Aesthetic Dimensions of Georgian Grief Rituals: On the Artful Display of Emotions in Lamentation


Helga Kotthoff

1. Introduction

The topic of this article is the communication of grief in Georgia, which in this Caucasian country is aestheticized in a variety of ways. Lamentation (xmīt naṭirlebi) is the verbal core activity of Georgian grief communication. Everywhere in the world people feel a sense of loss, depression and helplessness when a close person dies. Grief finds expression, e.g., in a hunched posture, crying and sobbing and is displayed externally in this way. People not only mourn in isolation, but rather express their grief in their behavior to other people. Particularly grief for the deceased thereby becomes a 'total social phenomenon' suffered in community and performed for the community.

Most societies have ritualized grief, i.e., predictable complexes of activities with predictable sequences of actions have developed in which the affected persons participate obligatorily and yet voluntarily and competently. In rituals, not only the feeling of grief is staged, but also relationships with the deceased person and the other mourners. Various ritual theorists have emphasized that rituals are non-instrumental to the extent that they are not useful for specifically technical purposes. They fulfill social functions instead such as binding the group together, inspiring action and producing consensus. By using expressive means they also alter the state of the world by metaphysical means instead of by physical means. In most societies religion comes into play when someone dies, and in its framework conceptions of the hereafter and images of transition are fictionalized. In this article I point out that these conceptions of the hereafter exist not only in people's minds but are also actively practiced, for example, in addressing the deceased which can often be found in Georgian lamentations.

In rituals symbolic condensation takes place, which is not confined to the verbal level. Sapir characterized the latter by multiple referents, richness of meaning, "a highly condensed form of substitute behavior for direct expression, allowing for the..."

---

1 This study of Georgian mourning rituals is carried out in connection with the special research area 511 "Literature and Anthropology," financed by the German National Endowment for the Sciences (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft), at the University of Konstanz. We have already taped 50 hours of lamentations in various Georgian regions.

I am grateful to Elza Gabedava and James Brice for help with the Georgian and the English.


5 Edward R. Leach, Culture and communication, Cambridge 1976.


ready release of emotional tension" (p. 565), with "deeper roots in the unconscious and diffusing its emotional quality to types of behavior or situations apparently far removed from the original meaning of the symbol" (p. 566). I agree with Sapir's claim, that in ritual the entire scenic arrangement is symbolically loaded and becomes the object of aesthetization. But I disagree with the idea of "release of emotional tension" and would rather show that in the aesthetization of expressions of grief not only the feelings of lamenters, but also those of the onlookers are worked out. I regard aesthetization as closely connected with affect management.

This article thus deals with the forms and functions of aesthetization of grief in Georgia. Ethologists and psychologists regard grief as one of the "basic emotions"\(^7\), which are observable in all human beings and higher animals. But this does not mean that this emotion is self-evident. It is subject to a complex cultural performance process, which within a culture is comprehensible in all its shades. Feelings do not simply emanate from people, rather they are processed and transmitted by means of conventionalized procedures.

But culture-transcending commonalities are also apparent. Crying and a sunken body position are as icons and indices universally integrated into the expression of grief. A few authors\(^8\) point out that while the vocal and verbal styles of ritual keening and lamenting are interculturally different, they display common semiotic features and share in common certain resemblances with what we call "wailing" and "crying," and there are many icons and indices associated with bowing and being lowered into the ground:

> "As a semiotic device, wailing is linked to affect, just as at the core one assumes 'crying' as a formal device is linked to 'sadness'."\(^9\)

As well in Georgia, cries of grief and appeals to the deceased occur. They are spoken or sung in lines (pulse units), using crying sounds, voice changes, drawn-out sighs, slowly falling intonation contours with integrated peaks, bowed bodily postures and an expressive lexicon.

Furthermore, situational standards of appropriateness develop in cultures. For example, the death of a person is everywhere an experience which evokes strong feelings. But historically and interculturally these feelings and their expressions are not the same\(^10\). Thus for example, mourning in Georgia is richer in forms, is practiced for a longer period of time and is more expressively communicated than in Germany or England. Lamentations are performed, a genre, that does not exist in most West European countries. We manipulate our inner feelings in accord with cultural expectations - and we then in fact have them, as Hochschild\(^11\) has shown. In contemporary cultural anthropology feelings are no longer regarded as something innate and inward, but rather as a culturally interwoven and shaped mode of experience.\(^12\) Also the external, conventionalized display of emotions is different. How things are said and done is as important in communicating emotions as what is said and done. Particularly in rituals the manner of performance is more important than the content, which is detached from an instrumental means-end-relation. Many rituals are

---

\(^10\) Greg Urban, 386. See footnote 8.

characterized by a great redundancy of symbols, stylistic elaborations, and an emphasis on aesthetic criteria. Even when it is emphasized that as well instrumental activities can be the object of stylization and artistry, rituals cannot be understood without attention to style, symbol, and aesthetics – they are essential to them.

In this article I would like to show that the aesthetization of grief simultaneously presupposes and affects feeling work. In addition, lamentations should be seen as situated religious practice. Artistry also contributes to creating an extra-ordinary space, in which the living can experience contact with the dead. In aesthetization, the emotions of grief are worked out and quasi-therapeutically kept in shape; but this aesthetics is not an end-in-itself here: it is deeply connected to religion. The special language which is used and the ways of speaking contextualize a religious space. Emotionality, art, morality and religiosity are performatively linked.

2. Grieving in Georgia

Georgia is a small country which belonged to the former Soviet Union up until its dissolution. It was Christianized as early as the Fourth Century AD. Today the Orthodox Church plays a major role in public life. Due to the strong influence of Iran and Turkey, the Muslim faith also predominates in some regions.

Institutionalized religious practice was discouraged during the Soviet period. In the case of Georgia, however, this did not mean that people abandoned all religious activities. If, following Luckmann,13 we regard communal concern with the great transcendencies, such as this world and the hereafter, as religious, then Georgian everyday life has many more religious moments than for example, the live of most people in Germany.

Georgian grief rituals can be regarded as a staging of religion. In Georgia the lament is assigned the official function of softening the ground for the deceased to make her/his way into the hereafter. People think of it as a form of honoring her/him and the family. In folk religious belief, the choreography of the overall activity complex is related to the life which the departed person can expect in the next world. A dignified parting promises an honorable reception in the afterlife.

When someone dies, people in Georgia still perform joint mourning for many days, including day-long lamentations by women and ritual night wakes held around the coffin by men; neighbors ritually prepare meals for all those sharing in the grief, and there are various large meals held in connection with the funeral and special memorial days later in the year, at which masters of ceremony (called tamada) follow a toast order canonized specially for "sad meals" (čiris supra). The various actions and forms of expression are regarded as related to people's emotional needs, but they always also have religious and moral dimensions14, which sometimes are made explicit within the ritual of shared grieving.

