alametis*, the signs of the coming apocalypse, are themselves known from past speech events (of divine speech), their coming to fruition in the here-and-now is like a citation of a past image, and the fulfillment of the past, of God’s declarations of how one can know that time is coming to an end. In a sense, witnessing a phenomenon in the world and taking it as a fulfillment of one of the prophecies of *qiyameti*’s coming is like seeing and recognizing the rhymed words at the ends of each line of Agamben’s *sestina*.

### Translating into the Now

At a later point in the sermon, Revaz Hoja states he would like them to read together the chapter of the Quran on *qiyameti* ‘in the Georgian language,’ and he pulls out his copy of the Quran translated by Rezo Mikeladze and published by the

It is this translation that Revaz Hoja has on hand at the Quran school and from which he reads regularly during his sermons.

Revaz Hoja thus starts by reading aloud the first verse of the *qiyameti* chapter in this translation, known in Arabic as *Surah al-Qiyamah*. He reads: ‘*vpitsav aghdgomis dghes*’ – ‘I swear by the day of resurrection.’ Only, the Georgian word used to render Arabic *qiyamah*, ‘resurrection,’ is *aghdgoma*<sup>66</sup>—literally meaning rising or resurrection, but which is also the Georgian word for Easter, a Christian holiday marking the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

After reading this first verse, the *hoja* interrupts himself with a clarification: ‘*qiyameti* is in actuality *aghdgoma* as well, you know, it’s death and then rebirth.’ His explanation does little, however, to prevent the inevitable objections of his students. Immediately, several boys point

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<sup>66</sup> In the quoted verse, *aghdgoma* is in the genitive, or possessive, case marked by dropping the final vowel and adding *-is*, meaning ‘of resurrection.’

out, their voices overlapping, that *aghdgoma* is a Christian holiday and what did that mean, are we to swear upon a Christian holiday as Muslims? The *hoja* reassures the students: ‘Look, by *aghdgoma*, Christians understand one thing, and we understand something totally different. Their *aghdgoma* is something completely separate... Got it? In other words, what they do and believe is not our issue.’ After this, he moves on with his sermon, continuing his discussion of this chapter of the Quran by reading the Georgian translation verse by verse and offering explanations and elaborations.

This moment of protest and clarification brings us back to the beginning of this chapter, to my conversation with Rezo Mikeladze, the translator of the government-affiliated All Georgia Muslims’ Administration. We saw that Rezo translates into standard Georgian on principle, even if the Arabic or Turkish word he is translating exists in Adjarian varieties of Georgian. He of course knows these words himself because he is a Muslim from Upper Adjara. When faced with the Arabic word *qiyamah*, he opted to translate its literal meaning of resurrection by the technically equivalent Georgian word *aghdgoma* over the Adjarian *qiameti*—even considering the clear Christian overtones of Georgian *aghdgoma* (as pointed out by the students too). Choosing to use *qiameti* would have offered clarity and lack of ambiguity for Adjarian readers of this Quran translation, but then would the translation have been sufficiently Georgian?<sup>67</sup>

## Conclusion

Revaz Hoja’s sermon on the end of times, on the intervention of the divine into the historical, and on how we can read the signs of the divine in this worldly life, orients his students to the multiple temporalities that construct the present historical conjuncture in Adjara. Historical time, a material and linguistic archive of memory, and a sedimentation of complex networks of social relations and mutual obligations over centuries, all also contain the signs of the intemporal divine’s imminent ending of the here-and-now. Revaz Hoja’s lesson that the signs of the intemporal divine must be read within the unfolding historical present provides a framework for understanding the multilayered, multiplanar, and multidimensional quality of the experience of time in Adjara. The hiccups and ambiguities of Rezo Mikeladze’s translation of the Quran into literary Georgian parallel the hiccups and ambiguities of the lived experience of time at the crosshairs of historical memory and the futurity of the end of history, of God and our return.

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<sup>67</sup> The ethnographic case discussed here is reminiscent of the Maya translations of Christian texts during the colonial period in Mexico discussed in Bill Hanks’ work (cf. esp. 2010). In the case he studies, translation is part of the process of conversion, and leads to a heavily neologized register of the target language, Maya. As he writes elsewhere: ‘it is the target language into which one translates that ultimately constrains the process’ of translation (2014: 18), requiring extensive neologization, including of existing forms as seen in the present example in Georgian.

