

Patriarchy through lamentation in Azerbaijan

ABSTRACT

In this article, I analyze patriarchy through the lens of emotional discourse in and beyond death rituals among Mountain Jews in northeastern Azerbaijan. I argue that the time-bound nature of female lamentation and the recent development of a popular narrative conceptualizing this genre as the custom defining Mountain Jewish identity in the Caucasus ultimately work to disempower women, reaffirming gender roles through narratives of suffering. Even though they use lamentations to address grievances within a context of increased outward migration, Mountain Jewish women cannot easily escape the conservative force that sorrow plays in their daily and ritual lives. [*Mountain Jews, Azerbaijan, death, feminist ethnography, emotion, women, mourning*]

In the summer of 2004, I traveled to the Mountain Jewish village of Krasnaia Sloboda, in Northeast Azerbaijan, to conduct research on female mourning rituals that occur during Suruni, the ninth day of the Jewish month of Av (Tisha B'Av), to commemorate the historical destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem.¹ On Suruni, Mountain Jews, like other religious observant Jews worldwide, visit the graves of their ancestors. Although many Mountain Jews have moved from Azerbaijan after the collapse of the Soviet Union in search of better job opportunities, they return annually to visit relatives they left behind and to pay their respects to deceased family members buried in the three cemeteries overlooking the village. Men carry out the official religious obligations of saying Kaddish (the mourner's prayer) and reading other prayers and Torah portions for the deceased and his or her relatives.² Women gather in large groups at the home of the dead, and then the cemetery, to perform laments called *girjə*.³ Mountain Jewish women engage in mourning rites whenever a family member dies,⁴ and their collective lamentations for the dead are an essential part of Suruni. These *girjə*, lasting several hours at a stretch and continuing up to seven days in a row for someone recently deceased, elaborate on the sorrow and suffering felt by those left behind, and, as such, they exemplify the religious culture of Mountain Jewish women, their " 'little tradition' within and/or parallel to the 'big tradition' " of official Judaism (Sered 1992:6).⁵

In the study of female lamentation, it is essential to acknowledge the powerful role that emotion plays in providing any ritual with conservative force, as well as innovative potential. On the one hand, ritual action channels emotion, inflects meaning, and reinforces belief. An individual is linked to society through his or her own emotional response during the rite. As Stanley Tambiah writes, "Ritual is not a 'free expression of emotions' but a disciplined rehearsal of 'right attitudes'" (1985:134). On the other hand, although ritual works to provoke specific emotional responses in its participants, the multivocal, ambiguous nature of ritual symbolism leaves room for people to bring their own feelings, experiences, and

understandings to the event (Kertzer 1988:11). Rituals, then, can become central sites of struggle, locations for the formulation of counterhegemonic subjectivities capable of influencing individuals' everyday lives (Hegland 1998b; Holland and Skinner 1995; Peteet 1994; Torab 1996).

Therefore, although death rites tend to be societies' most conservative rituals and, thus, the slowest to change (Danforth 1982), participants can nevertheless transform the ritual and their community within the context of such rites. For example, in many patriarchal societies, death rituals are the only places in which women can express their social grievances publicly and exhibit their resistance to authority (Aggarwal 2001; Graeber 1995; Johnson 1988; Worobec 1994). Some scholars have investigated how women emerge as spokespersons for the community by voicing their complaints in funerary laments (Bourke 1993; Briggs 1992; Caraveli-Chaves 1980; Crain 1991; Honko 1974; Urban 1988). Others have pushed the issue farther, arguing that women's emotional words and body movements during such rituals have the potential to both resist and transform the social order (Caraveli 1986; Cattell 1992; Hegland 1998a; Okely 1991; Seremetakis 1991).

Nevertheless, in his study of a Cretan funeral, Michael Herzfeld cautions that even though the rich symbolic vocabulary of laments afforded one woman the ability to redress her low social status, death creates a situation of "uncertainty and ambiguity" in which, in Loring M. Danforth's words, "a final resolution . . . can never be achieved" (Herzfeld 1993:242). He writes that the language of lamentation "resists reduction to literal, singular meanings, a fact that both makes resistance possible and constrains its practical effects," and he acknowledges that his provisional analysis hinges on "the uncertainty the mourners themselves experience in interpreting events" (Herzfeld 1993:252; see also Hegland 2003). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge how mourning rituals are not always spaces of extensive transformation (Kaeppler 1993; Wellenkamp 1988).

In the Mountain Jewish case, the sorrow women say they feel during lamentation is both personal and social.⁶ And, as Unni Wikan notes, because people experience emotions as "feeling-thoughts" (Leavitt 1996:524), the "truth" of that occurrence for Mountain Jewish women tends to reaffirm a gender ideology founded on female emotionality. Thus, although I discuss imagined possibilities for change within *girjə* and Mountain Jewish society as a whole because of outward migration and concomitant shifting expectations for young brides, I argue that, in the end, the sorrow displayed and enacted during lamentation reinforces gender expectations within national and transnational contexts.

I take my inspiration here from Jane Fishburne Collier, who notes that "modernity requires people to have, and to enact, tradition," and that women, because of their "overdetermined" association with tradition, are expected to bear and pass on national culture (1997:212, 210). Having such

a culture is especially salient in the former Soviet Union, where titular nationalities claimed their own states, and minority ethnic groups advocate for their rights within these new countries.⁷ The diasporic nature of Mountain Jewish life magnifies this perceived need to foster national tradition. When traveling abroad, Mountain Jews envision Krasnaia Sloboda as a symbolic center of kinship and ethnic identity. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson write that as migration and displacement increase, "*ideas* about culturally and ethnically distinct places become perhaps even more salient," so that the notion of a homeland "remains one of the most powerful unifying symbols for mobile and displaced peoples" (1992:10, 11). Therefore, the agency of Mountain Jewish women is shaped by the intersection of their own interests with the identity of their people.⁸ As Carol A. Smith notes, "Almost all kinds of nationalism build upon our attachment to the supports and claims that we can make of blood ties, kinship, and family" (1995:746). My approach to Mountain Jewish female lamentation thus relies on a notion of personhood that prioritizes kin relations rather than one that is based on Western ideals of a bounded and independent self.⁹ The question of whether mourning rituals can be forums for change must speak, as Marilyn Strathern says, to " 'how social effects are registered' . . . in shifting fields of power" beyond the motivations and experiences of individuals (Ong 1990:259).

In this article, I show how Mountain Jewish mourning rituals are innovative in that they accommodate recent post-Soviet migratory experiences, giving women the chance to express their grievances. However, this same transnational moment makes the conservative force of emotion in lamentation critical in counteracting what many see as the dangers facing Mountain Jewish culture because of increased diasporization. I argue that the recent development of a popular narrative conceptualizing *girjə* as the "tradition" defining Mountain Jewish identity in the Caucasus ultimately works to disempower women, limiting what life choices are "culturally conceivable" for them (Kandiyoti 1998:147).¹⁰

There are at least three ways in which this conclusion may be seen to work against some versions of current Western feminist sensibilities.¹¹ First, my study could potentially Orientalize and essentialize Mountain Jewish women as emotionally driven. Second, it proposes what some might see as a theoretical impasse: that these women do not have power to resist patriarchy, even though they still have agency. Third, my idea that women are compelled to take part in their subjugation because of a belief in the naturalness of their emotions could be read as suggesting that these village rituals are iron cages with no escape possible in the future.¹² However, Cynthia Enloe cautions us that

One of the starting points of feminism is taking women's lives seriously. "Seriously" implies listening carefully, digging deep, developing a long attention span,

being ready to be surprised. Taking women—all sorts of women, in disparate times and places—seriously is not the same thing as valorizing women . . . [A] feminist curiosity finds all women worth thinking about, paying close attention to, because in this way we will be able to throw into sharp relief the blatant and subtle political workings of both femininity and masculinity. [2004:3–4]

In embarking on this research into female lamentations, I had expected to find resistance where I found subordination. I had anticipated recording tales of innovation but, instead, uncovered narratives of emotional destiny. Taking Mountain Jewish women's lives seriously, I crafted a theoretical argument that aims to stay close to the ground (Geertz 1973:24) so as to provide nuanced understanding of how emotion validates patriarchy.