The dominant form of ritual wailing is called "xmit naṭırlıbi." "Xmit naṭırlıbi" means "crying loudly with one's voice." Also called "motkmiti tirili" (spoken weeping or wailing with the voice),

---

this genre performs an "aesthetics of pain", as Caraveli\textsuperscript{15} put it for Greek ritual wailing. Lamenting is always a polylogue with much turn-taking. Sometimes, a woman laments and others hum the melody with weeping sounds, a stylized background wailing called "zari." The lament performer (moțirali) orients herself mostly to the dead person, to various addressees or sometimes to the audience in general.

Similar to Africa, Brazil, Russia, Papua New Guinea, the Trobriand Islands, Greece and wherever lamentation is still practiced,\textsuperscript{16} in Georgia it consists of improvised, partly sung, partly spoken collaborative polylogues, praising and addressing the deceased person, other deceased and those present, voicing personal memories, thereby situating immediate emotions; the dirges are usually presented in line form, often with a repetitive melody and sobbing sounds at the line's end. Women are the chief wailers in West Georgia; in East Georgia only women lament. This emotional division of labor between the sexes is found in many cultures; there is always an ideology which declares it as "natural": Women supposedly cry better and as givers of life are said to have better access to its end. Crying or sobbing sounds and appeals to the deceased are mostly arranged in the lines often in a similar position at the line's beginning or end; by having conventionized positions they are included into the procedure of aesthetisation. Certain formulae of taking over others' pain to oneself\textsuperscript{17} are frequently used. Formulae and stable motifs (such as poetic rhetorical questions to the deceased as to why he had to leave) are combined in the xmit -națirlebi with improvisation as it is typical for oral art.\textsuperscript{18} Each lament is partly individually tailored for the deceased person, since it contains biographical dimensions which the lamenters can choose and stylize. Although there are generic standards of lament performance, the lamenters are free in topic choice and development, in imagery, in commenting upon or echoing previous texts. It is also up to her whether she sings or speaks her lines. There are no standards for turn length. Some turns may just consist of a formula, some may contain just some meaningless vowels.

Over and over the moțiralebi (wailers) tell stories about shared experiences. The close female relatives and acquaintances sit around the coffin. Frequently someone stands up, leans over the open coffin and tells the deceased something, often she makes those who enter the room the subject of her address to the deceased person (e.g., "Look, even Nina from Ikti came. She comes in honor of you, although she has five children. What a good woman Nina is"). Addressing the deceased is situated religious practice. When I entered the room the moțirali often told the deceased that people even came from Germany in honor of her. I was always given a role in the ritual process as was


everybody else. We can speak of a "split audience" here. The deceased person is often told something very positive about those present, who naturally also hear this. The deceased is again and again embraced and kissed. If someone new enters the room, the lamentation continues reinforced. Women arriving from distant villages climb out of the bus and immediately begin lamenting. This indicates how great the ritual space is. It is most definitely not confined to the deceased person’s house. They approach the deceased loudly shouting something like: "Elisa, how could you leave us so soon? Do you want to meet your husband? Oh, Otar, now you have her back.", not greeting anyone. No one smiles. Not to smile is an important part of ritual body politics. Men stroll past everyone and say: "viziareb tkvens mcuxarebas" (I share your grief). Then they sit down on benches in front of the keening room (often for hours or even days). They chat about everything imaginable there, but always softly and without laughter.

In West Georgia mourners unbind their hair and tear at it constantly. They also scratch their faces – forms of self-injury which are observed as an expression of grief in many cultures. This is regarded in West Georgia as a strong expression of pain - in East Georgia it is regarded as completely inappropriate exaggeration. Every region sees its own lamentation style as the most appropriate and also natural. In the sociology of emotions it has been assumed since Durkheim that emotions can combine with other feelings and moods; these can become "meta-affects" (as Urban 1988 put it in a study on wailing in Amerindian Brazil). Thus even mourning itself becomes "correct mourning" - with cultural standards of appropriateness for the expressive repertoire. Grief can, e.g., be quickly linked with the wish for support by the group, with the wish to fictionalize the world of the deceased and with the need to master the situation, to let it not overwhelm the mourners.

Not only the days-long dialogical lamentations, but also elaborated drinking toasts during mourning meals are still very popular in Georgia today. Only in the capital of Tbilisi lamentation is no longer practiced among the Tbilissians. In the villages anyone who can lament beautifully or formulate beautiful drinking toasts also shapes the feelings of other persons present. She who laments well is regarded as a good woman and knows what she owes the deceased in the other world and her people in this world. She thereby also manages the linkage of this world and the hereafter in theatrical, art-oriented communication.

On the verbal level of lamentation poetic forms are conspicuous. With Jakobson we assume that poetic forms are by no means limited to canonized art. The poetic function is present when the principle of equivalence is projected from the axis of selection to the axis of combination; equivalence is raised to a constitutive procedure of sequencing. This will later be shown on the basis

---

19 See Bauman's article in this book for analytical differentiations of the roles of speaker and hearer. The traditional model of the speaker-hearer dyad is too simple to capture most communicative processes. Very often we have, for example, a hierarchy of addressed persons. In Georgian lamentations we always have a "split audience" in the sense Erving Goffman, introduced the term in "Forms of Talk," Philadelphia 1981. Some are official targets of the message and others the unofficial.

20 Not to smile requires a control of the body which Georgians manage better at than I. The mourning natives recognized me as foreign by my smiling. I was not even aware that I had smiled slightly. This shows again how much mourning is body politics and how much this must be embodied in order to behave correctly.


of a lamentation text. Lamentations are always "staged discourse" in the sense of Iser. Staging or performance relates to aestheticized communication in a narrow sense. Georgian dirges demand a theatrical performance to a public employing engagement of the body, gestures, mimicry, the paraverbal and the verbal level. With the concept of performance we attempt to capture the semiotic multi-lveling of staged communication. Procedures necessary for every form of social activity we capture with Goffman’s concept of "framing" instead, as is outlined in the preface to this book.

Poetic and emotive functions are always closely linked; likewise here. Additionally, the lament provides a service to the deceased, the linkage of this world with the other and the linkage of various "provinces of meaning" in the sense of Schütz. I postulate that the stylized practice of ritual grieving creates a non-ordinary experiential and imaginative involvement and a space where the living are seemingly in contact with the dead, a magic space. One cannot, however, limit the analysis of grief communication in Georgia to the verbal domain. The experience of death is immediately ritually staged, and this staging makes use of several expressive modalities.