## Conclusion

One of my last days in Dzirkvadzeebi before making my way back to the States, Manana had come over to Beto and Melano's house for coffee in the afternoon and to gossip, as she often did. It was November 2018 and the air had started to get cooler. Winter was making its return and the villagers were preparing their fields for the first frost any day now.

I'd been wanting Manana to read my coffee fortune before I left, as Melano had joked with me often about how she knew how to read them. I was coming to the end of a very hard, and very emotional year in Georgia, and wanted to know what lay in store for me after this trial. Prophecy destroys time, Koselleck said. I needed time to be destroyed a bit to make some meaning for myself about what I'd been doing in Adjara that whole long year.

We sipped the coffee Melano made for the three of us, and when I finished I turned my cup over onto the saucer, moved it in a circle a few times, and let it sit for a while. When it was ready, Manana put on her glasses and began to read:

Manana: Ricardo, you have a big, big road now, you have a certain bright road now but you won't go it alone, you will go along with someone, someone will go with you. You won't go alone.

Ricardo: You?

Manana: Not me! Someone will go with you on this road, someone will accompany you, and you will be happy. Today you lied to me and said "I don't have a beloved," but this line [shows that] you do have a beloved. Why did you lie to me about what I would discern and see in the coffee cup? Ricardo, you have a beloved!!

Ricardo: No!

Manana: Well, you seem to have one in the cup.

Ricardo: I have one in the cup but not in real life.

Manana: You know what it might be like? It might be that it's your idea that you will fall in love with them, that you will take them as your wife. It might not be clear to you, but in your heart you have a beloved, absolutely, and don't lie to me! Because it's clearly right there, showing up in the upper part [of the cup], this is some beloved of yours...

You will hear some new news and it will make you very happy, Ricardo, I don't know, they will promote you on something, you will move forward, but I don't know what it is. There's so much big stuff in the upper part here.

Melano [in English]: Do you understand everything?

Ricardo: Almost everything...on the upper part I have...

Manana: Something when you make a name for yourself, something when you become a big man On a high level, when you go up on a higher level than your [current] position. It'll go up, it'll go up

For you, you think it to be good news, but it's not clear yet. You want to take some step, but you don't yet say, you don't yet know if it will come true or not, this step. If it will get done or not. Ricardo, what have you been nervous about? Tell us now, what have you been so worried about? You've been so worried about something that your heart could break.

Ricardo: Me?

Manana: Yes.

It's not death, something, someone, someone hurt you. You got mad or something I'm not sure, you got really worried. But I don't know what you've been worried about. Ask if I'm not telling the truth huh!

Melano: Who taught you [to read coffee fortunes]?

Mzia [who walked in]: It's good that she's reading [your fortune]

Manana: In fifteen days, well the number 15 came out. In fifteen days you will meet this person directly, you'll have to talk with them about something, maybe a document. It's some document, I don't know, you gave them some money, or—

Ricardo: In fifteen days?

Manana: In fifteen days, yes. I don't know, you gave money to someone and you have to ask them to return it. I don't know, some paper or document, you have to talk about something, but at that moment you won't get it, and you should know that you'll have to go through some trouble, some twists and turns [literally “writhing”] some going back and forth, you'll have to go through something like that. When you leave from here, from Batumi, or maybe from somewhere else you'll veer off, I can't say that you will go directly to your homeland. Because the road splits in two. One goes far away, and the other goes close. I can't tell you entirely, I'm not that good of a fortune reader to say whether or not, or where you are going, but there's one short road. You'll veer away and go on this short road.

Melano: [peering into the cup and pointing] Is that the long one or the short one?

Manana: Get out of here girl.

A point stands out here [for you] [looking at the cup]. I'll tell you some news and you will be happy. Something got me in stitches you know, if I don't laugh at this, ??? [unclear]

You will go to a crowd, to a wedding, to a dinner party, you will go to some lectures, where will you go, you will go to [a place with] many competing people, in order to get the first place from among these competing people, and you will take the first place. I don't know much more.

Melano: Come on, show me!

[Manana puts the cup down]

Ricardo: It's finished already?

Manana: It's finished.



The cup of coffee that contains the prophecy of my future. November 22, 2018.

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