Mountain Jews in Krasnaia Sloboda

Known as *gorskie evrei* in Russian and *yəhudilər* in Azeri, Mountain Jews refer to themselves as *çuhuro* (Jews) in their own language, a dialect of Judeo-Persian called Judeo-Tat.¹³ Mountain Jews, who consider themselves descendants of the ten tribes exiled from the Kingdom of Israel in the eighth century B.C.E. (Altschuler 2002:17),¹⁴ have settled in the Caucasus since at least the fifth century B.C.E.¹⁵ They first began to emigrate to Israel in the 1970s and, during the last years of the Soviet Union, they moved to North America, Russia, and Germany in search of better work opportunities. Today, Mountain Jews engage in temporary labor outmigration. Whole families relocate for parts of the year or, at times, male heads of households leave their wives and children behind.¹⁶ Some even emigrate to other countries but live in the village seasonally. In general, Mountain Jews like to “return” to Krasnaia Sloboda in the summer for Suruni and the rush of weddings that occur after this holiday.¹⁷ The survival of Krasnaia Sloboda, now supporting a population of 3,600 persons, is even more strikingly significant because 65 percent of Mountain Jews have emigrated from Azerbaijan, resulting in the dissolution of all other Jewish towns in the country (Agarunov 2001).¹⁸

Originally called “Evreiskaia Sloboda” (Jewish Settlement), Krasnaia Sloboda (Red Settlement) is situated across the river from the Muslim town of Kuba. Krasnaia Sloboda has been an active center of Jewish life since Fatali-khan, the ruler of the Kuba khanate (1758–89), offered Mountain Jews refuge there (Dymshits 1999:43). Mountain Jews settled according to their former residence patterns, naming new neighborhoods after the villages they left behind, and each neighborhood had its own synagogue and section in the cemetery (Khaimovich 2002:65). This migration continued until the mid-19th century, earning the village, in time, the nickname of “Jerusalem of the Caucasus” (Altschuler 2002:18). Today, although some Mountain Jews reside in the

village year round, others strive to build and maintain homes there for their summer sojourn.

Mountain Jews frequently live in extended virilocal families. Wives usually remain under the watchful gaze of their mothers-in-law, and two brothers and their brides live together so regularly that there is a special term for it: *hamboji*. Mountain Jewish women are knowledgeable about keeping kosher, holiday food restrictions, and the lighting of candles on Shabbat.¹⁹

Originally, the typical Mountain Jewish home was a *sakla*, a two- or three-room structure made out of straw and clay and heated with cow dung. Before the Russian Revolution, the Mountain Jews of Krasnaia Sloboda specialized in the rug trade and the cultivation of tobacco and rice (Mikdash-Shamailov 2002b:128). In the later 19th and early 20th centuries, the village featured two-story brick buildings with shops on the first floor and residences on the second (Khaimovich 2002:65). Although some remain, the majority of these buildings were razed to make way for three- to five-story luxury homes to accommodate families who come back in the summer. The collapse of the Soviet Union gave Mountain Jews numerous commerce opportunities that have dramatically impacted the look of the village. Constant construction of new homes engenders a feeling of inequality among at least a few Mountain Jews who cannot afford such residences.

An overview of Mountain Jewish death customs

Mountain Jews, like other religious Jewish peoples, mourn the death of a relative for seven days during the period of *shiva*, or *hofti*, as the Mountain Jews call it. During this time, men visit the synagogue twice a day, while female relatives gather at home to cry for the dead. Bereaved relatives cannot cut their hair, change their clothes, or take a bath. For these seven days, village residents and extended kin visit the family to express their condolences. Women gather separately to engage in lamentation while the men recite the Kaddish.²⁰ Men and women take turns eating the ritual meal, with men dining first. Only those women who have lost someone particularly close to them (e.g., parents) can attend the lamentations because the participation of people who have not experienced such grief might offend living relatives. The women who enter the room are thus recognized as having already shared difficult losses. Women at these laments are typically either relatives of the deceased (via extended kin networks accounted from both maternal and paternal lines) or neighbors and friends of those in mourning. On the seventh day, women are allowed to visit the grave, forbidden from doing so earlier because it is considered too difficult a burden for them to bear. They arrive first to perform songs of mourning, leaving once the men surround the grave to say prayers.

Mountain Jews perform additional mourning rituals both for a “40-day” as well as a one-year period. Recently,

however, Mountain Jews mark the shorter period of mourning for only 30 days, citing rabbinic authority to do so.²¹ On this day (called *cylə*, which means 40 in Judeo-Tat), men and women gather separately in the house to grieve before visiting the grave and the new gravestone, if the family is able to afford one at this time.

For the entire year of mourning, close relatives of the dead are not permitted to attend weddings or funerals, but they can witness a circumcision if they do not take part in the celebration afterward.²² Family members of the deceased also hold meals on Shabbat when more distant relatives and neighbors can pay their condolences. If the family did not unveil the gravestone on the 30th day, they do so at the *sal*, the one-year anniversary of death. A round of laments and subsequent viewing of the gravestone during the *sal* mark the end of the mourning period. Mountain Jews follow the religious notion that the three weeks prior to Suruni constitute a period of mourning in which they visit extended kin who are in bereavement. On the day of Suruni, entire families of Mountain Jews walk from one cemetery to the next to see the graves of their dead, and the adult women perform abbreviated laments at the tombs.

The head mourner: A conservative force

Istir is the most experienced and popular paid head female mourner in the village.²³ In her early sixties, tall, wrapped in a large black shawl, and wearing a heavy gold necklace, she radiates commanding presence and force. Her technique is the same for any memorial or burial service. She stands in the center of a crowd of women who sit on the floor in the home of the deceased. Tears rolling down her cheeks, she addresses individual women with graceful precision, and each woman to whom she speaks sobs inconsolably in response, rhythmically beating her upper thighs with open palms.

When I asked her how she gets the women to cry so forcefully, she responded that she retells the family history of each and every woman, causing her to weep for dead relatives, and, in turn, for the person in whose honor the service was organized. Istir is able to lead the women in this ritual because, ultimately, the death of close kin deals a powerful blow to a person's sense of self. As she explained, "I have had much sorrow in my life. I [no longer] have a sister, father, mother." Istir used the Judeo-Tat term *dərd* to refer to her "sorrow." *Dərd* is similar to the Russian word *gore*, and *gore* refers "very roughly, to profound acute and ongoing sorrow, related to a great and ongoing misfortune" (Wierzbicka 2004:581).²⁴ Mountain Jews also use the phrase *dərd kešira* ("to hurt in one's soul") in the context of mourning. The source of a head mourner's skill lies in her sorrow, and sorrow is the emotion that should be expressed and released by women during the death ritual.

