

## Chapter 5

### Communities of Mourning: Mountain Jewish Laments in Azerbaijan and on the Internet

*Sascha Goluboff*

I cannot control myself,  
Without you, I will die, die!!  
My heart will break,  
Snap apart with force like a ring of gold,  
I do not know how I can exist,  
How I can ease this sorrow.  
I could not protect myself,  
Thus, I found a predilection for poetry.  
Oh, such a depressing poem,  
And yet, I need it so.<sup>1</sup>

In describing rituals of mourning in his natal Mountain Jewish village of Krasnaia Sloboda, Azerbaijan, Khananli Abramov writes that religious Jewish law considers the death of “close people”—“father and mother, brother and sister, son and daughter, husband and wife”—to be the most difficult to bear.<sup>2</sup> Abramov comments that Jews, and Mountain Jews in par-

ticular, experience this suffering with great difficulty because "for more than 2,000 years," Jews have undergone

undeserved humiliation and abuse—perpetually persecuted and victimized, despised and cursed by the peoples around them. In very difficult circumstances, they [the Jews] have earned enough means to feed their large families and watch their children grow up, all the while worrying about their fate. And of course, after all of that, the death of a close relative becomes too hard to bear.<sup>3</sup>

Abramov cites the above poem by Frida Iusufova as an example of this phenomenon: "Here is a Mountain Jewish woman who expresses her grief in poetry over the untimely passing of her beloved husband."<sup>4</sup> I consider Iusufova's Russian-language verse to be a literary form of the Mountain Jewish female lament, an oral tradition called *giriya* in Judeo-Tat, the language of the Mountain Jews. In Krasnaia Sloboda, Mountain Jewish men conduct burial rites and recite the Kaddish prayer for the dead. Women gather together to cry publicly for the deceased. Abramov writes how these *plakal'shchitsy* (crying women) remember their dearly departed loved ones:

They call out the name of the deceased, listing all their virtues and their thirst for life, and this calls forth hurt, regret and tears, accompanied with "cries from the soul" of all the women together—"hei voi azar"—which means "O, *goré*" [O, sorrow]. It is the duty of women to remember the good deeds of all the dead, as well as what they were unable to accomplish. And they even remember the harm that they incurred in their lives.<sup>5</sup>

According to Abramov, this lament is the focal point of the mourning process, and its text comes from, and responds to, the Jewish diaspora experience, as seen through the lens of Mountain Jewish history. Mountain Jews consider themselves to be descendants of the ten tribes exiled from the Kingdom of Israel,<sup>6</sup> and they have lived in the Caucasus since at least the fifth century BCE, where they experienced both friendly and violent interactions with local Muslim populations. Known as *gorskie evrei* in Russian

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and *yeludliar* in Azeri, they refer to themselves as *guhuro* (Jews) in their own language, a dialect of Judeo-Persian called Judeo-Tat. Many Mountain Jews now live in Israel, Russia, Europe, and the United States. The survival of Krasnaia Sloboda, which has a Jewish population of 3,600, is significant because 65 percent of Mountain Jews have emigrated from Azerbaijan, causing the dissolution of all other Jewish towns in the country.<sup>7</sup>

Mountain Jews in Krasnaia Sloboda exemplify religious Jewish traditions regarding death and burial that separate male and female activities. Men are responsible for fulfilling official duties that require a knowledge of religious Hebrew texts. Lamentation constitutes women's "little tradition" within and/or parallel to this "big tradition."<sup>8</sup> This gendered nature of religious practice is consistent with Douglas Roger's findings on Russian Old Believers, as presented in chapter 4 of this volume.

The way that Abramov conceptualizes Mountain Jewish mourning practices as intimately tied to losses incurred in the diaspora connects Mountain Jews with Jewish history. Khachig Tölölyan writes that life in the Jewish diaspora reverberates with a "note of lamentation" for loss of the homeland and the "precariousness of diasporan political and economic life."<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin note that Jews have undergone a "process of repeated removal and regrouping" and, as such, "Jewish culture has elaborated a range of absolutely indispensable technologies of cultural transformation (such as modeling of commemorative technologies for new collective losses, the way Lamentations mourns the loss of the Temple . . .)."<sup>10</sup> Such discourse constitutes a commentary about proper relations between self and society in the modern world.<sup>11</sup> Similar to what Mark Steinberg notes in his study of the moral poetics of proletarian writers in revolutionary Russia, ideas of suffering are "almost always tied up with notions of self and with the moral and spiritual meanings attached to varied self-concepts."<sup>12</sup> Mountain Jewish lamentations enact and explore local notions of moral behavior on the village and diasporic levels. In this chapter, I discuss how mourning practices among Mountain Jews signify at least two key scenarios: (1) membership of Mountain Jews within the Jewish people and (2) past, present, and possible future diasporic journeys of Mountain Jews that could destroy Jewish village life in the Caucasus.

In what follows, I explore how constant "tension between 'routes and roots'" via discourses of loss and suffering shape Mountain Jewish religious and ethnic identity today.<sup>13</sup> Drawing on Brian Keith Axel's understanding of diaspora as "a globally mobile category of identification that engenders forms of belonging that are both global in breadth and specifically localized

in practice."<sup>14</sup> I discuss two "sites" of mourning. Krasnaya Sloboda, the more "traditional" location of Mountain Jewish customs, is where I researched *girja*—female lamentations in the home and the graveyard—in 2003 and 2004. The Mountain Jewish Online Center ([www.juhuro.com](http://www.juhuro.com)), a Web site established in 2001, features articles memorializing certain Mountain Jewish individuals. I investigate how lamentations expressed in both spaces create Mountain Jewish community. And yet each site promotes different relationships between religion and culture. The development of alternate places of lamentation ultimately challenges gender expectations of emotionality and grief work, as well as the texts of mourning themselves.

### Sites and Agency

In investigating Mountain Jewish laments in the village and online, I take my lead from Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, who question the idea that "a culture" is naturally the property of a spatially localized people and that the way to study such a culture is to go 'there.'"<sup>15</sup> They suggest that instead of studying "pregiven cultural-territorial entities," we investigate "cultural territorializations . . . as complex and contingent results of ongoing historical and political processes."<sup>16</sup> Peter Metcalf proposes that we conceptualize fieldwork sites as "emergent cultural cohesions" that "are always partial and shifting," situated in transnational and global circumstances.<sup>17</sup> My starting point, then, is to consider how Mountain Jews "construct their own worlds in cultural terms" online and offline.<sup>18</sup> As Wilson and Peterson suggest, it is not useful to see "real" and "virtual" communities as completely different forms of social life; instead we can "investigate the continuum of communities, identities, and networks that exist—from the most cohesive to the most diffuse—regardless of the ways in which community members interact."<sup>19</sup>

In this chapter, I trace how people craft the worlds of Krasnaya Sloboda and the Mountain Jewish Online Center through obligations of death and mourning. Though Mountain Jews talk about the village as a place where they have developed and "preserved" their customs, they might now find different meanings in these practices due to the recent cyclical and sometimes permanent movement of villagers in search of better economic opportunities.<sup>20</sup> On the Jewish holiday Tisha B'Av (known locally as Suruni), Mountain Jews return to Krasnaya Sloboda to visit the graves of their ancestors in commemoration of the historical destruction of the First and Sec-

ond Temples in Jerusalem, thus fusing individual losses with national calamity.<sup>21</sup> Three weeks earlier, Mountain Jews visit the homes of relatives and/or friends in bereavement, and they take part in ceremonies held in honor of the dead. After Suruni, Mountain Jews attend a rush of weddings in the village.<sup>22</sup>