Thus the wailing dialogues are always embedded in the context of the whole event. Text and context mutually form each other into a kind of "total artwork". This total artwork makes possible non-ordinary experiences.

3. Aesthetics in the lamentation for Dimiđri Gabrielašvili

Again and again - from Radcliffe-Brown and van Gennep to Ariës and Meuli - the literature on transitional rites states that shared grieving creates a community, or at least recreates communities after a loss. Through performance analyses we can show in detail how the social communalization of grief is communicatively acted out. Aesthetic strategies play a role in communalizing the living and also the living and the dead.

I would like to point to five strategies which in my view carry relevant aesthetic dimensions in Georgian lamentation. With Tannen we call the first dimension a "sound strategy" (the vocal, musical and poetical delivery) and the other four "sense strategies" (constructed dialogue, sudden address shift, formulaic self-sacrifice, imagery and detailing). Together they play a major role in creating an extra-ordinary realm of scenaric experience. Mutual participation in scenes that are put on stage is invited. For Georgian grief rituals I underline Tannen’s idea that music and evoked scenes trigger emotions and "that scenes are crucial in both thinking and feeling because they are composed of people in relation to each other, doing things that are culturally and personally recognizable and meaningful."

Of course, part of the scenic arrangement is the structure within the room where the coffin stands. Usually the grievers stand or sit beside the coffin. The photo in this book shows, that the wailer stages herself in a dialogue with the deceased as is typically done. I will first deal with verbal staging; then at the end of the article some other (including non-verbal) elements from the ritual domain will also be dealt with.

The sound strategy basically consists of speaking (or singing) in lines and of many forms of parallelisms. Speaking in line form is a sign of poetics. With all wailers lines are fairly easily recognizable through breathing. Often a line begins with sobbing inhalation. The lines are of different lengths. Crying sounds often mark a line's end. There is melodic delivery throughout. The melody is repeated line by line with some variation. The first syllables of a line are presented in a higher tone register, at the end the tone falls. This intonation pattern basically prevails, but there is always slight variation.

Additionally, we find many epiphora, anaphora, alliterations and anadiplosis which are all based on sound repetition. Poetry scholars have regarded such recurrent patterns of sound as basic to verbal art. Finnegan writes that the most marked feature of poetry is surely repetition. I will point to some examples from the first turn.

Epiphora: In the neighbor's turn we find various epiphora: the first two lines end on "a", the next five on "o"; four of them on "iko", also line 12. Lines 10, 11, 16, 18, 20 and 21 end on "genacvale."

Anaphora: As well anaphora are variously used: Lines 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, and 21 start with "šen(i)" and thereby contribute to the parallelization of sound; 2 and 4 begin with "uxtari", 13 and 14 with "da", 16 and 20 with "aba", 32, 34 and 37 with "vaime."

Anadiplosis connects two lines in starting the second line with the finishing formulation of the first, for example 13 and 14, 27 and 28.

Alliterations often organize identical sounds within a line, thus in 13, e.g., "g" dominates, in 14 "d". Sometimes we find lexical repetition within a line, for example, in 3, 4, 15, 23, 25, sometimes in the course of several lines.

Together with the sound strategies sense, strategies heighten involvement, coherence and the emotional experience of connectedness. They send metamessages of rapport between the communicators. Thus all these strategies of aesthetization create and symbolize community.

One important sense strategy is "constructed dialogue." With Tannen we see what is called "reported speech," "direct speech," "direct discourse," or "direct quotation" (normally this involves a speaker framing an account of another’s words as dialogue - here framing her own words in a dialogue with a nonpresent dead person) should be understood not as report, but as constructed dialogue. Claims to authenticity in reporting messages vary, sometimes not made at all. Especially in the lamentations the singer often calls to a person who has already been dead for a long time. The person in the coffin is asked to deliver her words to the other deceased whom he will soon meet; thereby he can be made the immediate addressee and mediator of the words for another in the hereafter who is the ultimate target of the lamentor's message. By constructing her message directly, the wailer opens a window to a dialogue that is fictionalized to happen in the afterworld.

---

33 Dell Hymes, "In vain I tried to tell you". Essays in Native American Ethnopoetics, Philadelphia 1981.
35 See footnote 32
A related strategy is multiple address and sudden address shifts: In lamentation there are complex participant roles.\textsuperscript{36} We often find the phenomenon that the dead person becomes the addressee of some message (often a kind of praise) about a present person who belongs to the audience, but is in a sense a target. Urban writes that many messages uttered in dirges are "intended not to be heard, in the ordinary linguistic sense, but rather to be overheard. Ritual wailing purports overtly not to engage an addressee, but to allow anyone within earshot access to something that would otherwise be private."\textsuperscript{37} We also agree with Feld\textsuperscript{38} who comments on Urban's statement and writes about the Kaluli instance that the otherwise privacy of the message is not the issue in ritual wailing:

"wailers are speaking out to the deceased, other wailers, and the present collectivity. Their mode of expression places them forcefully in the social domain as performers. Their words are in some sense very much meant to be heard rather than overheard in that they function as an invitation to others to collaboratively enunciate felt thoughts about the death at hand and the social position of the deceased."

A third strategy is expressed by formulaic self-sacrifice. Formulae which communicate the wish to take over another person’s burden or even death play a major role in Georgian everyday life, especially in dirges. These formulae presuppose a possibility of transcendence which departs from the realm of realism, imagining supernatural and magic powers. For example, "genacvale" is one of the special sympathy formulae which describe a strong religious wish for self-sacrifice. Detailing and imagery make a fourth important strategy. A major form of achieving mutual participation in sensemaking is creating images: both by the speaker who suggests an image with her words, and the hearer who creates an image based on that suggestion.\textsuperscript{39} Lamenters try to evoke scenes with the deceased. Details invite listeners to construct a scene.

We will discuss four successive turns from the lamentation for Dimi\c{t}ri (Mi\c{t}a) Gabriela\c{s}vili in this article. In this sequence a neighbor and three nieces lament. Niece 3 sings. Singing is not obligatory, but in Georgian lamenting it is always possible. The sequence occurred in 1996 on the day before the burial, called pana\c{s}vidi in Muxrani (East Georgia).\textsuperscript{40} The research reported here arises from long and intensive research visits continuing through many years of friendship and contact, especially with people from Muxrani. David Papu\c{s}vili, who taped this lament for us, specialized in staging the musical background for laments. He possesses a collection of mourning music (Western classical and Georgian folkloristic) and a cassette recorder. He is called to many mournings and acts there as a sort of disk jockey. Such mourning disk jockeys are found in many villages. We first look at the neighbor's turn. The neighbor instructs the deceased Mi\c{t}a, who lies in the room in a coffin, in line 1 that he should take her tears to her brother in the hereafter. Symbolic condensation is explicitly communicated here. Crying is not just crying but takes on other functions: The deceased can take the tears which he receives for the others with him in the hereafter and share them; they should make existence easier for the whole community of the deceased, soften the earth for them. By evoking the image of sharing the tears, a community of the dead is created.