The expectation that Mountain Jewish women should cry at funerals is so powerful that many Mountain Jewish

women interpreted it as "our law—a person dies, that means that we have to cry." Similarly, when I asked the 80-year-old patriarch of the Abramov family, "What would happen if female relatives did not cry for the dead?" he initially responded by explaining how they would cry. When I repeated the question, he said bluntly, "That is not proper. That would not be respect for the dead. Mourning is mourning. It lasts seven days, and then the men go to work and the women continue to gather for 30 days to cry."

When I pressed Istir further for reasons why Mountain Jewish women must wail for the dead, she stated matter-of-factly: "Tears bejewel a funeral like dances decorate a wedding." From this perspective, crying is not only the most appropriate but also the most beautiful response.²⁵ Mountain Jews believe that crying for the dead and recounting their conduct and accomplishments in life (*oplakivat' pokoinogo*, Russian) achieve two tasks. First, they show respect (*ħyrmət*, Judeo-Tat) for the deceased and their bereaved relatives. Second, these traditions calm the relatives, allowing their souls to feel lighter (*oblegchenie v dushe*, Russian). Istir noted that "you need to spread around the grief so that people cry. It is good for the person who died, and it is also good for his wife, because her soul will become calm."

In the Kuba dialect of Judeo-Tat, the word *girjə* refers to the lamentation song itself; it also signifies the communal act of crying for the dead performed by women in attendance.²⁶ Mountain Jews call the head mourner a *girjəsox*, which translates as "the one who makes the crying" or "the one who creates the mourning song." This definition hints at how, even though women are supposed to cry at funerals, it takes work to make them do so. The *girjəsox* thus aims to produce "a sense of heightened and intensified and fused communication" through the specific structure of the lament experience (Tambiah 1985:145). Her words and movements labor to bring individual mourners into a collective experience of grief appropriate to the occasion. Thus, even if individual women do not want to feel sorrow, the *girjəsox* forces them to do so. As Luba, a Mountain Jewish woman in her mid-thirties, noted, "Whether [the women] want to or not, they cry. Their hearts are squeezed. The tears flow freely. It is like the dead person is now standing directly in front of them. It is as if the deceased walked right out of the grave when the women hear the words of the *girjəsox*. They cry because the *girjəsox* talks well, and it hurts."

Talking well is a skill, but it also involves following a strict formula for success. Istir follows the same formula for each *girjə*. First and foremost, Tyrynç, another *girjəsox* in her sixties, told me, "The words of the *girjəsox* work only on those who no longer have brothers, sisters, and parents." Only those who have experienced sorrow can take part in a lamentation. With that criterion met, Istir then approaches each woman with an individualized adaptation of the same procedure. For example, Istir told me that when she laments a woman's deceased brother, she starts with the phrase *Qodoj*

biror tasinəmə (Judeo-Tat), which she explained to me this way: “Let’s say that your wonderful and generous brother died. I am upset that someone like your brother has died, because my brother and sister have also died, right? It is like I compare my pain with yours.” Other Mountain Jewish women described *Qodoj biror tasinəmə* as meaning “I remember your brother [*biror*] in my heart [*tasinəmə*].” The woman being addressed then quietly murmurs “I remember him or her in my heart” (*tasinəmə*) back to Istir. Luba said this part of the ritual functions “like a thank you” to the *girjəsox* for the “kind words she said about your deceased relatives.”

The word *tasinəmə* can mean “in my heart, or in my soul, or in my chest.” This sentiment is poignantly performed during the first days of mourning when the women beat and scratch their chests because of their anguish, an example of the way “emotions are *felt* in bodily experience, not just known or thought or appraised” (Leavitt 1996:526). Similarly, following the etymology of the sentence further, the word *qodoj* implies that “your pain falls upon me,” thus linking remembrance to suffering. Accordingly, Istir told me that after introducing the remembrance of a particular person, she says the phrase *na dobugil boşit* (Judeo-Tat), meaning “Do not be offended how I will cry. We also have mothers without sons, sisters without brothers. Our grief is your grief. I divide your grief in half with mine.” The Judeo-Tat saying for this concept—*Dərdjurə vokurdə*—translates as “to talk with someone openly about your sorrow; to divide your sorrow with someone else.”

Then, Istir extols the good characteristics of the deceased and reviews the causes of death. These causes, sometimes describing the failures of the deceased or their relatives, are meant to elicit sorrowful cries of regret and longing from female family members. Thus, the best *girjəsox* knows everything about all the members of the community.

Ultimately, the head lamenter aims to engage women in conversation (*dyndyrmish soxdə*, Judeo-Tat) about their personal anguish. When I asked Tyrynç how sorrow affects a person, she said it “beats down a person, both morally and spiritually.” As a result, many women who suffer from severe grief are not able to lament properly. Older women who know how “to express themselves” (*vyskazat’sia*, Russian) and say “beautiful words” are able to aid, in turn, women who cannot possibly grieve and release their sorrow through tears. Istir is proud of how “tears flow like rain” when she poetically elaborates women’s sorrow. “I talk and then decorate [their suffering through beautiful words]. And because of that, they cry. And it happens that as I tell about the death of one person, someone else has a similar grief, and then I see that three or four women are crying now.”

To seal the *communitas* of suffering, the head lamenter ends each story by leading all the women in wailing sounds.²⁷ Istir conceptualized these unified voices as a sign that women were following her in this journey of painful remembrances: “When I cry, and [the women] at the end give me

this strength, they are also with me. They give me support.” By bearing the anguish of others along with her own personal losses, the *girjəsox* carries a heavy load, and this chorus empowers her to continue the ritual.

Reaffirmation of gender roles

The text of the *girjə* centers on reevaluating the deceased’s contributions to his or her family and community, and as such, it highlights and reaffirms the importance of maintaining appropriate gender roles. For example, at the *sal* for Zaxar, a 70-year-old Mountain Jewish man who died one year earlier, Istir talked to his widow about how she looked after him in his last days. Istir reconstructed the scenario, saying, “You prepared a special meal for him, but there were no results.” Istir then scolded the dead man himself, as if he were in front of her: “You did not eat. You threw it away. You said you had no appetite.” Istir turned to another widow, detailing the onset of her husband’s terminal illness after he built a house. “He could not feed nor raise his children. . . . He built his own house, but he never sat in it.”²⁸ Istir then led all the women in a chorus of wailing in which they slapped their thighs and hit their cheeks. Istir worked hard to point out the similarities of the two widows’ fates: both had husbands who died before they could finish their fatherly duties. She transformed their personal sorrow into an empathetic statement of communal suffering, for it is extremely difficult for a mother and her children to live without a male provider.²⁹

Through her renditions, Istir reinforced notions of proper male and female behavior. She created a moral hierarchy by citing the tragedy of unreached goals. The sorrow that women expressed with Istir showed that they were following her and agreed with her reading of events. Lamentation thus synthesizes sentiments expressed and followed in nonritual contexts. For example, Mountain Jews repeatedly told me that men build houses and bring home money to keep their children fed while women aspire to be caregivers. For example, Dovid, a prominent middle-aged Mountain Jewish businessman, described himself as a model of Mountain Jewish male behavior. He did not allow his wife to work—even though she has a degree in medicine—because she should stay home and tend to the family. In private, his wife Hannah admitted to me that she was sad to leave her career, but “When your husband talks, you listen, even if you disagree. Keep your mouth shut. Do what he says. The husband is the head of the household.” She offered this to me as advice for the best way to live a married life.

