

## Chapter 1

### Vodka

‘Vodka is the drink of devils’

--Khevsur saying

Georgia’s northern border is formed by the high peaks of the Caucasus mountains, where can be found villages higher than any found in Europe. These mountainous regions of Georgia have become legendary amongst Georgians of the plains as being places of mystery and romance, a living museum, places where, it is said, ancient traditions of the Georgians, since lost in the plains, have long been preserved. Or so the story goes. In reality, the mountainous villages of Pshavi and Khevsureti (Pshav-Khevsureti for short) have participated fully in modern Georgian history, often fatefully. The highland region of Khevsureti, a center of Georgian national mythology, was entirely depopulated in the 1950s at the command of Stalin, the population entirely moved to the plains (Manning 2007b). The story I am telling in this chapter deals mostly with the period before these events, in a period in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when the contemporary lifestyle of the mountains was coming to be imagined by Georgian ethnographers as a still image of unchanging tradition in explicit opposition to the modernity of the plains, later becoming an officially sanctioned socialist image of the idealized national past. The ethnographers who diverted this local stream of mountaineer modernity into the pool of the national past were themselves often

modernized mountaineers (in particular Natela Baliauri and her husband Aleksi Ochiauri and their daughter, Tinatin Ochiauri; the Ochiauri family, which formed the center of an ethnographic circle working on mountain ethnography including Sergi Makalatia and Giorgi Tevdoradze, were brought into the Georgian academic world through the agency of linguist, folklorist, and co-founder of Tbilisi State University, Akaki Shanidze (Manning 2007b)). The intimacy of perspective of accounts from this ethnographic circle is what allows these accounts to see beyond the public, ritual life of the mountains, covered by earlier outsider ethnographers, into the intimate, private life of the mountains, allowing, Natela Baliauri, for example to fluently *imagine* typical flirtatious conversations that could not have been witnessed by anyone, let alone transcribed in the manner of a folkloric text (see Manning 2007b). In particular, these insider accounts give us a unique picture of local traditions of romance, traditions which are constituted by the parallel circulation of both vodka and poetry. The local economy of love is of a piece with the economy of poetry and of drink, constituting a minor, subaltern sphere of circulation in which the agents are girls, whose stolen vodka, love poems, and crushes forms a private sphere of circulation opposed to the indigenous public sphere mediated by beer and epic poetry in which older men represent the community as a whole.

As in the plains, in the mountains most rituals of daily life are attended by feasts accompanied by ritualized drinking, called *supras* (chapter 2). However, in the plains the ritual drink par excellence is wine (sometimes vodka), while beer (to be discussed in chapter 4) is an entirely profane, everyday drink, not suitable for ritual consumption at all. In the mountains of Pshav-Khevsureti, however, beer takes the pride of place as the sacred, ritual drink, and vodka is the everyday drink, though it too, has ritual contexts of

consumption. Because vodka takes on its values in relationship to beer, and the respective contexts of production, circulation and consumption of these drinks, ritual and non-ritual, to understand vodka we also need to understand beer.

Given that the Khevsurs say that ‘vodka is the drink of devils’, it would seem that they have a rather dim view of vodka. One might think that they consider it evil, to be avoided, much as when we speak of ‘the demon drink’, in reference to its destructive capabilities. For example, Khevsurs frequently blame vodka, in much the same way as they blame women, for the frequent fighting and dueling between young men that attends social events (Baliauri 1991: 127, for example). But Khevsurs do not shun vodka: any ritual that involves drinking (and most of them do) will involve large quantities of home brewed vodka as well as the ‘ritual’ drink, beer. Vodka is held in high esteem, and is respected, even in spite of its ‘demonic’ properties. As we will see in this chapter, the valuation of the opposition between beer and vodka reflects a rigidly dualistic cosmology in which gender oppositions are central. If beer is the drink of masculine shrine divinities (called ‘children of god’ *khvtisshvilebi*, these divinities, as well as their shrines, are also called *jvari* ‘crosses’ and *khati* ‘icons’, *jvar-khati*), the ritual drink used to mediate the relations between these divinities and humans, then vodka, in a sense, as the opposite of beer, must be ‘the drink of devils’.

Beer and vodka stand for, constitute, and mediate different kinds of social relations, different trajectories of social circulation. Beer stands for the idealized image of the community as a whole produced in rituals where beer is the primary drink, while vodka is the image of social relationships between individuals, such relations between hosts and guests, or between lovers. Beer is also the image of what one might think of an

indigenous public sphere of ritual activity, one in which the men of the community take on a kind of ‘representative publicness’, a part of the community representing (in ‘public’ contexts of ritual and battle) the whole community. By contrast, vodka is associated with private relations between individuals and families within the community. Beer is an image of the social, vodka of the sociable (compare Karp 1980:84 on beer as image of the social among the Iteso).