\textsuperscript{36} Here I draw again on participant roles as outlined in Bauman’s article in this volume: participant, speaker, author, source, receiver, addressee, overhearer, target, audience, mediator.

\textsuperscript{37} See footnote 8

\textsuperscript{38} See footnote 8

\textsuperscript{39} See footnote 32

\textsuperscript{40} The transliterated line is here the location of the transcription symbols. Transcription convention: % = sobbing or crying sound, : = vowel lengthening, ('H) = audible inhalation, here often sobbingly done. The other conventions are the usual ones in conversation analysis. Punctuation marks are used as intonation signs.
Line 2 also represents an instruction to Miṭa. He is supposed to talk to the neighbor's brother, who is already in the hereafter. She imagines the two men meeting there and talking to each other. In line 3 the neighbor directly addresses her deceased brother in the hereafter, who thereby becomes the target of her message. In line 4 she shifts address and talks again to Miṭa. In line 5 she uses direct speech which is marked as such by the particle "tko" at the end of the line. Not only with reported speech, but also with such instructions to the dead the lament contains direct quotation. It can, along with Tannen,\textsuperscript{41} be viewed as an involvement strategy. The neighbor stages the dialogue that is supposed to take place between Miṭa and her brother theatrically and consequently makes it plastic for her audience. The neighbor goes on directly addressing the brother, but in the post-particle (tko)\textsuperscript{42} in line 7 the imperative orientation in the sense of "tell him" is grammaticalized. The animated speech produces a double-address to both the deceased brother and the neighbor in the coffin. Line 8 is still double direct speech consisting of what Miṭa should say to the brother in the hereafter and what she herself is already directly telling him. Whereas she addresses the brother in line 8, she addresses Miṭa in line 9. It is not absolutely clear to whom line 10 is addressed, but presumably to Miṭa, because of the "also": she compares Miṭa's children with her brother's. All the children are imagined to act positively in their fathers' senses. Since they are present, she confronts them with her expectations concerning the children's behavior. We witness a moralizing function here, that indeed plays an important role in the laments.\textsuperscript{43} In line 11 she explicitly addresses Miṭa, giving him further instructions as to what to do for her brother in the hereafter. He should calm him. Line 15 contains another very frequent formula, whose grammatical form allows many variations. Here, the subject and the object are presented in the third person, perspectivizing herself as "his sister" from Miṭa's point of view. She then continues to talk primarily to Miṭa. She also instructs him as to what he should not tell her brother (about unrest in Abxasia, line 17).

\textsuperscript{41} See footnote 32
\textsuperscript{42} In Georgian, reported speech is grammaticalized. "tko" stands for "tell her/him" and is simply attached to the utterance: an attached "o" stands, e.g., for the report of a third person's speech.
what came out of your mouth, brother, they do everything (tell him)

(‘H) šeni suliko da sosos aravis darigeba ar unda

your Suliko and Soso need lessons from no one

(S) ūeni suliko da sosos aravis darigeba ar unda

genacvale, mita

genacvale, Mitā

šeni Suliko da sosos aravis darigeba ar unda (‘H)

your Suliko and Soso need lessons from no one

genacvale, mita

genacvale, MiRa

genacvale

ten not embarrassed your name (tell him)

(S) da-omurad geubnebi, genacvale, gtxov, gexvebi daamšvido.

Sisterly I tell you, genacvale, I ask you, please with you, calm him

damšvido, daqamqano, is da-damipeculi, mita:%%

calm him, console him, his sister should become earth for him, Mitā

(H) imas mokvdes da%% imas mokvdes da%%%

his sister should die to him, his sister should die to him

(H) abā (%) kai ambebi miutane, genacvale,

please bring him only good news, genacvale

ar utxra, ro ese arev-dareva:

do not tell him that there is unrest

torem isim sulis apxazeti gauxaria, genacvale

for his soul experienced much joy in Abxazia, genacvale

pirvel rigi imas ezaqian qvelaperši

people always called him as the first

(H) abā, mita, daloce šeni švilebi, genacvale

well, Mitā, bless your children, genacvale

(H) šeni kaqostvis iloce, avadmqopia, genacvale

pray for your kaqto, who is ill, genacvale

(H) šeni katosvis iloce, avadmqopia, genacvale

pray for your kaqto, who is ill, genacvale

mteli rame magaze erti otx-xutšer unda vikipro

at least four to five times in the night I must think

for how might things go for you, how might things go for you

vaime%%

((music))

(H) abā, mita, daloce šeni švilebi, genacvale

well, Mitā, bless your children, genacvale

(H) šeni kaqostvis iloce, avadmqopia, genacvale

pray for your kaqto, who is ill, genacvale

mteli rame magaze erti otx-xutšer unda vikipro

at least four to five times in the night I must think

for how might things go for you, how might things go for you

vaime%%

((music))

((0.5))
The neighbor modulates her voice for the lament: she speaks with a loud, creaky voice. Modulations of the voices are often used in lamentation as stylization.

I will continue by elaborating the already mentioned phenomena of artistry in lamentation:

### 3.1. Constructed dialogue

Constructed dialogue can serve as an intertextual link between many events. In Georgian lamentation we very often find a special form of it: in giving instructions to the lamented person as to what he should tell other deceased persons in the hereafter, the lamentor addresses her words to the nonpresent deceased person directly rather than indirectly. Thereby she makes the dead person in the room a mediator. As Bauman\(^{45}\) points out in his article in this book, in mediated communication we have discursive practices that transcend the face-to-face speaker-hearer dyad, a relaying of spoken messages through intermediaries. Lamentation can also become a speech routine by a mediator of utterances from a source to an ultimate targeted receiver, a long deceased person. This procedure here symbolically unites the living and the dead.

In lamentation we always have an audience which is the receiver of the whole performance, even though messages are often not addressed to it. Since lamentation only takes place in front of an audience, it is an important factor of that discourse.

In the neighbor's turn she quotes her own words to her dead brother in lines 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12. Miţa is supposed to take them along as a message from her. She tells him that his children are following in his traces (line 5), that they do what he told them (line 7), that they need lessons from no one (8), that they have not embarrassed his name (12). The children are present and are meant to hear her praise. They are of course also target addressees of her words.