The Mountain Jewish Online Center, whose prose is mainly in Russian, is an example of an Internet group centered on an offline ethnic identity.<sup>23</sup> Vadim Alkhasov in the United States founded the Web site. Though Mountain Jews contribute to it from all over the world, the main participants are from the United States, Russia, Azerbaijan, and Israel. It features Mountain Jewish history, music, culture, and community news, including a photo gallery of family pictures. It also maintains information on Jewish holidays and wisdom from the Torah. A section called "*Aktual'no*" ("topics of an urgent and/or timely nature") honors the deceased. Mourning on the Internet, though referencing burials of certain people in particular cemeteries, has broken the tie between place and rite seen in the village. Like Iusufova's poem, articles posted online stand apart from events. However, the online nature of these *girja* compositions gives them repeated accessibility. I take these texts as new forms of lamentation that draw on, as well as go beyond, the major tropes and gendered emotionality found in village mourning.

By focusing on death and mourning as spurring individuals to engage in the world, I utilize a notion of agency that privileges pain "as an object of passion—but also of action."<sup>24</sup> As Jarret Zigon discusses in chapter 3 of this volume, religious sentiment formed through experiences of personal difficulty provide a firm foundation for a Russian Orthodox person's sense of appropriate moral practice. Similarly, Christian narratives of salvation through suffering guide foreign missionaries in their soup kitchen work in Russia, as how pain is a private experience and a public relationship. Talal Asad writes need to communicate their physical and emotional suffering. People have the to receive a response with appropriate cultural understanding and empathy. As such, pain is a social act. It produces and sustains human relationships. Because Asad is interested in how "certain traditions use pain to create a space for moral action that articulates this-world-in-the-next,"<sup>25</sup> he takes a social constructionist view of emotions as "pragmatic acts and communicative performances."<sup>26</sup> Like bodily pain, lamentations involve emotions that "are *felt* in bodily experience, not just known or thought or appraised."<sup>27</sup>

In applying Asad's notion of pain as agency to the Mountain Jewish context, I aim to explore the local "ethnopsychology" about how suffering

works on a person.<sup>28</sup> Lamentation, as a type of religious practice, shapes the emotional lives of individuals both on the ground and online. I discuss how Mountain Jewish women in the village labor to share their grief in laments “decorated” with tears and blood. They expect that others in the community will respond and feel similarly during the death rite. Online, *giva* compositions exist beyond the confines of ritual performance. In both cases, I investigate the relationships among the mourner, the form that her or his grieving takes, and its intended audience. I argue that women’s cries in the village and memorializing comments on the Web site are processes that create Mountain Jewish communities of suffering bound together morally through shared bereavement. These laments reference social injustice done in the past and call for the appropriate retribution. They outline the proper roles of men and women, as well as the appropriate kinship relationships.

However, because emotions, like any discursive practice, are social phenomena and, as such, have “multiple, shifting, and contested meanings,”<sup>29</sup> sorrow is ambiguous, opening up possibilities for individuals to find poetry within the grim finality of death. Through *giva*, individuals bring together past, present, and future by projecting their personal anguish onto the larger historical canvas of (Mountain) Jewish history. The rich symbolic terrain of sorrow provides mourners with resources to interpret their grief differently and perhaps act beyond cultural expectations.

### Krasnaia Sloboda

Krasnaia Sloboda (Red Settlement) was originally called Evreiskaia Sloboda (Jewish Settlement) and 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), gave Mountain Jews refuge there.<sup>30</sup> Mountain Jews settled according to their former residence patterns, naming neighborhoods after the villages they left behind in Persia and the Caucasus.<sup>31</sup> This kind of migration and expansion of the village continued until the mid-nineteenth century, and each neighborhood had its own synagogue and section in the cemetery.<sup>32</sup> In time, the village earned the nickname “Jerusalem of the Caucasus.”<sup>33</sup> Today, many Mountain Jews, under the leadership of the male heads of households, have migrated to other countries to expand business ties and earnings. They usually strive to

build and maintain homes in the village so that they can return there to live comfortably during Suruni and the rest of the summer.

Originally, Mountain Jews lived in *sakias*, two- or three-room structures made out of straw and clay and heated with cow dung. Before the Revolution, Mountain Jews in Kuba specialized in the rug trade and growing tobacco and rice.<sup>34</sup> In the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the village featured two-story brick buildings with shops on the first floor and residences on the second.<sup>35</sup> Although some of these buildings remain, the majority have been razed to make way for luxury three- to five-story homes that accommodate families in the summer months. The collapse of the Soviet Union gave Mountain Jews numerable commerce opportunities that have dramatically affected the look of the village. Constant construction of new homes engenders feelings of inequality among some Mountain Jews who cannot afford such renovations.

Mountain Jews typically live in extended patrilocal families. Wives are usually under the watchful gaze of their mothers-in-law. The situation of two brothers and their brides living together occurs so regularly that there is a special term for it: *hamboji*. Mountain Jewish women know how to keep kosher food restrictions on holidays and how to light candles on Shabbat (the Jewish day of rest from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown).

Mountain Jews in Krasnaia Sloboda speak the “Kuba” dialect of Judeo-Tat. Although there are some Judeo-Tat publications in Israel, most Mountain Jews in the village conceptualize Judeo-Tat as an oral rather than written language that they speak among themselves, particularly at home.<sup>36</sup> Besides comments from local intellectuals, most Mountain Jews with whom I spoke did not refer to their language as “Judeo-Tat” nor reference its Persian origins. Instead, they said that they spoke “*gihuri*” (“Jewish”), whereas their Azeri neighbors spoke “*musulmanai*” (the Judeo-Tat word for Azeri whose root is *muslimu*, Muslim). Living in Azerbaijan, Mountain Jews have good command of Azeri, but not all of them know Russian.<sup>37</sup> Those Mountain Jews who lived in Israel can speak Hebrew.

### Grief Work in the Village

Early in my summer fieldwork in 2004, I attended a *cyla* (Judeo-Tat) in honor of a middle-aged man named Merdechai. It was the ritual marking the fortieth day after his death.<sup>38</sup> He had immigrated to New York City with

his wife and ten children years ago, but when he was diagnosed with terminal cancer, he decided to return to his natal village to be close to his parents' graves. His wife Leah pleaded with him not to go because he was too ill to travel, but he insisted. At the airport, she sat on the floor, weeping over his imminent departure. During his layover in Moscow, Merdechai died. I met Leah at his *cyla*, and she told me this story during the afternoon meal following several hours of women's lamentations and a visit to his grave.

Earlier that morning, Leah and at least fifty other Mountain Jewish women sat on the floor of a tiny back room in Merdechai's relative's house. I managed to squeeze myself into the last remaining space near the door. We sat listening to Istir, the paid head female mourner, who stood in the middle of the room. She was tall and in her early sixties. Wrapped in a large black shawl and wearing a heavy gold necklace, she radiated commanding presence and force. Tears rolling down her cheeks, she addressed individual women in the room with graceful precision, and each woman to whom she spoke sobbed inconsolably in response, rhythmically beating her upper thighs with open palms. After several hours of lamentation, Istir led the women to board buses to see Merdechai's new gravestone at the cemetery on the hill overlooking the village. Made out of shiny black marble and over six feet tall, it featured a life-sized carved picture of his face at the top, with the Star of David and the dates of his birth and death underneath.