**Vodka, Poetry, Love.** Let’s return to the present day for a moment, to a well-populated mountain region nearby, to remind us that these traditions are living ones, and therefore, always changing. The Pankisi valley, a large wide valley adjacent to the dark, narrow gorges of Pshav-Khevsureti, is noted for its multi-ethnic complexity compared to other mountain regions, for here live both ethnic Georgians (Pshavians) as well as Ossetians, Tush, and Georgian-Chechens (Kisti). My expeditions to Pankisi were coloured and directed by a Georgian folklorist, Nugzar (not his real name), with whom I had been working for a number of years. For Nugzar, following a long line of folklorists, the defining characteristics of folkloric circulation of texts was that they had an **anonymous** and **collective author**, the **‘folk’**. The fact that many such texts have the authors’ name ‘built into’ the text (see below) does not prevent them from being ‘folk’, because there is an additional criterion: ‘folk’ texts are also **traditional** in the sense that they were circulated within a traditional form of public, the ‘folk’, who stand with respect to each folkloric text simultaneously as collective author and collective public and means of collective circulation, anonymously by word of mouth (**orally**) and over time handed down by tradition across generations (**traditionally**). Hence, folklore consists of texts

whose author is often anonymous and collective, ‘the folk’, but oral composition and transmission is probably more criterial (as Nugzar asks below, ‘who SAID this poem’, not, ‘who WROTE the poem’).

While our Pankisi Pshavian informants could remember a great deal about many rituals, many of which were still practiced, they seemed to be unable to remember many **texts:** poems, toasts, ritual expressions, a fact that Nugzar bemoaned each day as we discussed the day’s fieldwork in the evening over coffee and cigarettes. The problem, as Nugzar saw it, seemed to be literacy, oral transmission of texts had been replaced by written transmission. In the case of Pankisi, there is a high degree of ‘folk’ production and distribution of poetry in small notebooks, badly worn by being passed from hand to hand. As was the case with many traditional ‘oral’ poems of the Pshavs, ‘folk author’ of these poems was no longer anonymous or collective, but signed her (real) name, in this case, as Babulia Gakhuashvili, in ink on paper.

At his request for exemplars of folk poetry, Babulia brought out some tattered notebooks and put on some reading glasses. Nugzar looked at the piles of worn notebooks that Babulia brought out with obvious and undisguised disappointment, perhaps even dismay. Written poetry is not ‘folk’, he wanted recitations from memory. But perhaps, in these notebooks, was an authentic example of oral folk poetry, transcribed by the folk themselves. Indeed, when we asked for a specific sort of poem, namely an indigenous form of ‘love poem’, a poem celebrating a kind of Pshavian premarital relationship called *tsatsloba* (‘relationship between *tsatsalis*’ the latter term best being described for now as ‘boyfriend/girlfriend’, bearing in mind that this is a premarital relationship that by definition *does not* lead to marriage: it is not to be thought

of as a kind of premarital courtship), Babulia indicated that she had collected some traditional ones amid her own assorted poems. Nugzar perked up, and the conversation went like this (note by the way how he blames the prurient interest in this kind of love poetry, whose imagery is often quite frankly sexual, on the foreign fieldworker, that is to say, me):

B: Here, this one is about a *tsatsali*.

N: Well, well, we are really interested in *tsatsalis*, especially, Paul is interested; that's why he came all the way from America, that he could record that sort of thing.

B: (Recites the first poem in full)

N: Who said it?

B: What do I know?

N: It's folk?

B: It's folk.

...

N: What else (is there)?

B: One more, this one is also about *tsatsalis*.

N: Well, about *tsatsalis*, about *tsatsali*, and more, well, well!

B:

*ramdenjer araqit davitver,*

How many times did I get drunk on vodka,

*randenjer barbacid viare!*

How many times did I go along staggering,

*ramdenjer vic'evi c'ac'altan,*  
*mainc ver vushvele iarebs.*

How many times did I lie down with my *tsatsali*,  
But still I could not cure her pains.

*ramdenjer damive/ge logini,*  
*ramdenjer damxure sabani,*  
*ramdeni gapice, ara stkva,*  
*es chveni c'ac'lobis ambavi.*

How many times did you make a bed for me,  
How many times did you cover me with a blanket,  
How many times did I make you swear, not to tell  
This story of our *tsatsloba*.

*ramdenjer gavxseni sikindze,*  
*ramdenjer davitbe xelevi,*  
*ramdenjer davk'ocn, lamazo,*  
*eg sheni t'uchebi cxelevi.*

How many times did I open the *sikindze* (?)  
How many times did I warm my hands,  
How many times did I kiss, pretty one,  
Those hot lips of yours.