Women in Krasnaia Sloboda know that their deeds will be evaluated publicly after their death. For example, a common phrase uttered by a *girjəsox* to a woman suffering the loss of her aunt is “We remember your clean aunt” (*Qodoj xoləity tovtovini tasinəmə*). Many Mountain Jews say that a woman who has a job outside the home is “unclean,”

and they support a man's right to throw his wife out on the street if she does not take care of herself, either "letting her appearance go" or engaging in suspicious acts such as walking alone in public or cavorting with men who are not her relatives.³⁰ Thus, to lament a deceased female relative as "pure"—*tovtov* or *təmiz* (Judeo-Tat)—means that she kept a virtuous household, not only in terms of her own activities but also the activities of her children. Such sentiments are also found on gravestones. In a walk through one of the three graveyards, I came on an epitaph that read in Judeo-Tat:

My mother, my mother
You bore many children
My clean mother

Family values

Family values celebrated in lamentation shape women's daily lives, encouraging them to conform to gender expectations by referencing "natural" male and female relationships. Emotions expressed during mourning rituals constitute an integral part of the way women view themselves, their families, and their future. Take, for instance, the Yusufov household, in which Sara Yusufova lives with her two brothers, their wives, and their children. Sara, in her mid-thirties, is the only daughter left in the village to look after her deceased parents' graves. She relies on income from her brothers (who work in Moscow) to support herself, her two sisters-in-law, and their children in the village. Her father died less than a year ago, and she and her close relatives were still observing the year of mourning when I spoke with her. When asked what would happen at her house during Suruni, she said, "People will come to sit and eat with us. We will remember my father, and we will cry."

- Sascha:** Will the men cry, too?
Sara: No.
Sascha: Why?
Sara: Men are stronger than women. I do not know why. They have perhaps something stronger inside—a stronger physical organism. They have to work harder than women [to make money for the family].
Sascha: Well, women have to give birth, doesn't that make them stronger?
Sara: No. I would want to be a man more than a woman if I had a choice.
Sascha: Why? What would you do as a man that you could not do as a woman?
Sara: I am not allowed to leave here to go to Baku or anywhere else. If I wanted to be a chauffeur, I would not be allowed to do so.

Sara's sentiments echoed the following advice that I heard countless times in the village: "girls need to be kept at home" (*Duxtorə ə xunə gurdi*, Judeo-Tat), as if keeping a girl at home trained her psychologically and physically for her future role as wife and mother.³¹ Sara told me during another conversation that boys should learn to be "free" (*svo-bodnye*, Russian), but girls should be taught to be "domestic" (*domashnie*, Russian). Her statement expressed the belief in an opposition between home and freedom. Girls needed to be cloistered in the house where their male relatives, and then their husbands, would decide their fate. When pressed for an explanation to the question "How do you teach the boys that they are free?" Sara answered, "I don't know. . . . But girls must know how to do housework so that there will not be complaints later. But all our children have a good upbringing."

Similarly, Hannah, Dovid's wife, told me that "boys and girls have different customs and laws [*obriady i zakony*]. Girls must be *domashnie*. If girls go on the street, they would be considered *guliashie* [persons who walk the streets, and are thus of loose moral character]. No one would marry them." Luba likewise indicated that "no one will look after the girl if she is not married—she is like a rock. She can weigh down a family. She cannot feed herself. It is a sin for a Jewish woman to work for her own food. The husband must support the wife and children."

Furthermore, a bride must be a virgin. Male relatives, usually the father, arrange the match. The wedding ceremony includes the groom's deflowering of the bride and then showing the bloodstained sheet to the relatives gathered outside the nuptial chamber. Staying close to home and to her mother can ensure a girl's virginity, making sure she is "clean." Parents, older siblings, and other kin carefully watch their young female relatives to safeguard them and keep them off the street.

Boys, however, are encouraged to meet with their friends, drive cars, and make money in business, either with a male relative or as an apprentice to a family friend in the village or abroad. Married men can either take their families with them on business trips or leave them behind in the village. When men return to Krasnaia Sloboda to see their wives and children for holiday or vacation, they do not stay in the house for long, instead preferring to meet male friends at the local coffee house and stroll the streets.

Women and sorrow

Lamentation not only reinforces traditional relationships between women and men seen and enacted in family life, but it also gives credence to an image of women as overemotional and sorrowful. In an interview with members of her family, Valentina Abramova (in her forties) told me that crying is a woman's job because "men are a more serious folk, they cannot express themselves. They cannot cry like women

can.”³² Her husband agreed, saying, “Men are stronger than women.” As a result, men bury the dead and say the Hebrew-language prayers in the home and at the gravesite. In contrast, Tyrynç and Istir assured me that men do cry but only for extremely close relatives. Tyrynç explained that during *girjə*, men sit outside the house and “burn” with the searing heat of grief. When their emotions become too much for them, they sob. “They can hit themselves or pull at their beards, but they do so quietly.” Istir boasted that even the men in the courtyard weep when they overhear her lamentations. I myself saw them crying silently at the graves of close relatives during *Suruni*.

However, women are the ones most visibly affected by grief because they see suffering as an inescapable aspect of their lives. This in turn reinforces the idea that *girjə* is the quintessential female art. Anna Wierzbicka, in writing about the Russian term for sorrow (*gore*), comments that it “does not imply a special and exceptional emotion related primarily to death. It has no special conceptual link with death, and it implies, rather, a great suffering ‘of the kind that is a normal part of human life’” (2004:592).³³ Similarly, a great sadness pervaded one particular household I visited in Krasnaia Sloboda. Şuşan Agarunova, a widow, lived with her three children: a daughter, Tova (age 16), and two sons, Avram (age 15) and Natan (age 8). Describing herself as her father’s favorite child, Tova continued to miss him three years after his death. And, yet, there were hardly any pictures of him around the house. All Şuşan said of Benami, her deceased husband, was that “he liked to drink.” No one in the family was forthcoming about the circumstances of his death. Tova demurred, saying that he had unexpectedly fallen sick and died.

I originally met the Agarunovs in the winter of 2003. At that time, Tova was interested in her studies, and she liked to practice with me the English phrases she had learned in school. When I returned in the summer of 2004, Tova told me she was not going back to school for the tenth grade because no Mountain Jewish girls go any farther in their education “and people would talk if I did.”³⁴ Sometimes she said there was too much work to be done at home, and at other times she confessed to being bored. Her life was monotonous. Each day, under the supervision of her mother, she picked a room to sweep and straighten; the housework, seemingly, never ended. She confessed to me that she wanted to go to Austria, or somewhere warm so she could stroll the streets. Later, though, she described her fear at going anywhere beyond the confines of her home. When I asked why her eight-year-old brother Natan could walk to his grandfather’s house alone whereas she could not, Tova said, “I don’t know the way.” “You just go straight,” I responded.