After we returned to the house of mourning for the afternoon meal, I introduced myself to Istir. I asked her, "How do you do it? How do you make the women cry?" She told me that she retells each woman's family history, causing her to weep for dead relatives, and, in turn, for Merdechai. Istir is able to lead the women in this ritual because, she explained, "I have had much sorrow in my life. I [no longer] have a sister, father, mother." Istir used the Judeo-Tat term "*dard*" to refer to her "sorrow." *Dard* 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."<sup>39</sup> This notion of sorrow as ongoing shows the links between individual losses and Mountain Jewish displacement; an individual's anguish also expresses collective losses incurred in the past and perhaps in the future. The source of a head mourner's skill is her sorrow, and sorrow should be expressed during the death ritual.

When I pressed Istir further for the reasons why Mountain Jewish women must wait for the dead, she stated matter-of-factly: "Tears bejewel a funeral like dances decorate a wedding."<sup>40</sup> Crying is thus the most appropriate and beautiful response. Mountain Jews believe that to cry for the dead and re-

count their conduct and accomplishments in life (*oplatkiv' pokoinogo*, Russian) achieves two tasks. First, it shows respect (*byrnat*, Judeo-Tat) for the deceased and their bereaved relatives. Second, it calms the relatives, allowing their souls to feel lighter. Mountain Jewish women repeated to me that they cry at funerals because, ultimately, "It is our law—a person dies, that means that we have to cry." In addition, when I asked the eighty-year-old patriarch of the Abramov family, "What would happen if the relatives did not cry for the dead?" he at first continued to explain 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 thirty days to cry."

When in Krasnaia Sloboda, Mountain Jews see their religious responsibilities as interwoven with ethnic identity. They do not talk about how what they do relates to Judaism. Instead, they assume that it does so naturally. In their way of thinking, they subscribe to Jewish religious obligations because they are Mountain Jews. Their religious duties, as designated by gender, are essential to what defines them as a people who are different from their Muslim Azeri neighbors. Correspondingly, then, Mountain Jewish women thus have a moral responsibility to cry at funerals. And Mountain Jews see this responsibility as stemming from the essence of femininity. Mountain Jews thus talk as if women have a natural capacity for emotionality, especially sorrow, and that this feeling of grief effortlessly leads to tears, thus making women suitable for the art of lamentation.<sup>41</sup> In an interview with other members of the Abramov family, the wife (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." 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, Istir assured me that men do cry but only for extremely close relatives. Tying, another head lamenter (*girjasox*) in her sixties, explained that during the *girja*, 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 men weep when they overhear her lamentations. I myself saw them crying silently at the graves of their close relatives during Surni.

And yet, local terminology for mourning reveals the hard work needed to make women cry. *Girja* exemplifies what Tambiah calls the "disciplined rehearsal of right attitudes."<sup>42</sup> In the Kuba dialect of Judeo-Tat, the word

*grija* refers to the lamentation song itself; it also means the communal act of crying for the dead in which all women in attendance participate. Mountain Jews call the head mourner a *grijašov* ("the one who makes the crying" or "the one who creates the mourning song"). She produces "a sense of heightened and intensified and fused communication" through the specific structure of the lament experience.<sup>43</sup> Her words and movements bring individual mourners to tears and then fuse their sorrow into a collective experience of grief that is suitable for the occasion.

Isir followed the same formula for each *grija*. She said the name of the deceased, extolled his or her good characteristics, and reviewed the causes of death. This last part, sometimes describing failures of the deceased or his or her relatives, should elicit sorrowful cries of regret and longing from female family members. This is why the best *grijašov* know everything about everyone in the village. To seal the community of suffering, the head lamenter ends each story by leading all the women in wailing sounds of "Vo!" and "No!"<sup>44</sup> Isir explained, "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, she carries a heavy load, and this chorus gives her the power to continue the ritual.

The *grija* viscerally connects mourners. Only those who have lost someone particularly close to them (like their parents) can attend the ceremony, because the participation of people who have not experienced such grief might offend living relatives. So women who enter the room already bear difficult losses. Usually, they are married with children, and they are either relatives of the deceased (via extended kin networks accounted from both the mother's and father's sides) or neighbors and friends of those in mourning.

A good example of how *grija* works is the *sól* (Judeo-Tat) I attended for Zakhar, a seventy-year-old Mountain Jewish man, who had died one year earlier. Isir talked with his widow about how she looked after him in his last days. Isir recreated the scenario, saying, "You prepared a special meal for him, but there were no results." Isir 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." Isir turned to another widow, detailing how her husband became terminally ill after he built their house: "He could not feed or raise his children. . . . He built his own house, but he never sat in it." Isir then led all the women in a chorus of wailing. They slapped their thighs and hit their cheeks. Isir worked hard to point out the similarities of the two widow's fates—both had husbands who died before they could finish their fatherly duties. She transformed their personal sorrow into a statement of

communal suffering, for it is extremely difficult for a mother and her children to live without a male provider.<sup>45</sup>

In instances like this, Isir reinforced notions of proper male and female behavior by citing the tragedy that comes when such goals are not reached. The sorrow women expressed at this moment with Isir showed that they were "with her," agreeing with her reading of events. In both nonritual and ritual contexts, 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 needed to 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 gave me this as advice, believing that such conduct always leads to a successful marriage.

Both Dovid and Hannah said that a woman who has a job outside the home is "unclean." Many Mountain Jews say that support a man's right to throw his wife out on the street if she does not take care of herself by either literally "letting her appearance go" or by engaging in suspicious acts like walking alone in public or cavorting with men who are not her relatives. Thus, to recall a deceased female relative as "pure"—"tovrov" (Judeo-Tat) or "tamiz" (Judeo-Tat)—in a lament means that she kept a virtuous household in terms of her and her children's activities.<sup>46</sup> Women know that their deeds will be evaluated after their death. For example, a common phrase uttered by *grijašov* to a woman suffering the loss of her aunt is "*Qodoj xolay tovrovini iasimame?*" (We remember your clean aunt). Such sentiments are also found on gravestones. In a walk through the graveyard, I came upon an epitaph that read:

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

By extolling the virtues of proper motherhood, death rites make clear the moral obligations of women and men in Mountain Jewish society.

In exploring the notion of sorrow more deeply with Tyrynç, she said: "Those who do not have *dard* cannot cry. The words of the *grijašov* work only on those who no longer have brothers, sisters, and parents." For ex-

ample, Isfir told me that when she laments a woman's deceased brother, she begins with the phrase "*Qodoj biror tasinama*" (Judeo-Tat). She explained: "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 tasinama* as "I remember your brother [*biror*] in my heart [*tasinama*]." The woman addressed then quietly murmurs "*tasinama*" (meaning, "I remember him/her in my heart") back to Isfir. Luba, a Mountain Jewish woman in her midthirties, said this part of the ritual is "like a thank you" to the *gijaxox* for the "kind words she said about your deceased relatives."