*damisxit, lotebo, araqi,*  
*araqidamisxit anc'lisa;*  
*dzvelia ch'eroxshi nanaxi,*  
*dzvelia, ar aris am c'lisa.*

Drunks! Pour me vodka,  
Pour me elderberry vodka,  
It is old, stored in the *cherkho* (second floor of house)<sup>1</sup>  
It is old, it isn't this year's [vintage].

*ch'irivit shemjavrda diaci,*  
*araqit datroba barbacit;*  
*kalao, ra uch'k'vo qopilxar,*

The woman began to hate me like a plague; (?)  
Drinking staggering with vodka;  
Woman, how stupid you were,

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<sup>1</sup> *Cherkho* is a Khevsur word for the first floor of the house, so it may be that this poem is mixed in heritage.

<i>pici rom gast'exe vazhk'acis...</i>	When you broke the oath of a lad...(?)
<i>pshavlebo, sheeshvit lotobas,</i>	Pshavians, stop being drunks!
<i>dedas git'ireben c'ac'lebi...</i>	<i>tsatsalis</i> will make your mother cry
<i>me k'i arc araqit davtvrebi</i>	But I will get drunk on vodka,
<i>da agharc c'ac'altan davc'vebi.</i>	and I will no longer lie down with a <i>tsatsali</i> .

N: Who said this one?

B: What do I know, some, these four [strophes], were written by me, and those two, earlier, are folk; four couplets are mine.

N: Ah, you also... Understood. That is, two strophes are yours?

B: Two strophes are folk, and these four strophes are mine, my own.

N: Four strophes are yours; your own, yes, in a folk style...

The first poem was fine, fully 'folk', but Nugzar can scarcely hide his disappointment that this second poem is a mixed, hybrid, poem, most of which 'belongs' (*sak'utari*) to a specific author and not the folk. Hoping perhaps to salvage some folkish authenticity for this poem, he concludes that the remainder, although 'her own' (*sak'utari*) is in a 'folk style', although she has insisted on the literariness of the poem by using the verb 'to write' of her own strophes, whereas he has insisted that the defining characteristic of a folk poem is that it is composed in speech ('who *said* this poem?').

I was interested in the poem for another reason entirely. Whether or not this hybrid poem truly counts as 'folklore', it makes considerable use of the motif of drinking

vodka as being synonymous with romance. In the poem, of mixed authorship (one notes that the poem's narrator is a man, but composed at least in part, by a woman), vodka appears first as a sign of *tsatsloba*, of a certain kind of pre-marital romantic relationship recognized in Pshavi (a similar one called *stsorproba* is recognized in Khevsureti) between boys and girls who, because of residence in the same village or membership in the same clan, cannot marry each other, but prior to marriage can form elective romantic relationships of variable commitment and duration (Tuite 2000, Manning 2007b). These relationships stand somewhere between consanguineal siblinghood and affinal marriage, so that the term 'brother-spouse' and 'sister-spouse' are sometimes used with respect to the partners, and are so strongly opposed to marriage that some researchers call the whole relationship 'anti-marriage' (Tuite 2000). These relationships are fully elective, and therefore betrayal of affection, jealousy, anger, pining, and loss are as much a part of these relations as happiness. In fact, since all such love must, by definition, be unrequited (that is, the lovers can never stay united), it is not surprising that these relations are the topic of an enormous cycle of indigenous poetry, and this poem is a rather late and mixed example of the 'love poem to a tsatsali'. Vodka appears, then, first as a sign of the fond memories of a certain kind of relationship which is initiated by drinking vodka together, and vodka too is the sign of the end of the relationship, of drinking to forget.

**Stolen vodka and stolen kisses: the economics of adolescent romance.** Vodka is a common motif in poems about these relationships. To be more precise, references to vodka are more typical of love poems among the neighboring Khevsur, where the equivalent pre-marital dalliance is called '*stsorproba*', meaning 'the relation between