“I am afraid.”

“Of what?”

“Dogs, and no one would let me go alone.” Later, remarking how quickly time had flown since I first met them, Tova said that from now on she would “sit in the house and

not see anything.” She commented, “I will get old, and then die, and then people will come to cry for me, but then time will pass. The memory of me will fade because it is easy to forget about a person when he is not with us.”

The knowledge of mourning customs, and the social values of female propriety they emphasize, imprinted on Tova the importance of maintaining appropriate gender roles despite her periodic frustration with her lot in life. For, even though she dreamed of going abroad and said that she would never marry because “that would mean sitting in someone else’s house with children,” she later confessed to me that it was only a matter of time before she became a wife. The timing of her wedding would depend on her mother’s wishes since, for now, Şuşan preferred having Tova around to help her with the housework. It was too early for Şuşan to get a daughter-in-law because Avram was neither old enough nor financially secure enough to obtain a wife. Perhaps in the near future he could use kinship connections to go abroad to make his fortune.

Migration and lamentation

In reviewing the reasons for a person’s death, the lamenter cannot help but address the changes wrought by migration. During one *girjə* performance, Istir spoke to two women in the room, Hovo and her daughter-in-law Sona. Istir recounted how Sona refused to come to the aid of Hovo’s daughter Dina. Dina called Sona in the middle of the night, saying she had chest pains and needed a ride to the hospital. Istir reminded the women of Sona’s insistence on waiting until morning. By then, Dina had died of a heart attack. Her children found her the next day lying facedown on the living room floor. A year later, Sona’s son Ysyf died in Moscow, and the family brought his body back to Krasnaia Sloboda for burial. Istir looked at Hovo, commenting, “There was grief (*dərd*) over the death of Dina, and that became grief over the death of Ysyf. From that grief came blood.” Now laying her eyes on Sona, Istir said, “You brought blood. Blood flowed from that scratched place,” referring to the blood drawn by close female relatives of the dead who scratch their cheeks, chests, and arms with their nails. Both Sona and Hovo broke into loud sobs, hitting themselves on their upper legs and chests from the anguish caused by remembering these painful events.

In February 2003, I went to the funeral of Sona’s son Ysyf, who died at the age of 21. Like many young Mountain Jewish men, Ysyf was sent to work in Moscow with his male kin. While there, he died of a drug overdose. On the first day of mourning in Krasnaia Sloboda, relatives gathered at a family member’s home, with Ysyf’s mother and grandmother leading the lamentations until Istir arrived. Sona, a chubby woman, was dressed in black and held a large gold-framed picture of her son. Her face already scratched from mourning, she jumped up and down in the middle of the room, and

each time she hit the floor, she crossed her arms over her chest, striking her shoulders with her fists. She repeated the words “my son, my brother” (*Xələfma* . . . *Birorma*, Judeo-Tat). Sona jumped up and then fell to the ground, face-down, wailing. Several young women rushed to her, helped her up, and gave her some water. One of these women said that Sona “would not be able to stand it. She will kill herself.”

Later that day, I asked Tova why Sona would be calling for her brother as well as her son. Tova replied that Sona’s brother, like her son, had died in Moscow while on a business trip, tragically run over by a car. It seemed that Sona used the forum of the lament to address her grievances. She protested the loss of both men and the new economic realities of life in the Caucasus that leads many Mountain Jewish men to leave their families behind to make money abroad. Her female relatives sympathized with her dire situation as they conceptualized death as an escape from such pain, even though suicide is usually not advisable. The emotional performances of the women reverberated with the testimony of Shulamit, a middle-aged Mountain Jewish woman, who told me how bored she was in the village, stuck at home with her children while her husband worked in Moscow. When I asked her why she did not try to change her situation, she said, resignedly, “Well, we are used to it. We must be patient. You are probably used to going here and there, but we are not.”

“Why?”

“Because men can do everything but women cannot.” Looking around her modern and spacious kitchen, Shulamit asked rhetorically, “What do we need all of this money for?” She said she would rather have her husband at home than making money for the family.

The Mountain Jewish migration experience is also reflected in how Mountain Jews see Judeo-Tat as primarily an oral language suited for fleeting and time-bound encounters in the home and in rituals. Therefore, although mourning songs are in Judeo-Tat, the gravestones in the village are marked mostly in either Russian or Hebrew. Similarly, when asked if she would help me transliterate my tape of her lamentations, Istir hesitated, saying, “Words follow words; the words come themselves.” She implied that it was hard for her to remember what she said, and she thus could not (and would not) repeat it (and not even listen to it on tape). “I do not compose [the lament] ahead of time. I just look at the person, and the words come.” Tyrynç similarly voiced the notion that words come to *girjəsox* as inspirations when she commented, “At the *girjə*, whoever you see, that is the person upon whom you compose [the mourning song].” Accordingly, although Mountain Jews encouraged me to tape and photograph the ritual, they did not want me to replay laments in their own houses after the ritual because grief has its time and place. Experiencing such sadness a second time would be too much for them to bear outside the ritual

framework of the funeral. Luba warned me never to bring such recordings into the home of a woman age 50 or over. It would be as if I were “hitting her in the legs, cutting her down by bringing this tape into the house and asking her to listen to it.”³⁵

Limited resistance in lamentation and life

This time-bound nature of lamentation is one of the factors limiting the kinds of resistance women can accomplish within it. The story of Şuşan Agarunova, Tova’s mother, epitomizes this situation. She was concerned that, because both my parents were living at the time of my research, I was not in the proper position to fully engage in the mourning ritual. She informed me that because I had not yet experienced the loss of a loved one, I should not respond to the *girjəsox* when she addressed me. “You should do this,” she said, clasping her hands in front of her as she silently lowered her head. I then remembered that, when we visited the grave of her husband Benami during Suruni, Şuşan, unlike her in-laws gathered around her, did not cry. Instead, she sat on the ground next to his tomb, staring down at her hands in her lap: this was a clearly conceptualized challenge to lamentation protocol. The absence of any expression of sorrow initially surprised me because a wife, based on what others told me, should mourn her husband. Her inaction nonetheless seemed to match her unwillingness to talk about him at all.

Toward the end of my fieldwork, I met the extended members of the Agarunov family and heard of Benami’s previous marriage. While Benami was at work, his mother kicked out the first wife (and infant son) for failing to keep a clean house. Benami never saw them again. Family members persuaded him to remarry. He missed his first wife so much that he drank continuously and beat Şuşan in fits of drunken rage, ultimately dying of liver cancer. I wondered if Şuşan’s nonperformance of grief was her way of protesting his treatment of her all those years. I had seen her cry at her brother’s grave, which we also visited on Suruni. He had been murdered in Moscow while on a business trip. The absence of sorrow for her husband, therefore, did not signify a lack of knowledge about how to properly mourn the dead.

But this kind of dissent did not prompt Şuşan to resist other prevailing expectations of her as a Mountain Jewish woman. Her and her daughter’s reputations could be easily besmirched with no man to head the household. Şuşan tried even harder than most to show her status as a “clean” woman. Every day, she and her daughter made meals, scrubbed dishes, and swept the floors, as if a strict cleaning regime would announce to everyone that her family was in order. Relatives remarked that the only thing Şuşan did well was clean house.