The word *tasinama* refers to the heart, soul, or chest. This concept is poignantly performed during the first days of mourning when women beat and scratch their chests out of anguish—an example of the way emotions are experienced and portrayed through the body. Similarly, following the etymology of the sentence further, the word *qodoj* implies that "your pain falls upon me," thus linking remembrance to suffering. Accordingly, Isfir told me that she begins each lament with 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." There is a Judeo-Tat saying for this concept, "*Dardjura vokurdə*" translates as "to talk with someone openly about your sorrow; to divide your sorrow with someone else."

The head lamenter aims to engage women in conversation (*dindymiş soxda*, Judeo-Tat) about their personal anguish. When I asked Tyrnynç how *dard* affects a person, she said it "beats down a person, both morally and spiritually." As a result, many women who suffer severely from grief are not able to lament properly. Older women who can "express themselves" (*vyškazat'sia*, Russian) and say "beautiful words" help those unable to grieve to release their sorrow through crying. Isfir boasted to me how "tears flow like rain" when she poetically elaborates mourners' losses. "I talk and then decorate [their suffering through beautiful words]. And because of that, they weep. 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." She continued, "You need to spread around the *dard* 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." Therefore, Mountain Jews use the phrase "*dard keşirə*" ("to hurt in one's soul") in the context of mourning.

The head lamenter brings women together in a community of suffering at that moment through painful remembrances of the ancestors. Women recall deeds of the deceased, fusing together living and dead. Later, in an interview, Luba echoed Isfir's comments: "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 women hear the words of the *gijaxox*. They cry because the *gijaxox* talks well, and it hurts."

To induce the expression of such pain, the head lamenter strives to make women relive difficult moments. She reenacts individual memories to make them collective. Such invocations sometimes reference local notions of social justice by detailing what happens when women do not fulfill kinship expectations. During one *gija* performance, Isfir spoke to two women in the room—Hovo and her daughter-in-law Sona. Isfir 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. Isfir reminded the women how Sona told Dina to wait until morning. But by then, Dina was dead from a heart attack. Her children found her lying face down on the living room floor. A year later, Sona's son Ysyf died of a drug overdose in Moscow, and his body was interred in Krasnaia Sloboda. Isfir looked at Hovo, commenting, "There was grief over the death of Dina, and that became grief over the death of Ysyf. From that grief came blood." Now laying her eyes upon Sona, Isfir said, "You brought blood. Blood flowed from that scratched place," referring to how close female relatives of the dead scratch their cheeks, chests, and arms with their nails. Both Sona and Hovo broke into loud sobs, striking themselves on their upper legs and chests out the anguish caused by remembering these painful events.

As a form of action, grief can be a vehicle for complex and, at times, contradictory experiences of catharsis and reproach. The religious practice of *gija* thus engages in a complex relationship with time. The head mourner strives to make women relive their sorrow to help them express, and thus resolve, their feelings of grief. In this scenario, grief is confined to the lamentation; this emotion has a beginning and end.

For example, when I asked if she would help me transcribe my tape of her lamentations, Isfir 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 (nor listen to it on

tape). "I do not compose [the lament] ahead of time. I just look at the person, and the words come." Trynyn similarly voiced the notion that words come to *girjasev* as inspirations when she commented, "At the *girja*, 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 homes because grief has its time and place. They insisted that women should express their sorrow only within the context of the mourning ritual. Otherwise, their grief might consume them. Luba warned me never to bring such recordings into the house of a woman age fifty 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."<sup>47</sup>

And yet, constant reinocations of difficult memories at each mourning ritual impress upon participants the permanence of their grief. They must relive their own losses again and again to lend support to their kin. Experiences of grief always reinforce the tragic history and contemporary realities of the (Mountain) Jewish diaspora. Grief thus seems to be eternal, as lamentations take place many times throughout the year. Feelings of bereavement, just like the Jewish religious holidays, occur on a cyclical calendar. As the next section shows, colossal tombstones add force to the perpetual nature of grief.

### Coming Home to Bury and Mourn

Death brings Mountain Jews back to Krasnaia Sloboda. Three weeks before Suruni, Mountain Jewish women go from house to house to take part in *girja* for the recently deceased. On Suruni, individuals and whole families roam around the three cemeteries overlooking the village, searching for the graves of their kinsmen, and when they find them, women throw their hands up in distress and cry out the names of the deceased, bemoaning the circumstances of their deaths. Men sometimes lean against the cold marble stones, sobbing silently (figure 5.1).

The cemeteries in Krasnaia Sloboda resemble those in other Mountain Jewish villages in the Caucasus where Jews resided in quarters and buried their dead on adjacent hills.<sup>48</sup> The earliest tombstones in Krasnaia Sloboda date to 1807 and 1814, and these are carved from fieldstone, "about eighty centimeters high, with the inscription chiseled into the façade of the stone



Figure 5.1. A lead female mourner at the graveyard during Suruni. Photograph by Sascha Goluboff.

slab."<sup>49</sup> The end of the nineteenth century saw the appearance of sarcophagi and mausoleums made out of a single stone, and they featured the same kinds of Hebrew inscriptions about the deceased's characteristics and circumstances of death.<sup>50</sup> Today, the most popular stones are black marble slabs, at least six feet tall, featuring a carved picture of the deceased. Sometimes, they are made out of red marble or a combination of both materials. Inscriptions are in Russian, Hebrew, and (more rarely) Judeo-Tat.

On a tour of the cemetery in the summer of 2004, Moshe, one of the synagogue employees in Krasnaia Sloboda, pointed out graves marked by a metal Star of David on a tall pole. The names written with paint weathered away; these markers are testament to the time when the Mountain Jews were too poor to afford good tombstones. He commented that "no relatives [are] left here, or they would have redone it. Twenty years ago, many [Mountain Jews] were here." Until fifty years ago, there were no large black marble gravestones. Mountain Jews "were afraid to buy them because they might be arrested. If they did buy one, the government would ask them 'otkuda?'"

['from where did you get such money?'—Russian] and 'where do you work?'—they could spend up to seven years in jail. The same thing would happen to them if they bought a nice car. Now, no one asks."

Moshe commented on which young men buried here died from being sick, in a car crash, or a drug overdose. It seemed as if we were walking through a necropolis—rows upon rows of faces silently gazing upon us. According to Dovid, the businessman I quoted above, when a person dies in an accident, his gravestone has two pictures—his face on one side and a life-sized full body portrait on the other. For example, Moshe pointed out a red marble headstone featuring a life-sized portrait of a man wearing a Hawaiian shirt and khaki pants. Moshe explained that the man was playing poker in Moscow, lost \$15,000, refused to pay it back, and was shot. The young man buried next to him was a "*markoman*" ("druggie," Russian), and the man on the other side died of old age.

Clearly, then, the dead, like the living, make their journey back here. Instead of laying their loved one to rest in graveyards in the cities where they died, relatives sometimes decided to bring the corpse to Krasnaia Sloboda to be interred. This is what happened in the case of Ysyf (Sona's son) and Merdechai. Bringing the dead back makes the graveyard in Krasnaia Sloboda a locus of mourning, a focal point for family reunions on Surrini.

The tears and blood spilled by kinswomen out of grief stain their clothes and wet the earth. Tears and blood epitomize the complex and empowering role that women have in sustaining, defining, and defending their community.<sup>51</sup> As women cry and scratch themselves, they create a collectivity of suffering; for the death of one member causes mourning for the losses each woman has endured. The fate of one becomes the fate of the other. Relatives, families, and villagers are woven together in this way. Lamentation binds recently deceased kin with all the village ancestors.