The voicing used in lamentation performances can generally be understood in terms of Soviet cultural semiotics,\(^{46}\) which analyzed the functions of direct and indirect quotation in fiction. Voloshinov\(^{47}\) distinguished two types of reported speech in fiction. The type which works with indirect quotation is said to be concerned with the stylistic homogeneity of a text. The other type individualizes the language of characters and also the language of the teller. He refers to this as relativistic individualism and finds examples in the works of Fedor Dostoevski and Andrej Belyi. Characters are identified through their own quoted speech, through direct citation. Direct citation permits ellipses, omissions and a variety of other emotive tendencies which would be lost in indirect quotation. He demonstrates this, among other examples, by the exclamation, "What an achievement," which in indirect quotation one would have to transform into the clumsy phrase, "She said that it was a real achievement . . . ". Direct quotation evokes "manner of speech," not only individually, but also typologically. It is "speech about speech, utterance about utterance".\(^{48}\)

Tannen,\(^{49}\) Brünner,\(^{50}\) Günthner,\(^{51}\) and Couper-Kuhlen\(^{52}\) have shown that reported dialogue can contain verbal and intonational characterizations through which - on the basis of stereotypes -

---

\(^{45}\) In this volume.


\(^{48}\) See footnote 47

\(^{49}\) See footnote 32

\(^{50}\) Gisela Brünner, Redewiedergabe in Gesprächen. *Deutsche Sprache* 1 (1991), 1-16.

images of persons, social groups, etc. are transmitted. By the 'polyphonic layering of voices' protagonists are implicitly stylized and evaluated. The speaker anchors the voices in a storyworld and animates them in a way that corresponds to her current intention.

Brünner underlines the performative character of directly quoted speech. Goffman uses the term "animated dialogue" in order not to suggest that it might be realistic reproduction.

Throughout the text the voices of the deceased are intertwined with those of the living. The lamenting neighbor, for example, unites her dead brother and his children as addressees of her messages. Thereby a community of the living with the dead is again and again symbolized. The reality of this community is one of the basic religious convictions of most Georgians. It is conversationally (re)created.

3.2. Multiple address and sudden address shifts
Connected with constructed dialogue is the phenomenon of unannounced address shifting. Multiple address is more the rule than the exception in Georgian laments. Sometimes it is heard to determine who the target addressee is and whose dialogue is being performed. Address shifts are very often not explicitly announced. It has to be inferred whose speech is put on stage. In line 23 the neighbor directly addresses the absent woman  by quoting to the public her own nocturnal thoughts about . In line 21 she asks Miţa to pray for the ill woman  who is a relative. Since 's other relatives are also present in the audience, they witness how the moţirali cares about her.

In discussing the turns following the already presented one, we will return to this strategy.

3.3. Formulaic Self-Sacrifice
The first line contains the formula "genacvale." Laments are permeated with this formula which often marks the end of a line (such as in lines 10, 16 and 20). It can very well make a line or make a line together with a name, such as in line 9. "Genacvale" expresses the process of immersing oneself in a person's sorrow and can be translated as "I take your place." "Genacvalos deda" accordingly means "I take mother's place." Boeder writes that in a certain contextual position one can as well translate the formula as "I die for you."

"First, there are the abundant, often-repeated formulae whose fundamental semantic pattern states, at least etymologically, the following: the speaker wishes to shoulder the burden of pain (the illness, misfortune . . .) which the person addressed suffers. The addressee's misfortune should be conveyed to the speaker; the lamenter wants to symbolically shoulder the suffering person's pain."

However, as is often the case with formulae used to express strong feelings, their semantics is weakened in everyday life. In Georgia one hears this formula so often and in so many contexts that it can be taken as a mere expression of sympathy. There are many other formulae using the

---

Günthner, Susanne, 'Poliphony and 'the layering of voices' in reported dialogues: An analysis of the use of prosodic devices in everyday reported speech', *Journal of Pragmatics* 31 (1999), 685-708.
See footnote 46
See footnote 50
See footnote 17
Transcribed by H.K., See footnote 17
semantics of shouldering another person's suffering, for example "your sister should die for you" in line 3 and "your children's aunt should die" in line 6. The most common form is "şen mogi_kvdi" (I should die for you) as uttered by niece 2 in line 50. It is interesting that the neighbor does not say: I should die for you, but perspectivates herself as her brother's sister or his children's aunt.

Perspectivation seems to play an interesting role in the use of formulae. Very generally, all humans' perceiving and acting is done from a specific viewpoint which, together with the scope and other structural characteristics of perspective, determines the space of perception and activity. Every experience is normally present in those aspects that are seen from the spatio-temporal point of view taken by the subject.\(^{58}\) In lamentation, however, experience is sometimes explicitly presented from the point of view of a deceased. Normal subjectivity of the experiencer/speaker is thereby symbolically deleted. The same is done in lines 14, in the formula "his sister should become earth for him" and in 15. The perspectives of several dead and living persons are thereby symbolically combined. Formulae of wanting to suffer for another or even exchange places with the dead play an important role in Georgia - as in the Near East in general.\(^{59}\) They have various pragmatic functions which for reasons of space cannot be explained in detail here. Line 6 is primarily addressed to Miţa, but targeted at the brother, and it is perspectivized with even greater complexity than in line 3. The neighbor perspectivizes herself as the aunt of her brother's children; in this role she wishes to perform a ritual self-sacrifice which would make her equal to her brother. We see here various communicative communalizations symbolically brought about, father and children, brother and sister and all (the living children and the sister with the deceased father/brother) together.

Obviously the repeated use of formulae also contributes to sound coherence. As an illustration consider how many lines are connected by variants of "şen mogi_kvdi" (I should die for you) or "şen mogi_kvdes da" (the sister should die for you) or other variations of the same formula: 3, 6, 15, 43, 44, 48, 50, 55, 61.

Turn-taking is also poeticized. Opening up the closing of the wailer’s turn often begins with an interjection or formula employment. "Vaime" is similar to the English "woe," an interjection which expresses sorrow and suffering. The neighbor closes her turn by this interjection and crying sounds. Also niece 1 in finishing her turn combines crying, the interjection "vaime" and the rhetorical question "what shall I do." Niece 2 closes her turn by the formula "şen mogi_kvdi" (I should die for you), and niece 3 utters "vai vai ra mçare xar, miţa 3ia" which again consists of interjections and a formula of suffering. Besides expressing grief, formulae, interjections and also crying sounds fulfill a function in structuring the lament.