Although Şuşan and Sona (who lost her son Ysyf) used ritual to voice their grievances with their life situations and,

more broadly, Mountain Jewish gender ideologies, their actions did not significantly change the death ritual, nor did they transform their positions in society. Couching their actions within the rubric of sorrow (*dərd*), they reaffirmed it as one of the defining aspects of their subjectivity. Şuşan buried herself in cleaning house while Sona's immobilizing grief easily played into the local notion that women are overly emotional. At times, however, women performed a gender identity that did not hinge on sorrow as a key experience. I saw instances of an emergence of a new womanhood based more on the satisfaction of the self rather than the fulfillment of kinship obligations. These transformations open up alternative possibilities for women and could perhaps weaken the tradition of lamentations by creating a generation of women who do not know how to perform them.

Marital love

Not one of the women I talked with ever mentioned the idea of adjusting *girjə* to better meet her own needs. Instead, some admitted their inability to perform laments and, perhaps, used this as an excuse to avoid participating in them. Such comments hint at the prospect of changing expectations among Mountain Jewish women. Luba mused that by the time she is 60, Mountain Jewish women will no longer perform *girjə*: "We do not know *girjə*, and I do not have the talent for it. I do not know how to start and how to end. It is a gift from the past. Young brides now do not know it because they live like aristocrats. They have servants, whereas before, brides did everything themselves at home." Luba explained how, in the past, the bride would get up at 6 a.m. to light a wick in a small cup of kerosene. Then she would use the dried cow dung patties gathered the day before to light the oven.

When she first arrived at her mother-in-law's, Luba shared chores with the wives of her husband's brothers. Their mother-in-law told them that she had brought them into her house to support her. Now that her mother-in-law has passed away, Luba has gained relatively more control over her own time, which she now spends looking after the needs of her children and her husband. The main activity of the day is preparing her husband's lunch. She explained that there are days her husband wants to "sleep" after he eats, and he has her come upstairs with him for that time. But she cannot stay longer than 20 minutes because she has to look after her children. "If I did not have the kids, I would lock up the house and stay there with him." She, like many other Mountain Jewish women, decided to have fewer children than the eight to ten so often seen a generation earlier. She maintained her appearance through cosmetics, frequent baths, and sexy clothes in the hopes that her husband would always return home for his meals. Many Mountain Jews told me that men have daily sexual needs that their wives must meet; otherwise, they assumed their husbands would have the right to

seek such satisfactions elsewhere. Emma, Luba's aunt, commented how wives in the past gave all of themselves to their housework. Emma recounted how she had to get water from the river to do laundry. She had no time to pamper herself and monitor her figure, whereas now, "Women put on powder and lotion."

Such conversations pointed to the tendency of some younger women, unlike the older generation, not to conceptualize their lives as centered on notions of respect (*hirmət*) for elders. Out of such reverence, a woman was first and foremost her mother-in-law's bride (*hərys*), responsible for keeping the household running smoothly. The new wife also honored her natal kin by maintaining a clean lifestyle. She spent most of her time around other women in her household rather than with her husband as a marital couple. Now, some younger women see the need to enhance the relationship with their husbands. Better economic circumstances allow women to buy nice clothes and makeup. Each household has a television, and the female relatives of my host family liked to watch soap operas depicting the steamy lifestyles of sexy women in Brazil and Mexico.³⁶ Fostering the feeling of "love" (*əşuq*), these young women signal a shift from dedicating their lives to creating a clean home and maintaining extended kinship obligations to looking after their own beauty first.

"We love God because our women are clean"

Performing *girjə* and keeping the house in good working order signify more than the choices of individual women; these actions are registered within larger fields of power. Therefore, although some women changed the way they feel about themselves and their families, I suspect in the end that mourning rituals will continue to play an important role in their lives in the near future because women's daily and ritual activities are easily caught up in the identity politics of the region. Even though some women might not know how to perform rituals, others will be there to lead them through the procedure. *Girjə* has evolved into an overtly political symbol of Mountain Jewish identity, strengthening the ritual's conservative power. I found it significant that Mountain Jewish men, rather than women, placed importance on *girjə* as their ethnic and religious "tradition." Whereas women offered such statements as "we keep the traditions because we do not know anything different here," men tended to tie women's obligations to larger issues of national pride. This reflects the greater frequency with which more men than women engage in local politics and take part in local and international conferences about preserving Mountain Jewish culture.

Dovid, the businessman I mentioned earlier, conceptualized death rites as a way to hold Mountain Jews together in the midst of their Muslim neighbors and a growing diaspora. Dovid told me that "women hold on to customs more

than men.” Because of this female commitment to custom, he continued, “we are proud of our rituals. . . . We remember [the dead] and upon that we support one another.” He went on to state that girjə is a “relic” from the past, a list of the names of people, “just like that in the Torah.” He confidently asserted that “the past of our fathers holds us together. It is like the root of a tree. . . . The truth about the past is remembered. Both good and bad are discussed.”

Similarly, the director of the local school mentioned that Krasnaia Sloboda’s cultural distinction continues to depend on Mountain Jews’ preservation of their rituals, including girjə, “without change.” Living “compact[ly]” and “close together” for so long has functioned to strengthen these rituals, as well as the sense of communal identity they continue to endow. Dovid finished his discussion of the importance of girjə by stating, “We have one love—and that is God. We love God because our women are clean.” This last statement neatly ties together women’s emotionality, daily housework, and bodily self-management with their obligations to lament the dead, maintain kinship obligations, and worship God. Accordingly, then, the continuing practice of mourning customs in Krasnaia Sloboda testifies to the uniqueness of Mountain Jews in the Caucasus and the world at large.

Conclusion

When first encountering the actions of Sona and Şusan during girjə, I wanted to laud them as incidents of resistance to patriarchy, a sign of women’s power to critique and, perhaps, transform, Mountain Jewish society. However, after seeing the hold that gender ideology has had on this community both within and beyond death rituals, I was forced to reevaluate the meaning of their actions. If it is surely the case that Mountain Jewish women have agency—“the capacity to reinterpret received gender models contextually” and to “act effectively on their lives” (Torab 1996:237)—then why do they insist on advocating those gender ideals that mark them as weaker (and more subordinate) to men?

Thinking through this question, I considered Deniz Kandiyoti’s notion that contestation and resistance are possible but always circumscribed by the limits of the “culturally conceivable” (1998:147). Following this line of thought, the only other female identity available to Mountain Jewish women beyond the kinship model is one based on the marital bond. The image of a womanhood centered in desire and love, rather than in obligation and respect, appears daily on television screens in the homes of Mountain Jewish families. And although Mountain Jewish women enjoyed discussing the skimpy outfits and sexual exploits of TV characters, debates about the value of looking after one’s self first always led to a reaffirmation of male power in the family. Now, instead of the mother-in-law (i.e., the husband’s extended kin) holding sway, it is the husband himself who influences his

wife’s behavior. She dresses sexy for him so that he will not leave her for another woman.