On the day of Surrini in the summer of 2004, I took a cab with Šušan, her deceased husband's aunt Mozol, and other relatives up to the first graveyard. We made our way through crowds of mourners to three unmarked graves. Buried there were Benami (Šušan's husband and Mozol's nephew), Donil (Benami's father), and Milko (Benami's mother and Mozol's sister). We scattered red carnations on the mounds of earth while Mozol knelt down in front of one, putting her face in the dirt. Sitting back now, her face soiled and tear-stained, she composed her own lament:

Ai Mama, woe.

Ai Milko, [you died] with suffering . . . [and so did] Benami

I went with you [Milko] to the hospital  
I did not know that this hospital was where Aunt Frida was also sick and died.

Ai my mother, ai my aunt  
Ai my mother, ai my aunt.

Even though Mozol sat by the graves of her sister, brother-in-law, and nephew, she referenced her mother and her aunt, who had also suffered similarly. The pain of one was the other's hardship in these memorializing laments. Other women stopped by to touch the grave and kiss their hands out of respect for the dead. Some exchanged "*rasanani*" with Mozol as she sat keening, and she acknowledged their losses as well. Later, in a conversation with Mozol, she asked me if I had cried when I heard her mourning song. I said that I had. Ignoring my question as to how she learned how to perform *giri'a*, she boasted how "everyone came to me. Did you see that?" The cemetery on that day was a place of Mountain Jewish belonging and personal pride.

Taken in broader context, lamentation can also reference losses the village has faced due to outward migration. This community of pain is one that is set apart from, as well as intimately tied to, other places of Mountain Jewish life around the world. Though travel is an essential aspect of Mountain Jewish life today, it can come with a cost—namely, death abroad due to what some see as the temptations and dangerous lifestyles in foreign cities. The *giri'a* in this case can also be a form of dissent against the decisions men make for their families.<sup>52</sup>

During my first stay in the village, in February 2003, I went to the funeral of Sona's son Ysyf. Like many young Mountain Jewish men, he was sent to work in Moscow with his male kin. While there, he died of a drug overdose, and the family brought his body to Krasnaia Sloboda for burial. On the first day of mourning, his relatives gathered at home, and his mother and grandmother led the female lamentations until Isfir arrived. Dressed in black, Sona held a large framed picture of her son. Her face was scratched. 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 upper chest with her fists. She repeated the words "*Xajfna*, . . . *Biroma* [my son, my brother]."

At one point, Sona turned to me. Leaning down to see my face, she moaned, "He was beautiful, he was good." I responded, "Yes, he was beautiful." "He would give candy [to the children]." She looked into my eyes beseechingly. I started to cry. Sona jumped up and then fell to the ground,

face down, wailing. Several young women rushed to her. Helping her up, they gave her some water to drink. A woman next to me whispered that Sona "will not be able to stand it. She will kill herself."

Sona's brother died in a hit-and-run accident while doing business in Moscow. She linked the fate of both men in her lamentation. In using *girja* to protest the loss of both men, she inherently critiqued gender roles in the village, especially how many Mountain Jewish men leave their families behind to make money abroad. Her female relatives displayed their sympathy for her situation by referencing her intent to cure her pain via suicide, even though such actions are usually not advisable in local and Orthodox Jewish traditions.<sup>53</sup>

A year and a half later, during Suruni, some of Sona's female relatives and I paid a visit to Ysyf's grave. Sona and her female kin gathered around his life-sized portrait. Sona prostrated herself on the ground, throwing her arms out toward his image above her. Female mourners bemoaned how he died before getting married. Relatives told me that Sona cried so much over the last year that she damaged her eyesight.

Mourning rituals in the village shape notions of appropriate female behavior and emotionality. Lamentations solidify kinship through sympathetic connections among women in the face of a growing Mountain Jewish diaspora. Even though Sona challenged gender ideology to voice concerns that went against cultural expectations, her emotional outbursts ultimately reinforced mourning as a female activity.<sup>54</sup> However, the mourning texts on the Internet contest the "natural" linkage among women, death rites, and lamentation seen so clearly in village life. Because the Internet is partially removed from everyday sociality, the online setting provides the possibility for Mountain Jews to question cultural expectations in a way not possible in the village.

### *Girja* Compositions

Mourning in Krasnaia Sloboda situates the text of lamentation squarely within its performance during death rites. However, it is possible to unlink the text from this time-bound ritual. Istir herself hinted at such an option when I met with her to discuss some questions I had after transcribing our first interview. She began our conversation by saying that the *girja* "is like a composition. Something you ask your students to write." I then asked, "Is it also like poetry?" "Yes, it is. Poetry can also be included."

Drawing on Istir's comments and the existence of lament poetry like Iusufova's, I now turn to what I call *girja* compositions—articles eulogizing Mountain Jews killed tragically. I focus on two cycles of lamentation posted on the Mountain Jewish Online Center—one for Zaur Gilalov, the president of the World Congress of Mountain Jews (known as the VKGE), who was murdered, and the other for Violeta Khizgiatova and Gena Isakov, who died in a suicide bombing in Israel. The shift from oral to written form reveals the strength and flexibility of the genre. Although they reference blood, tears, and shared fate, these texts could potentially transform *girja* and even Mountain Jewish identity itself. Though they log on to enact "core values, practices, and identities," Mountain Jews can also use the Internet to imagine new visions of themselves "as actors on ever more global stages."<sup>55</sup> This forging of ethnic and spiritual links beyond locality is similar to the Siberian-North American connections that Katherine Metzko found among Shamans in Buriatia in chapter 7 of this volume. In what follows, I discuss how online laments problematize a Mountain Jewish identity based on "natural" associations among ethnicity, gender, and religiosity found in the village.

### *Zaur Gilalov*

At the age of twenty-nine years, Gilalov was a successful young businessman who, like his father, supported Mountain Jewish cultural productions and social projects. He was planning to wed in April 2004, but he was shot and killed in March outside the Moscow store where he had ordered his wedding suit. This tragedy mirrored that of his father, who was murdered in Moscow seven years earlier. Both cases remain unsolved, and some believe that the murders were related to the men's business operations.<sup>56</sup> Although his father was buried in Krasnaia Sloboda, Zaur was interred in Moscow.

The article by Ol'ga Iusufova, titled "Two Similar Fates," recounts how Zaur's untimely death echoed that of her brother-in-law Yasha.<sup>57</sup> Iusufova writes,

I would not have written these lines if I had not seen the grief and horror in the eyes of my children upon hearing the news of Zaur's murder. —Mom, Zaur was killed like our beloved Yasha. He was so young! And maybe his young bride also waited for him on the eve of their wedding?

Iusufova draws on the connection between funerals and weddings that is extremely salient in village life. She continues by describing how she first

learned of Yasha's death when she was in Krasnaia Sloboda. On the first day of Passover (April 21, 1996), someone knocked on her door at six o'clock in the morning. It was one of Yasha's coworkers:

He looked me in the eyes and apologetically said:

—They killed Yasha.

In horror, all I could do was scream: "Oh, God!"

She then flashes forward to New York on March 5, 2004, the eve of the Jewish holiday Purim. She was at work at a local Russian-language newspaper when the telephone rang. It was her editor:

—Good morning. I am stopping by soon. They killed Zaur.