### 3. 4. Detailing and imagery

A major form of creating conversational involvement in sensemaking is organized by imagery: the power of images to communicate meanings and emotions resides in their ability to evoke scenes, as we will see in the next excerpt from the lament for Miţa. Like constructed dialogues, details create vivid pictures, and understanding is derived from scenes in which people are placed in relation to each other. Details create mental images and can stand as metonyms for larger experiental chunks. The individual imagination of the wailer invites group imagination. Thus, a collective memory of

---


\(^{59}\) See footnote 17
the time spent together is not only organized but celebrated. Details and imagery play an essential role in making the xmit natirlebi easy to memorize. Thus, the lamenting women play a major role in constructing social memory. The particularity and familiarity of details such as those communicated from line 16 onward in the neighbor's turn is very moving.

In line 16 the neighbor starts telling Mița to only pass on good news. Again and again we find in the taped laments instructions as to what should not be said in the hereafter. Very often political unrest is mentioned, of which there were various cases in the past few years, e.g., the war with Abxazia. The neighbor gives the detail that her brother was always immediately invited when he went to Abxazia (19); many Georgians had relatives there. The listeners are invited to create the whole scene of such an invitation themselves. In inviting all those present to recall what wonderful times they had spent in Abxazia, political positions are given voice, and a political memory is kept alive. To invite and be invited points to moral values that are highly regarded in Georgian culture. The deceased Mița and those present are united in the remembered scenes.

Let's look at the next turn. One of Mița's nieces takes the turn:

26 Ni 1:  

Uncle Mița,  

I cannot manage to not cry about you

27  

I cannot cry (well)⁶⁰

28  

I cannot, but my heart is filled

29  

you did not speak with my father⁶¹

30  

as you reconciled, how happy he was

31  

why did you break his shoulder⁶²

32  

why did you break his shoulder

33  

hand in hand we place ourselves there, sisterchildren and brotherchildren, and do not let you go

34  

woe, what shall I do, woe, what shall I do

35  

my father how sad he is

36  

he never let us, people, speak ill of Uncle Mița

---

⁶⁰ Meaning: lament.
⁶¹ There was a conflict between the two.
⁶² Meaning: Why do you leave him alone now?
The starting phrase of the niece, that she cannot cry but simply must, because her heart is so full (28), is in the frame of the genre, stereotypical but nevertheless points to the value of spontaneity. Again and again lamenters claim that they cannot act otherwise does. Then she speaks to Mița and thereby also to those present about the disagreement between Mița and her father. She gives some details about Mița's and her father's behavior and feelings, for example, that her father allowed no one to speak ill of Mița. Everyone can hear that the father's valuation of Mița was high and still is, despite the disagreement. A reconciliation between them had already occurred during his lifetime; it is regarded as very important in popular religion to reconcile oneself before death. Then the niece fictionalizes images of not letting Mița go (line 33). Again she tells of her father. It appears to be morally important to let everyone know that her father and Mița parted on good terms. But she does not tell the whole story of their quarrel. The audience can complete the scene from knowledge of similar ones from their own experience.

Niece 2 takes the next turn.

38 Ni 2: [mita Zia, vzivar da gelodebi, rodis etqvi gulo gulos] Uncle Mița I sit and wait for what you will say to Aunt Gulo

39 marines dauzaxe, xelebi gamizilos, mita gia fetch Marina, she should massage my hands,63 Uncle Mița

40 (H) magram arc šen eubnebi da arc is mejaxis yet you say nothing and she also does not call me

41 (H) rogorc maSin ar damiZaxa, mita Zia just as then she did not call me, Uncle Mița

42 mec gamifrTxilda, cudaT ariso, magram ar movkvdebodi, ara% she paid attention to me, she doesn't feel good (she said), but I would not have died, no

43 (H) neta tu gabutuli xar ĉemtan, mita, ʃove, šen mogikvdi, mita gia perhaps you will no longer speak with me, I should die for you, Uncle Mița

44 magram megona, ro kargad dagtove, šen mogikvdi, mita gia but I thought that you were well when I left, I should die for you, Uncle Mița

45 guli amevso, aRar ĉemZlia, mita Zia, is my heart is filled, I am at wit's end, Uncle Mița

46 my twenty-five-year-old cousin died, people

47 da ĉem das xma ar amouria, ar utiria, mita gia and my sister made no sound,65 did not cry, Uncle Mița

48 Šen mogikvdi, mita gia

---

63 Literally: rub. The uncle's hands often fell asleep.
64 Since Georgian has no gender, the cousin could be either male or female.
65 She did not lament.
I should die for you, Uncle Mița
darogor amoarebine exla xma, mita zia
and how you have forced them to cry, Uncle Mița
șen mogikvdi, mita zia%%%

I should die for you, Uncle Mița
vaime, ra Ra vqna, mita zia %%%
oh, what shall I do, Uncle Mița
((murmur))
mita zia, is mainc damarige
Uncle Mița, at least advise me
valiko ro čamova da metqvis
when Valiko arrives and says
zia ra uqavio, ra vutxra, mita zia%%%
where do you have your Uncle, what shall I reply, Uncle Mița
vaime, rara vka mita zia %%%, vaime, șen mogikvdi, mita zia%%%
oh, what shall I do, Uncle Mița, oh, I should die for you, Uncle Mița

at all the time I see only your poor eyes, Uncle Mița

at all the time I see your look, Uncle Mița

you looked at me and were happy that I came

massage my hands, (you said) Uncle Mița

massage my hands, which are completely asleep (you said)

I should die for you, Uncle Mița

In line 38 niece 2 directly addresses her uncle. She first creates a concrete scene from her memory (I sit and wait for what you will say to Aunt Gulo); then she speaks with her uncle's voice. She offers details from earlier meetings, which she now shares with everyone present in the audience. Again we have a constructed dialogue. Niece 2 in line 40 contrasts her concrete expectations from the living uncle with the reality of the present moment. In line 41 she compares the present situation with the past. The sadness of the present situation culminates in the detail that neither speaks. She then gives details of an incident in which she was likewise not called because she was ill herself. Rhetorical questions are asked (43) which suggest the uncle’s inability to speak. Death itself becomes plastic in this concrete detail of not speaking. As is typically done in Georgian wailing niece 2 also reminds the audience of a cousin who died young (line 46). She says that her sister did not cry in that case. In line 49 she turns Mițas attention to how everybody cries for him. Contrasts such as this are often constructed by the wailers. They have the following pattern: For X or Y I was
unable to cry, but for you my feelings are too strong. Although the control of feelings is culturally not desired at all (emotional expression is desired), it is often said that one is struggling for self-control but just cannot manage. This strengthens the emotional expression and its authenticity. Formulae follow. The comparison should not be taken literally but has the mere function of reflecting the grief everybody present expresses.