And, yet, although the existence of this new patriarchy might explain women’s continual subordination, it misses a key element: the powerful and pervasive role of sorrow in their lives. It became clear to me that to really comprehend the hold that gender ideology has on this Mountain Jewish community, it is essential to investigate the “cultural force of emotion” (Rosaldo 1989:2). It not only defines the parameters of the culturally conceivable, but in the end it also provides one of the only ways in which Mountain Jewish women can act effectively in their lives. Although head mourners like Istir implicitly acknowledge the artifice involved in the performance of grief when they talk about their skill at saying “beautiful words” to make women cry, the bruises that women inflict on themselves as they beat their arms and legs in anguish and the tears that “flow like rain” from their eyes provide “evidence” of the ultimate “truth” of a Mountain Jewish female subjectivity firmly located in patriarchal kinship obligations. And the blood they shed supports the “reality” of a Mountain Jewish culture rooted in village kinship obligations. The never-ending possibilities of death in the family trump the fleeting and flickering images of sexy females in faraway places. Death obligations additionally work against Soviet values of “internationalism” and “friendship among nations” by reaffirming women’s ties to their natal kin; this is especially the case for those who married non-Jews.³⁷ These “certainties” also surprised the anthropologist; I had to let go of my expectations so that I could follow the path of grief in my research and writing.

Although Mountain Jewish women at times adjust their mourning songs to address the new realities (and tragedies) of migration, these narratives of loss feed easily into standard gender norms that conceptualize women as more emotional and debilitated by sorrow and suffering than men. Male leaders of the community then use this problem of the growing diaspora as a way to reinforce the need for women to maintain personal cleanliness and to continue to engage in the “custom” of lamentation. This art, if done correctly, sanctions the sexual division of labor in Mountain Jewish families, the economic basis of the current cultural configuration. Ultimately, then, this study reveals how female lamentation in such a patriarchal society is a complex phenomenon in which innovation ironically leads to conservation. The bodies and memories of the dead will put pressure on women to continue performing girjə even if, for some, their words are muddled and their hearts are barren of the sorrow they are asked to bear.

Notes

Acknowledgments. Research for this article was funded by a Short-Term Research Grant from the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, a Junior Scholar Grant from the Hadassah-Brandeis Research Institute, and a Junior Leave and a

Glenn Grant from Washington and Lee University. There were many people who have helped me along the way. In Azerbaijan, thanks to Samira Karaeva, Bruce Grant, Liya Shamailova, the Nisanovs, Larisa Reikhrudel, Tailo Azeriaeva, Margo, and Rabbi Adam and Miriam Davidov. Shari Jacobson, Sarah Barrash Wilson, Eric Wilson, Kimberly Hart, Donald L. Donham, and Ken White read various drafts and provided keen insights. The comments I received from the three anonymous reviewers at *American Ethnologist* helped me explicate and refine my argument. Finally, a special thank you is reserved for Virginia Dominguez, who guided me through the writing process with precision and grace.

1. My being an Ashkenazic Jew gave villagers some sense of familiarity with me. In addition, being a woman afforded me the opportunity to do fieldwork on female laments.

2. Harvey Goldberg describes how the Kaddish became “the prayer appropriate to recalling parents and to mourning. It proclaims an acceptance of God’s will but also implies belief in His ultimate act of redemption” (2003:205).

3. Michael Zand categorizes these funeral songs, as well as lullabies (*nem-nenuy*), as the folklore genres in which women specialized, whereas men performed as professional storytellers who recited folktales, poems, and proverbs (2002:39).

4. Muslim Azerbaijanis also have female lamenters and the tradition of mourning songs (*dillär*). See Efendieva 2001, Pfluger-Schindlbeck 2000, and Yalçın-Heckmann 2005.

5. This gender distinction in religious obligations during burial and memorial rites is common in Judaism. Harvey Goldberg writes how during the medieval period, women were not allowed to hear a dying man confess, they had to follow behind the men in processions to the cemetery, and they could not recite the Kaddish. He comments, however, that “the fact that women in traditional Jewish societies did not participate in memorial rituals in the same manner as men did not mean that this was a sphere closed to them” (Goldberg 2003:213). Their long life expectancy “creates a natural situation for them to be concerned with matters connected to the end of life in their later years” (Goldberg 2003:213). For Russian-language ethnography of mourning among Mountain Jewish women, as well as their other religious rituals, see Ilya Anisimov 1888; Goluboff 2004; Liya Mikdash-Shamailov 2002a, 2002b, 2002c; Yurii Murzakhanov 1994a, 1994b; and Liya Agarunova Shamailova 2004.

6. Wierzbicka writes that grief, like other human emotions, is “also a matter of interpretation and belief” (2004:596).

7. See, for example, Sascha Goluboff 2003, Vieda Skultans 1997, Greta Lynn Uehling 2004, and Catherine Wanner 1998.

8. In leaving room for Mountain Jewish women to interpret the mourning ritual, I write from the stance that Mountain Jewish women do have agency. In other words, they “are not predetermined by structure but have the capacity to act effectively on their lives,” and in so doing, they have “the capacity to reinterpret received gender models contextually” (Torab 1996:237). Such a standpoint corresponds with recent ethnographic scholarship on Jewish women that conceptualizes them as playing powerful roles in everyday Judaism (Sacks 1995:67).

9. See the following for more details about this approach: Saba Mahmood 2001, Chandra Mohanty 1991, Marilyn Strathern 1988.

10. As Deniz Kandiyoti writes, contestation and resistance are possible but always circumscribed by the limits of the “culturally conceivable” (1998:147).

11. Thanks to two of the reviewers who challenged me to clarify possible problematics with my argument.

12. For information on how Mountain Jewish communities abroad and on the Internet have transformed the mourning process, see Goluboff in press.

13. Judeo-Persian is the common name for literary and spoken forms of Jewish Iranian language varieties. Dan Shapira notes that

“there has never been a variety of spoken JP [Judeo-Persian] common to all Persian Jews. The Jews spoke their own dialect, with some ‘Jewish’ traits, just as their Muslim, Christian, or Zoroastrian neighbors spoke basically the same dialect, with their own communal, professional, or caste-based traits. These dialects varied from area to area” (2003). Judeo-Tat is similar to the Judeo-Tadzhik or Judeo-Bukharan spoken by Jews who have lived in the Central Asian part of the former Soviet Union. In writing down Judeo-Tat terms, I use the spelling recommended by Ia. M. Agarunov and M. Ia. Agarunov 1997. Mountain Jews in Krasnaia Sloboda speak the “Kuba” dialect of Judeo-Tat. Although there are Judeo-Tat publications in Israel, the majority of Mountain Jews in the village see Judeo-Tat not as a written language but, rather, one to be spoken among themselves, particularly at home. I never heard them refer to their language as “Judeo-Tat,” nor reference its Persian origins. Instead, they talked of speaking “Jewish” (*çuhuri*), whereas their Azeri neighbors spoke “Muslim” (*musulmunđi*, the Judeo-Tat word for Azeri whose root is *musulmu*). Living in Azerbaijan, Mountain Jews have a good command of Azeri, but not all of them know Russian. Those Mountain Jews who have spent time in Israel can also speak Hebrew.

14. The origins of Mountain Jews are highly contested. Mountain Jewish oral history states that they are descended from Jews captured by the Assyrians in 721 B.C.E. and then by the Babylonians in 589 B.C.E. In the fifth century, these Jews moved to the Caucasus from Media (Persia) to escape persecution. Another theory states that the ancestors of Mountain Jews are the Khazars, a group of converts to Judaism who ruled over the areas of modern-day Azerbaijan and Dagestan from the mid-seventh century C.E. to the end of the tenth century C.E., when they were forced out by Muslim expansion. Finally, some researchers believe that the Mountain Jewish people emerged from a long period of cross-cultural interaction and intermarriage among the descendants of ancient Hebrews and local pagans who later converted to Islam. For more information on the debate about Mountain Jewish origins, see Koestler 1976, Ikhilov 1994, Murzakhanov 1994b, and Brook 2002.