In horror, all I could do was scream: "Oh, God!"

I lost all sense of time, and subconsciously I drew a connection between what seemed to be the parallel nature of these two fates. And in that minute, it seemed to me that I was again hearing news about the death of Yasha.

Similar to *girya* in Krasnaia Sloboda, Iusufova tells how she first learned of the murders of Yasha and Zaur. She also recounts the tale from her own perspective. In so doing, she makes Zaur part of her kinship network. She binds the fates of two men—one who is family and the other whom she "saw only once." As such, her story moves readers to mourn with her:

It was in December, when he [Zaur] was visiting America. The Mountain Jewish synagogue threw open its doors wide for him. . . . He had a responsibility not only for his family and those close to him, but also for his people, for the masses. . . . For a very short period of time, he made a colossal contribution to the unification and prosperity of the Mountain Jewish people. . . . News about Zaur's murder passed through the Mountain Jewish community with lightening speed. People gathered at the synagogue to share this sorrow [*gorel*]. It was difficult to resign oneself to this bitter loss.

Zaur's passing brought together Mountain Jews in an international community of mourning. In Iusufova's narrative, the synagogue in New York became the site of a massive *girya*. She goes further in referencing this Mountain Jewish practice:

Svetlana Aranovna, who knew Zaur and his charitable work well, said with tears in her eyes: "What kind of hand [of fate] has fallen on him! He was like a bright spark that lit our world for a short time and then left us." These words cut into my soul. These were the same words that I said when Yasha was killed. . . . Years have passed, but I cannot shake with distance this hurt [*bol*]—the pain that comes from losing beloved and close people. This is like the eternal pain in the soul of a maddened mother. . . . But Zaur continues to live in the soul of each person. . . . And for a long time, his relatives and friends will dream of Zaur under the wedding canopy, like he wanted it to be.

Iusufova highlights how Zaur worked to forge a Mountain Jewish identity spanning beyond Krasnaia Sloboda. Similarly, his murder brought all Mountain Jewish communities together in mourning, making them aware of the space between them and the power of lamentation to unite them in one extended family.

The second essay dedicated to Zaur, titled "My God! Why Did You Abandon Me?" originally appeared in *Kavkazskaja gazeta* in Israel.<sup>58</sup> The author, Mozol Rafael', admits that she never knew Zaur. She heard about him through her father, who praised Zaur's good works. She dreamed of writing and publishing a prayer book in Judeo-Tat with Zaur's sponsorship. The article is structured like a long lament. Rafael' takes on the role of the *girysesox* by directly talking with the dead. She begins:

It is not possible to find words of consolation in these bitter and mournful days. We cry and grieve together with your loved ones, Zaur! . . . You wanted to be our protector, the leader of the Mountain Jewish people. Didn't you, Zaur? Forgive us for not having the strength to avenge your ruined life. Instead of the holiday of Purim, instead of a joyous wedding—there is bitterness from our loss, cries of "Voj," and tears in our eyes.

She goes on to ask: "For what reason will Jewish blood be spilled with impunity?" Like laments in Krasnaia Sloboda, she references the social injustice that accompanies the death of a loved one. However, in talking about only *his* blood, rather than including that spilled by his female relatives in grief, Rafael' conceptualizes Zaur as building a Mountain Jewish identity that goes beyond the limits of family and village life. Zaur's death brought Mountain Jews together in an international Jewish community claiming a significant place in the larger Jewish diaspora.

Writing about how she will grieve, Rafael reinforces the notion of the Mountain Jews as Jews: "Forgive us that on March 8, International Women's Day, your female relatives 'wail' from the bitterness of an irreplaceable loss. Forgive all of us that we could not come to say goodbye to you, to visit your house on that day and console your loved ones." Because she too could not pay her respects personally, she plans to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Jewish city of Tverin to visit the graves of "our forefathers": "On Friday, having lit the candles at the end of Shabbat, I will go to the grave of Rabbi Akiva and pray for you, Zaurchik!" Like Insufova, Rafael mourns the death of Zaur as a family member, even calling him by a loving nickname. But Rafael goes further, drawing a connection between mourning Zaur and creating an transnational Mountain Jewish community grounded in Judaism and Israeli national history. She locates a place of lamentation in Israel that she believes is similar to his grave in Moscow. She links Mountain Jews in Russia with those in Israel—equating Zaur's fate with that of famous Jewish ancestors in the national homeland.

Rafael continues to elaborate linkages among Mountain Jews, Jewish history, and Judaism by citing religious text, particularly the Megillah Ester and the Psalms of David to illustrate the pain Zaur's untimely death has caused his family and Mountain Jews worldwide. Rafael crosses gender boundaries of Orthodox Jewish religious obligation because only men are supposed to read written religious text in honor of the dead. This reformulation of gender-based mourning practices, as well as the alignment of Mountain Jews with mainstream Judaism, becomes even more evident in articles written by Robert Azar'ev about Violeta Khizgiiaeva and Gena Isakov.

### *Violeta Khizgiiaeva and Gena Isakov*

Violeta Khizgiiaeva and Gena Isakov, two Mountain Jews living in Khader, Israel, died when the bus they were riding exploded during a suicide bomb attack. Robert Azar'ev, a regular contributor to the Mountain Jewish Online Center and who lives in Brooklyn, wrote two articles about the incident. In "Forty Days of Eternity,"<sup>59</sup> Azar'ev describes how he traveled to Khader to participate in the "40th day anniversary" (i.e., *cy/b*) of the deaths of Khizgiiaeva and Isakov:

Everyone there talked about the tragedy, and those who took part in the burial . . . spoke as if their hearts would break. They talked about Violeta and Gena, about what they were unable to accomplish. They talked

about the shock, which affected everyone, of having committed their bodies to the earth. Fainting, sobs, prayers, curses—all of this combined into a long drawn-out agonizing wail—a wail of grief, of the pain of loss, and of helplessness.

Azar'ev notes how "the death of these innocent youth rocked the small Mountain Jewish community in Israel." The mourners considered it their duty during the forty days of mourning "to be close so as to lighten the sorrow of those present (as it is written in Jewish law)." Azar'ev too felt the need to go to the youths' graves "to pray for their souls, for all of us, since prayers at the graves of the pious go straight to G-d." He interprets these mourning practices to be in accord with Jewish law, rather than with Mountain Jewish "tradition."

While Azar'ev was at the graveyard, he used the Web site as a place to continue to grieve and work through his own feelings of loss and confusion. His written lament takes on a moral tone, pointing out injustices and calling for retribution:

Gena's mother does not see the point in living without her son . . . His fifteen-year-old sister bitterly laments that it would have been better if she were on that bus, for then he would be alive. When I think about all of this—I feel that I am slowly going insane. . . . Absurd. Life can be cut short at any moment at any place—perhaps on a bus, a hotel lobby, a discothèque, or a cafeteria of a university. That is the tragic, overwhelming understanding of ABSURD.

Unlike female mourners in Krasnaia Sloboda, Azar'ev formulates a relationship between individual deaths and Jewish national and religious sentiment. He writes how life "is the most important value. God has given us as a gift, and our commandment is to preserve it and cherish it." He makes a symbolic connection between the tears of Mountain Jews and the tears of the Jewish people while recounting his visit to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem where he asked God to help him understand the tragedies of this world. A man at the Wall gave Azar'ev a Bible that fell open to Samuel II, 1:14: "I grieve for you, my brother Jonathan." "These words answered like an echo in my soul: 'I grieve for you my brothers and sisters.' As long as the government of Israel delays in resolving the situation, our people will die and their blood will remain unavenged." Azar'ev clearly believes that Israel's future hangs on the fate of Gena and Violeta.