Starting in line 52 she evokes a concrete scene by asking Mița what she should say to Valiko, who up to now has not been informed of Mița’s death. In this way an absent person is drawn into the communalization process. She dramatizes the scene with Valiko, which is of course much more effective in enhancing emotions than generally acknowledging that Mița is not among them anymore. Starting in line 56 she focuses on details of Mița’s appearance. She mentions the contrast between his poor eyes in line 57 and his happy eyes in 58. With these metonyms she compares the happy past and the sad present. Details, such as the massaging of the uncle’s hands (59), which had fallen asleep, again visually evoke the scene; they are of course more easily remembered than general information would be. Details represent a sort of zoom effect in the narration. They work with analogy and association.

Niece 2 and niece 3 end most of their lines with the call "mița ʒia" (39, 41, 44, 45, 47, 49, 50, 51, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 67, 69).

Niece 2 laments somewhat more melodically. The melody does not correspond to the music heard in the background, which here comes from a cassette recorder, but sometimes, however, is played live. The music does not accompany the lament, but is rather independent and also is played in another room, e.g., in the courtyard. It can, however, very easily happen that the lamenters orients herself to the music, as does Niece 3 who sings. The melody is quite typical for East Georgia.

((music pause for a few minutes; change of music; tape was briefly turned off and again on)))

62 Ni 3: ءو یاود، نیای وید وید ید، ویدودی، یدودو، یدود وید،
(H) ra, vka ɾi de vna ɾa vna ɾe vna ɾed o, mița ʒia::%
what shall I do, shall I also reproach my mother, Uncle Mița,

63 یدودو، یدودو، یدودودیدودیدودیدودیدودیدودو، یدودو، یدودو، یدودو، یدودو، یدودو، یدودو، یدودو، یدودو، یدودو، یدودو، یدودو، یدودو، یدودو، یدودو، یدودو

66 As already said, D. Papukašvili taped the lament for us; he specialized in staging the musical background for laments, Western classical or Georgian folkloristic.

67 Literally: how bitterly she coos to you.
Let’s examine the text from line 62 onwards. Niece three asks her uncle what to do and tells him by performing words she herself had uttered in another context how her mother is bewailing him. Niece 3 constructs the words of her mother (63 and 68) and her own words (66). Her mother is present and listens to her daughter’s performance; again we witness multiple addressee orientation: the dead uncle is the direct addressee, her mother and the audience are indirect addressees. The mother is complimented and the audience is informed about her deep grief. In line 68 Niece 3 animates her mother’s voice for the public, but also directly addresses her by calling to her; indirectly she is of course also talking to the audience. As already pointed out, we often find sudden address shifts in Georgian lamentation. In line 67 the uncle is addressed, in 68 the mother and the public, in 69 again the deceased uncle. Line 70 is presumably addressed to Miṭa, the public, and the mother likewise, line 71 is primarily addressed to Miṭa. Again we witness multiple address and sudden address shifts as a communicative communalization strategy. It combines the realm of the living with that of the dead.

Since niece 3 sings we will take a look at the notes of lines 68-71:
The Georgian ethnomusicologist Prof. ყუჭრის ჭოხონიძე from Tbilisi transcribed the notes of this passage.

These strategies make the discourse vivid and imaginative. Together, the poeticized line structuring, the special vocabulary of the interjections and formulae, constructed dialogue, detailing, imagery, and multiple address have an involving and evocative effect on everybody. They create the sensual experience that is necessary to create a space, in which normal true or false statuses are abandoned, a space in which oral art is combined with magic.

As Finnegan pointed out so convincingly in her work on oral literature we never have the texts in isolation. They have to be understood in connection to the processes of which they are a part. I would like to add that we also do not have artistry in isolation. In the Georgian grief complex, most

---

68 Ruth Finnegan, (1977), see footnote 34. 
Ruth Finnegan, (1990): Introduction; or: Why the Comparativist Should Take Account of the South Pacific. 
Oral Tradition 5/2-3 (1990),159-184.
artistic elaborations play a role in staging religion. Therefore I would like to point to some other dimension of the ritual process.

4. On the external structure of Georgian grief rituals

Ritualization starts as soon as a death is made public. The family in which someone has died announces the death by crying loudly (šecxadeba) around the village. This cry is of course seen and experienced as a cry of shock but it also initiates a special period for the whole neighborhood. Now it is the duty of neighbors and relatives to hurry to offer their assistance. The grief family is provided for by neighbors until the burial. Work and festivities all stop at once. Ablutions with ritual provision of wash water begin. In East Georgia the wash water must be dumped far from the house as impure. In some West Georgian regions it is regarded as luck-bringing water for use in irrigating the fields. Regional differences are written into the grief complex in many places.\(^{69}\) The recreation of regional culture is one layer of the symbolic in the ritual process. All mirrors are immediately covered with black cloth in order to avoid seeing the deceased's reflection. This would according to folk belief mean death for the affected persons. The deceased is then dressed, in Georgia usually in Sunday clothing. The grieving family is not permitted to wash themselves. All forms of personal hygiene are stopped.\(^{70}\) In the period up to the burial neighbors and male relatives hold night-vigils over the dead. They sit around the fire while doing so. People believe that the deceased, including the one who has just joined them, will also meet around the fire in the afterworld. We can observe a continuing parallelization of earthly ritual action with what is supposed to happen in the hereafter. Thus it is also assumed that wine or vodka and roast sunflower seeds, which all neighbors bring with them, are likewise eaten by the deceased. During the night-watch the visitors must enjoy themselves, in order that the deceased can also enjoy the merriment.

Interesting mixtures of orthodox Christianity and natural-religious elements are observable in all Georgian regions. In former times the church played no role in the grief ritual complex. In the post-communist era, however, it has become customary for a priest to visit a family, bless the deceased and the mourning family, offer prayers and provide advice on the ceremony. As we all know, in the communist period church religious exercises were inopportune. Forms of unofficial religious practice, however, were all the more popular and were also more difficult to persecute, since they were exercised privately. Nowadays, the Orthodox church tries to gain influence everywhere. Although the grief rituals were independent from official religion, and very often act out imaginations of the hereafter which are incompatible with official Christian versions, most Georgians are very willing to integrate a priest into the ritual. The church has a high prestige at the moment.

In folk religion all of ritual mourning is regarded as a sacred duty to the deceased person. Standards of appropriateness, which make it possible to judge the performance, combine religion and art. When ritual activities are forgotten, the community of the deceased may according to religious

---

\(^{69}\) Especially conspicuous is the performance of differences between East and West Georgia. Western and Eastern lamentation styles are regarded as hardly compatible by the Georgians. Kotthoff deals with the distinction of regional identities in joint lamentations: Helga Kotthoff, (1999b): Affekt-Darbietungen in interkulturellen Lamentationen in Georgien. In: Stefan Rieger et al. (eds.), Interkulturalität. Tuebingen 1999b, 231-251.