15. Mordechai Altshuler places this date earlier: “there were certainly Jewish communities in the eastern Caucasus as early as the third century CE” (2002:17).

16. Current Mountain Jewish migration is part of a larger trend of temporary labor out-migration from the Caucasus. It has been estimated that 500,000 persons left Georgia and Azerbaijan in the 1990s. The Mountain Jewish case also fits the larger pattern in that migration flows from the southern Caucasus are predominantly male (Buckley 2005:28).

17. According to Jewish tradition, weddings are prohibited during seasons associated with tragedy such as the three weeks culminating in Tisha B’Av. Mountain Jews thus consider all three weeks to be a time of mourning. They plan their weddings to take place right after this time period.

18. Azerbaijan is also home to 4,300 Ashkenazic and 700 Georgian Jews. Mountain Jews make up about 0.14 percent of the population of Azerbaijan (Agarunov 2001). According to the World Fact Book of 2003, Azerbaijan had a population of 7,830,764 persons in 2003.

19. Shabbat is the Jewish day of rest that lasts from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown.

20. Men read the Kaddish every Shabbat at the deceased person’s house until the 30th day. At first the rabbi reads it, then the head of the family, then the next male head of household recites it for his dead, and so forth. Women told me that they could not touch this “card” (referring to the piece of paper on which the Kaddish is written) because to do so would be a sin. They explained that only fathers can touch it. However, women read “another Kaddish” when they light the candles on the holidays so that the house will have bread, money, and so forth.

21. The period of 30 days corresponds to Jewish law in which mourners may not shave or wear new clothing from the seventh to the 30th day (Werblowsky and Wigoder 1965:274). It is interesting to note that Muslim Azeris mark their mourning period with a gathering on the 40th day after death.

22. This injunction corresponds to Jewish law that states that the mourner "must refrain from participating in festive activity for a full twelve months" (Werblowsky and Wigoder 1965:274).

23. Many intellectual families of Mountain Jews warned me that if I met with any of the head lamenters, I would "not get anything out of it" because they are not "educated." Although assumed to be "illiterate" and ignorant of Russian, this was not always the case. The education of girjəsox ranged widely. Istir is a teacher at the local Russian-language school, whereas others received only elementary education in local Azeri-language schools. Girjəsox are not specifically recruited. Istir implied that women learn the profession by listening to their female relatives lead laments. She said that her eldest daughter knew how to do girjə, but since she moved to Israel, "I don't know if she does now or not. Of course they know. They hear me. I am sure that they more or less learned it." Each woman comes to the profession influenced by her own particular experiences, knowledge of local family histories and religious rituals, and talent for oratory. Some women see being a girjəsox as their job, whereas others refer to it as their "hobby" and engage in it in addition to another line of work. Paying the girjəsox for her services depends on the family's income and the number of women present at the ritual. For example, if there were a room full of 60 people, the head lamenter would have to address each one and, thus, be paid accordingly. The girjəsox do not name a sum. Instead, mourning families pay her \$150 to \$200. Well-off households could afford to hire Istir. Poorer families, however, relied on the services of Asnat, the oldest head lamenter in the village, who slurred her words (because of her lack of teeth) and performed without Istir's fiery passion.

24. Agarunov and Agarunov's *Tatsko (Evreisko)-Russkii Slovar'* defines *dərd* as "gore, skorb', kruchina" (1997).

25. There is a wrong way and right way to cry, according to Istir. Perhaps because of a sense of competition with other head lamenters, Istir accused some of being fakes, "pretending" to have grief. She told me: "Those who know it [*dərd*], have it. Those who do not know it are like cows. There are women—I have seen them when I cry—I look around like this." She squinted her eyes a bit and looked from side to side, a move I saw her do during lamentation. She continued: "I see that they have not one tear. There are also two or three women who do girjə, but they do not have any tears because they do not cry in their souls. They cry like that—simply." She pretended to sniff and wiped her eyes. "They count up who died [who in the room has relatives who passed away]." She pretended she was looking around the room to see everyone in attendance. "They do not decorate their words, and therefore there are no tears."

26. Zand points out how funeral songs are known as *girye* in Azerbaijan and southern Dagestan and as *domoyos* in northern Dagestan and the northern Caucasus (Zand 2002:39).

27. I obtained contradictory statements as to what the women were actually saying during this refrain. Some of the women told me that the two sounds—"Voj" followed by "Noj"—are meaningless; others believed that they are the untranslatable expressions of despair. Istir instead highlighted how this chorus is a source of strength for her. The *Tatsko (Evreisko)-Russkii Slovar'* defines *Voj* as "ax! ox! yx! (*vyrazhenie boli, gorja*) [expressions of hurt and sorrow]."

28. Literally, "He never put his spine up against the wall of his house."

29. Mountain Jewish women told me that men in Krasnaia Sloboda rarely marry a woman with children from another marriage. Thus, if a woman decides to leave her husband, she must be

able to make it on her own, or move to the United States where she might be able to remarry.

30. For more on the ramifications of being unclean, see Goluboff n.d.

31. Despite the strong feeling among many Mountain Jews that wives should stay at home, several Mountain Jewish women did work in the local schools as teachers, and they credited the Soviet educational system and philosophy of equality in the workplace for their positions. In conversations with me and each other, however, these women supported the role of the husband as head of household and the need to keep girls at home.

32. For accounts of other gendered emotional discourses of grief and mourning, see Lila Abu-Lughod 1993, Lila Abu-Lughod and Catherine Lutz 1990, and Benedicte Grima 1992.

33. Wierzbicka here refers to a quote from Louise Maude and Alymer Maude's translation of Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1932).

34. Although the Soviet Union made schooling mandatory for girls, today Mountain Jews prefer not to send their daughters to school after the age of 16 for a number of reasons. Mountain Jews say there is no need for girls to continue in school because they do not need skills to work outside the home. In addition, the school system is short on funding and supplies, so parents must hire tutors to make sure their children pass exams, and not all parents are willing to spend such money on their daughters' education. And, although boys usually receive the equivalent of a high school education, they are encouraged to take up a career in trade to help male relatives as soon as they are able to do so. It is a mark of manhood to make a stable income, and securing work with family members allows Mountain Jewish men to earn enough money to support a wife and future children.

35. Interestingly, Leah hired a man to videotape her husband Merdechai's *cyb* at the graveyard where the women performed stylized laments around his gravestone. She told me that she wanted to play the tape for her children in New York who could not make it back to the village for the event. It seems, then, that this notion about the dangers of playing recorded mourning songs in the home is somewhat contested.

36. During my research stay in the summer of 2004, a favorite topic of conversation among the women of my extended host family was the Brazilian soap opera *Gypsy's Blood* that was dubbed into Russian.

37. Although Mountain Jews told me definitively that their women never marry Azeris, I did hear about particular intermarriages. I believe that the contradiction stems from Mountain Jews' wanting to portray a certain image of ethnic purity stemming from their drive to maintain their cultural heritage.

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accepted April 20, 2007

final version submitted August 27, 2007

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