Violeta's death affected Azer'ev the most severely. In his article "Thinking Aloud in Regard to,"<sup>60</sup> he contemplates the horror of this "terror act" and how the death of Violeta, the beautiful twenty-year-old girl from his hometown of Derbent, has affected him personally. Taking on the role of the male mourner, he comments that after hearing the news of the incident, "I lifted my eyes to the heavens and whispered the words of a prayer." But then, switching gender roles, he admits that seeing photos of Violeta makes it

hard for me to write, my hand does not obey, as treacherous tears slide down my cheeks and a hard lump appears in my throat. . . . Our Jewish religion says that people's souls do not die, that they reside in what is called "the better world" where they see everything, that they spend time with us here, in the sinful world. I want to talk with Violeta, with her eternal soul. Maybe she can hear me. . . .

He continues:

I read that you tried to be strong and held back your tears after the death of your grandmother. So many times I have logged onto the Internet site Juhuro.com and seeing your smiling face, I cannot hold them [tears] back. It seems that I am not that strong, but for some reason I am not ashamed. They say that men do not cry, but burn [with the pain of grief]. I do not know what is happening to me, but I feel so terrible. No one will read the Kaddish for you, but I will pray for you, so that your soul will be lighter and more peaceful.

As in the case of Sona, tears can signal a challenge to ideology. Azar'ev admits that he cannot be as strong as Violeta once was in the face of death. He admires her fortitude and ability to transcend the norms of gendered mourning. It is as if he takes on the role of the male and female mourner at the same time by accepting his tears, as well as vowing to read the Kaddish for her. He ends his piece by promising that on his next trip to Israel, he will go to the graveyard to lay his hand upon the gravestone under which lies "the young Jewish heroine—Violeta Danilovna Khizgiyava."

### Conclusion

Mountain Jews construct a sense of themselves and their relation to the world through mourning practices. They use their experiences and dis-

courses of pain to make life meaningful. In the village, lamentation creates and reinforces local kinship relations, whereas online, kinship expands to include all Mountain Jews in an international community with the Jewish nation-state of Israel at its center.

Spilling blood and tears during *grija*, Mountain Jewish women in Krasnaya Sloboda take on the responsibility of creating and maintaining kinship relations that ultimately lead to the reinforcement of village ties in opposition to the increasing transnational character of Mountain Jewish life. Though the expression of female emotionality during laments reaffirms the notion that women are natural mourners, it also provides individual women with the ability to interpret sorrow on their own terms—giving them space to enact agency within proscribed gender ideologies. The performative aspect of *grija* limits the amount of grief women can express by making the genre itself extremely time bound and improvisatory, but women's sorrow easily slides into an expression of the eternal pain of the Jewish people and the Mountain Jews in particular.

Although they utilize village metaphors of blood, tears, and fate, online *grija* compositions transform the nature of lamentation and its intended outcome. Its written form challenges traditional notions of how and when to express grief. The textual nature of these laments could break the cyclical and ritual nature of mourning by crystallizing it in a format that grieving family members could read at any time. In addition, these *grija* compositions are written in Russian, signaling that Mountain Jews see themselves as part of the Russian Jewish diaspora. So, though authors write for Mountain Jews like themselves, their work is accessible to other kinds of people. This poses a question about the salience of Mountain Jewish metaphors embedded within the text, and, correspondingly, it throws into doubt the amount of empathy writers can expect from Internet readers.

Finally, these new laments create a space for men to mourn like women and *visa versa*. Though this forum might allow participants to use their sorrow to move beyond cultural expectations, it could also downplay the important role women have in making Mountain Jewish kinship. This is especially the case because these online articles conceptualize Mountain Jewish belonging beyond family and village life. Such a possible disempowerment of women mirrors the changes occurring in the Old Believer village of Sepych, as discussed by Douglas Rogers in chapter 4 of this volume.

Internet contributors think about Mountain Jewish identity on a larger scale. Consequently, online laments produce new connections between religion and Mountain Jewish culture that are not evident in the village.

Mountain Jews in Krasnaia Sloboda assume a natural affiliation between their traditions and Judaism. They talk about ethnic and religious identity as one and the same because they see themselves as Jews in relation to their Azeri (Muslim) neighbors. But on the international scene, Mountain Jews have to prove their religious heritage to other Jewish groups in the diaspora and Israel. Religion, not ethnicity, is key to proving their membership in the Jewish people. Perhaps this is why Internet authors feel the need to link up their own suffering with that of the Jewish people as a whole.<sup>61</sup>

What are the implications of a Mountain Jewish identity grounded in pain and suffering? It seems as though Mountain Jews will continue to use the genre of lamentation to deal with the dramas of living in a time of upheaval within and beyond the Caucasus. Though the Mountain Jewish Online Center offers other aspects of Mountain Jewish life—like weddings, music, and history—for Internet visitors to discover, death and burial continue to be an essential way that Mountain Jews represent themselves to themselves and others. Perhaps the need to mourn past losses in order to move forward will inspire Mountain Jews to shape meaningful lives that incorporate ever-expanding kinship networks and new places of belonging.

## Notes

1. Khananil Abramov, *Gorskie evrei kuby* (Khafra: N.p., 2003), 219–20. All translations from Russian and Judeo-Tat are my own.
2. Ibid., 218.
3. Ibid., 219.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., 223.
6. Mordechai Altschuler, "A History of the Mountain Jews," in *Mountain Jews: Customs and Daily Life in the Caucasus*, ed. Liya Mikhdash-Shamailov (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 2002), 17. For information on the contested history of Mountain Jews, see Sascha L. Goluboff, "Are They Jews or Asians? A Cautionary Tale about Mountain Jewish Ethnography," *Slavic Review* 63, no. 1 (2004): 113–40.
7. For more information on population figures, see Mikhail Agaranov, *Evreiskina obshchina Azerbaidzhana*, October 2001, [http://www.juhuro.com/pages/English/English\\_agaran.htm](http://www.juhuro.com/pages/English/English_agaran.htm).
8. Susan Starr Sered, *Women as Ritual Experts: The Religious Lives of Elderly Jewish Women in Jerusalem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 6. This gender distinction in religious obligations during burial and memorial rites is common in Judaism. See Harvey Goldberg, *Jewish Passages: Cycles of Jewish Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
9. Khachig Toledyan, "Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Movement," *Diaspora* 5, no. 1 (1996): 12.

10. Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora: Two Essays on the Relevance of Jewish Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 11.
11. For examples of how loss is central to the experience of modernity, see Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" in his *Collected Papers, Volume IV* (London: Hogarth Press Ltd and Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953); and Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).
12. Mark D. Steinberg, *Proletarian Imagination: Self, Morality, and the Sacred in Russia, 1910–1925* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002), 74.
13. André Levy, "Center and Diaspora: Jews in Late-Twentieth-Century Morocco," *City and Society* 13, no. 2 (2001): 249.
14. Brian Keith Axel, "The Context of Diaspora," *Cultural Anthropology* 19, no. 1 (2004): 46.
15. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, "Beyond 'Culture': Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference," *Cultural Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (1992): 3.
16. Ibid., 4.
17. Peter Metcalf, "Global Disjuncture and the 'Sites' of Anthropology," *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 2: 180, 168.
18. Metcalf, "Global Disjuncture," 167.
19. Samuel M. Wilson and Leighton C. Peterson, "The Anthropology of Online Communities," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31 (2002): 6.
20. For similar diaspora experiences in the post-Soviet context, see *Anthropology and Archaeology of Eurasia* 41, nos. 1 and 2 (2002).
21. R. I. Zvi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder, *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Religion* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1965), 273.
22. According to Jewish tradition, weddings are prohibited during seasons associated with tragedy like the three weeks culminating in Tisha B'Av. Mountain Jews consider all three weeks as a time of mourning, and their weddings take place right after Tisha B'Av.
23. Wilson and Peterson, "Anthropology of Online Communities," 6.
24. Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, and Modernity* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 79.
25. Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 91.
26. Catherine A. Lutz and Lila Abu-Lughod, eds., *Language and the Politics of Emotion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 11.
27. John Leavitt, "Meaning and Feeling in the Anthropology of Emotions," *American Ethnologist* 23, no. 3 (1996): 526.
28. Jane C. Wellenkamp, "Notions of Grief and Catharsis among the Toraja," *American Ethnologist* 15, no. 3: 486–500.
29. Lutz and Abu-Lughod, *Language and the Politics of Emotion*, 10–11.
30. Valery Dymshits, ed., *Gorskie evrei: Istoria, etnografiya, kulturna* (Moscow: DAAT, 1999), 43.
31. Boris Khaimovich, "The Characteristic Features of Caucasian Jewish Construction," in *Mountain Jews*, ed. Mikhdash-Shamailov, 65.
32. Khaimovich, "Characteristic Features," 65.
33. Altschuler, "History of the Mountain Jews," 18.
34. Liya Mikhdash-Shamailov, "Daily Life in the Caucasus," in *Mountain Jews*, ed. Mikhdash-Shamailov, 128.
35. Khaimovich, "Characteristic Features," 65.

36. I studied Judeo-Tat before entering the field from two sources—I. I. Framenev, *Tat* (Nal'chik: Nart, 1991) and Ia. M. Agarnunov and M. Ia. Agarnunov, *Tatisko* (*Evreisko*)—*Russkii Slovar'* (Moscow: Evreiskii Universitet v Moskve, 1997). In this chapter, I transliterate Judeo-Tat terms according to the style that the Agarnunovs recommend.
37. I conducted most of my interviews in Russian, because I am most proficient in that language. Local women helped me translate my tapes of Judeo-Tat laments. My training in Azeri helped me to follow conversations between Mountain Jews and their Azeri neighbors.
38. Officially, this ritual marks the fortieth day, but in practice, it marks the thirtieth day.
39. Anna Wierzbicka, "Emotion and Culture: Arguing with Martha Nussbaum," *Ethos* 31, no. 4 (2004): 581. Agarnunov and Agarnunov define *dard* as "gore, skorb', kruchina." *Gore* and *skorb'* mean sorrow and grief, while *kruchina* implies a note of anguish.
40. Mountain Jews connect funerals and weddings ritually and conceptually. Traditionally, a wedding march accompanies the bodies of unmarried youths to the graveyard. When a man dies at the age of eighty or older and all his children are living, relatives eat honey at the funeral so that he is buried "s *sladosti*" (with sweetness), because he has fulfilled his role in life as a father and provider. Before the bride enters her new home with her husband's kin, the groom's mother greets her with a plate of honey into which the bride dips her right hand. She then lets her mother-in-law and father-in-law "lick her honey-dipped hand, wiping the remainder on the doorknave in order to assure a sweet and prosperous life"; Mikdash-Shamailov, "Daily Life in the Caucasus," 102. Finally, weddings occur in the village right after Surumi, as people receive invitations after visiting the graveyard.
41. As an Ashkenazic Jewish woman, I was called upon to cry at these events.
42. Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Culture, Thought, and Social Action: An Anthropological Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 134.
43. *Ibid.*, 145.
44. Some women told me that "Voj" and "Noy" are meaningless sounds. Others said they are the untranslatable expressions of despair. Agarnunov and Agarnunov define *Voi* as "axi axi yxi" (*vyrzhenie boli, gor'da*) [expressions of hurt and sorrow]."
45. Mountain Jewish women reported that men in the village do not marry women with children from previous marriages. Thus, if a woman decides to leave her husband, she must be able survive on her own, return to her natal family, or move abroad to find a new husband.
46. Notions of purity and cleanliness reference the honor and shame complex at work in Mountain Jewish society. For more information on this issue, see Sascha L. Goluboff, "Wicked Women: Mountain Jewish Folklore, Gossip, and Female Agency," unpublished manuscript, 2007.
47. Leah had a video made of the *cyla* at the graveyard so that she could share the event with her children in New York. Therefore, not everyone agrees about the dangers of playing recorded mourning songs in the home.
48. Khaimovich, "Characteristic Features," 74.
49. *Ibid.*, 75.
50. *Ibid.*, 76.
51. The importance of Mountain Jewish women's ritual roles in defining community are similar to those of Russian peasant women, who, although subordinate to men,

were valued for their reproductive abilities and capacity to pass society's values on to their children. See Christine D. Worobec, "Death Ritual among Russian and Ukrainian Peasants: Linkages between the Living and the Dead," in *Cultures in Flux: Lower-Class Values, Practices and Resistance in Late Imperial Russia*, ed. Stephen P. Frank and Mark D. Steinberg (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 11–33.

52. Studies of funerary laments that empower women include Mary M. Crain, "Politics and Politics in the Ecuadorian Andes: Women's Narratives of Death and Devil Possession," *American Ethnologist* 18, no. 1 (February 1991): 67–89; C. Nadia Seremetakis, *The Last Word: Women, Death, and Divination in Inner Mant* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991); Mary Hegland, "Flagellation and Fundamentalism: (Trans)Forming Meaning, Identity, and Gender through Pakistani Women's Rituals of Mourning," *American Ethnologist* 25, no. 2 (1998): 240–66; and Ravina Agarwal, "At the Margins of Death: Ritual Space and the Politics of Location in an Indo-Himalayan Border Village," *American Ethnologist* 28, no. 3 (2001): 549–73.

53. For more information on the Jewish religious injunction against suicide, see Louis Rabinowitz, Haim Cohn, and Menachem Elion, "Suicide," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 19, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 295–97.

54. For more on how laments both constrain and empower Mountain Jewish women, see Sascha L. Goluboff, "Patriarchy through Lamentation in Azerbaijan," *American Ethnologist* 35, no. 1 (2008): 81–94.

55. Daniel Miller and Don Slater, *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 10, 19.

56. "Gilalov Shooting: 03/05/2004," <http://www.ncsj.org/AuxPages/030804Gilalov.shtml>.

57. See <http://www.juhuro.com/pages/zaungilalov03124.html>.

58. See [http://www.juhuro.com/pages/140304\\_xana.html](http://www.juhuro.com/pages/140304_xana.html).

59. See <http://www.juhuro.com/pages/9111/055.html>.

60. See <http://www.juhuro.com/pages/911/037.html>.

61. For parallels among Muslims online, see Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson, eds., *New Media in the Muslim World* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2003).