\(^{70}\) Forms of letting-oneself-go as an expression of grief are found in many cultures; see Stubbe 1985, footnote10.
ethnotheories be offended and revenge itself on the descendants of those who carried out their duties poorly. Concern for the well-being of the deceased in the hereafter is omnipresent in everyday Georgian life, and it is always linked with concern for one's own well-being. Since every family lives in a close social network, which also displays its supportive capacity in a phase of grief, each death is an event of great social significance for the whole community.

Many photos of other deceased persons are arranged on the table behind the open coffin. These deceased persons are believed to receive the just deceased in the hereafter. They are often directly addressed in the lament.

The time order of the ritual is roughly the same everywhere in Georgia. The burial must take place at the latest on the seventh day after death, at the earliest on the third day. During the day people lament until the coffin is lowered into the grave. After the burial kelexi takes place, a large "sad meal". On the seventh and fortieth day people mourn and lament again; again there are meals. In Xevsuretia and Tušetia the lamentation is held over the so-called plasi, a rug on which selected personal possessions and pieces of clothing belonging to the deceased person have been arranged. These are afterward given by the family to good friends of the deceased. After a year a very large meal in honor of the deceased is held, called clistavi. Now "čeris gaxsna" must take place, the raising of the roof (the end of grief). The meal ends with cheerful toasts to those present, the living. Now normality is supposed to be reestablished. For example, marriages can be celebrated again.

Many of the named activities can be carried out more or less aesthetically or appropriately. People may dress the deceased elaborately, etc. They can arrange many flowers in the room and thereby beautify it. They can lay the table beautifully, decorate the food and much more. Standards of appropriateness always prevail which are prescribed as unwritten law for the purpose of common mourning. The small step to what is seen as "overdone" would be just as fatal as dispensing with aesthetics. Standardization allows minor individual deviations.

---

71 One could fill pages with the semiotics of culinaria during kelexi. I limit myself here to a few essential observations. In the last few decades often over a hundred persons have been at kelexi in the village. When the group returns from the cemetery, people first wash their hands (the cemetery and the dead are regarded as unclean). Then they take their places. Arranged pickles, tomatoes, various vegetable pastetes (pxali), two-to-three types of cheese, smoked and cooked fish, pickled sour vegetables, a bean dish (lobio), potatoes and wheat cooked in honey (candili) are on the tables. Then bozbashi (a soup made from lamb with vegetables) is served, as well as the following courses, always cooked by men. The women prepare everything, place food on the tables and continuously serve guests. After this there is xaslama (cooked beef) and as final course there is šilaplavi, a rice dish with meat from joints of lamb and and black pepper. On the fortieth day after the death (ormoci) still more is put on the tables, for example, additionally sweet cakes and fruit. According to the testimony of various villagers, the funeral dinners in pre-communist times were much more modest; the communists had begun to expand kelexi, ormoci and clistavi. It is interesting that the politically motivated limitation of ecclesiastical elements of the mourning ritual presumably caused the quasi-religious elements to increase and thus to stimulate changes in the ritual complex. Today the great mourning meals represent a financial burden for almost all families. However, all those present must contribute some money (called pativiscema = honoring a person), whereby the family keeps a record of the contributions, because they must then also pay the same sum at the mourning meals of the other families should the occasion arise. It is interesting that people remember over many years exactly who paid (financial) homage to whom. Presently a renewed change in ideals toward more modest meals can be detected. People also feel a need to distance themselves from the communist influences. Korkoti, a wheat porridge, is cooked on religious days in honor of the dead by the family of the deceased and distributed to neighbors. People thereby observe the ritually prescribed odd number of plates. As well here people assume that the deceased eat the same things.

72 These forms are also practiced in reduced and altered forms in other Georgian regions. In Tušetia and Xevsuretia the plasi-weeping is strongly ritualized and carried out in public. In other regions they occur in a private frame and at one chosen time.
Concluding remarks:

Lamentation is a ritual of shared grieving which reinforces and intensifies sociality among village people, especially among women. In these ritual dialogues the loss of a person is communalized, and by aestheticization it is quasi-therapeutically worked out. The loss is symbolically shared, whereby the social network of the whole community is reaffirmed. Aestheticized speech, demanding bodily control during the performance of "being beside oneself," makes possible a consensual coming to terms with the loss and the creation of a shared cultural memory. The ceremonial genre of lamentations refers to cultural ties and emotional expression.

Ritualized genres of mourning occupy a broad space in the communicative household of Georgian culture. The simultaneous attention to the deceased and the living demands a high temporal, physical and artistic engagement. As artists of pain, lamenters enjoy a high moral reputation everywhere in Georgia (except Tbilisi). Their art is highly regarded not only in terms of genre criteria, but also in terms of criteria of individual expressive improvisation. A good lament evokes many tears among those present; it is "beautifully sad". Religiosity plays a stronger role in Georgia than it does in the Western world. Thus there is no table where a drinking toast is not offered asking for Uendoba, forgiving the sins of the dead, in order that they can have peace.

Interestingly the lamentation genre of the "unofficial religious" survived the Soviet period intact. It was too closely linked to emotional needs and too strongly integrated into normal everyday life for it to have been effectively forbidden.

Durkheim, van Gennep, Radcliffe-Brown, Feld and many other anthropologists argued that the function of ritual weeping among those left behind is to affirm the existence of a social bond between two or more persons. In the case where the social tissue is threatened by the departure of a person, the social structure is knit together again by a theatrical performance of shared emotions. The Georgian "xmit natibrebi" simultaneously combine several purposes: They allow people to aestheticize feelings of sadness on the occasion of death, they transmit them, organize social memory, and they bind the community together by sharing grief and reaffirming its moral values. For the lamenters aesthetical grieving means to keep control over their feelings. They cannot let themselves go. For some of the listeners the process is the other way round. They are inflicted with their pain.

Georgians, and especially Georgian women, certainly perform "grieving work" (to use this ugly term from German psychoanalysis), but much more, they perform "grieving art" as I hope to have shown.

---

73 See footnote 12
74 See footnotes 14, 29, 28, 8
Literature


Feld, Steven, "Wept Thoughts: The Voicing of Kaluli Memories", *Oral Tradition* 5/2-3 (1990), 241-266.


Finnegan, Ruth, "Introduction; or: Why the Comparativist Should Take Account of the South Pacific", *Oral Tradition*, 5/2-3 (1990), 159-184.


Hymes, Dell, "In vain I tried to tell you", Essays in Native American Ethnopoetics, Philadelphia 1981.


Leach, Edmund, Rethinking Anthropology, New York 1968.