*stsorperis* ('equal-color') that is, peers of similar dispositions. The relationship is also called by another name, 'sworn brotherhood' (*dzmobiloba*), with both partners in the relationship calling each other 'sworn brother' (*dzmobili*, the term 'sworn sister' *dobili*, is not used in the context of this relation for the girl partner). Sometimes the term is expanded to *sandauri dzmobili* 'desired sworn brother' is used, to distinguish the romantic version from another kind of non-romantic sworn siblinghood that occurs with same sex partners (Baliauri 1991: 8). In this normal, non-romantic, sworn siblinghood, the term *dzmobiloba* would denote a kind of artificial kinship between young men, the feminine equivalent being *dobiloba*, sworn sisterhood between girls. If cross-sex relationships are involved, or taken together, the whole set of artificial siblinghood relations are called *dobil-dzmobiloba* 'sworn sister-brotherhood' or 'sworn siblinghood' (Baliauri 1991: 8-9, Ochiauri 1980: 208). Like romantic versions of *dzmobiloba*, non-romantic sworn siblinghood (*dobil-dzmobiloba*) can also be an elective expression of closeness and friendship between two boys or two girls (or even a girl and a boy) who might, for example, be from different villages (Ochiauri 1980: 210-211). There are strategic uses of non-romantic sworn-siblinghood as well, each of which link this friendship to the romantic 'boyfriend-girlfriend' version (*stsorproba*, *sandauri dzmobiloba*). For example, the sworn sibling relationship can be forced upon two young men to reconcile them after a fight (Ochiauri 1980: 210-211, Baliauri 1991: 125), and whatever young men might say was the cause of the fight, jealousy and romantic competition relating to *stsorproba* often figures as a major (concealed) motive alongside simple drunkenness (Baliauri 1991: 126-7). In other cases, girls from different villages might become sworn siblings, or force their brothers to become sworn siblings with a

particular boy in another village, in order to provide excuses for visiting that village to facilitate *stsorproba* with that boy or another boy there (Ochiauri 1980: 210).

If practice places these two relationships that are both called ‘sworn brotherhood’ into a curious functional complementarity, Khevsur myths of the origins of *stsorproba* link them genealogically. According to the Khevusr myth, the cross-sex romantic dalliance of *dzmobiloba* grew out of functional necessity because of the constant danger of enemy attacks, which forced boys and girls to sleep in close proximity. As a result of the sexual dangers of this close physical proximity, such boys and girls, it is said, were made to swear oaths of siblinghood (Baliauri 1991: 8-9). The earliest accounts we have of the relationship in Pshavi, too, in the nineteenth century, define a girlfriend (*tsatsali*) as ‘sort of like a sworn sister’ ‘a pretend sworn sister’ (*vitom dobili*) differing from a true sworn sister in that she has an erotic function, and further imply that the relationship is formed ritually in an identical way in both sworn-siblinghood and romantic cases (by what is called ‘the oath of silver’, drinking vodka with silver flakes) (Droeba 1880, no. 102 page 3). Whether or not this is an outsider’s casual error, clearly, there was enough resemblance between the two for them to be mistaken for one another, down to the ritual of drinking vodka that creates the relations (I will return to this below). One might see here an explanation for the curious fact that in the cross-sex relationship both the boy and the girl call each other ‘sworn brother’, as if the romantic possibilities of the relationship were being erased by neutralizing the opposed genders of the partners, treating the girl, as well as the boy, as ‘brothers’.

Both kinds of relationship (boyfriend-girlfriend and sworn-brother-sister) share a feature other than using the same terminology in Khevsureti: Both kinds of relationship

are *initiated* by drinking vodka together, and in general vodka is the fuel of both relationship types throughout. In the constant visiting that characterizes both relationships, a *dzmobili* (the party in motion) ‘comes with vodka’ (*araqit misvla*) when visiting another *dzmobili*, whether the *dzmobili* is actually a girl visiting her lover with a bottle at night, secretly, or a boy visiting his sworn brother by day, openly (Ochiauri 1980: 208-211).<sup>2</sup>

Both relationships are marked by other gift exchanges between the partners, called *sadzmobilo/sadobilo* gifts (gifts for the *dzmobili/dobili*). In both romantic and non-romantic forms of *dzmobiloba*, the person that receives this gift of vodka (*sadzmobilo* or *sadobilo* vodka) from the visitor will respond with a *sadzmobilo* gift in turn, an object which is kept to remember the other, in the case of true sworn brothers, a copper pot, a short sword, or some weapon, given openly for all to see (Ochiauri 210: 210); in the case of a *dzmobili* girlfriend, in addition to saving him bottles of vodka, she will sew and embroider gifts for him (secretly, often when she is supposed to be working) in addition, and her *dzmobili* boyfriend will carve wooden objects for her own use, and give her silk scarves, silver rings, accordions. Unlike the other series of gifts for the non-romantic version of the relationship, which are given openly, all of these boyfriend-girlfriend *sadzmobilo* gifts are given indirectly, secretly, the girl giving the boy things by the hand of an ‘ambassador’ (the person who arranges romantic trysts), the boy through some relative (Baliauri 1991: 64-5). This is an important difference between the two forms of

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Coming with vodka’ is a kind of intimate gift when used between *dzmobilis*, the same act can occur between enemies, too, in which case the party who ‘comes with vodka’ is, in effect, abasing themselves before their enemy, begging forgiveness, rather than paying a hefty fine in cows.

*dzmobiloba*: the same sex relationship, we might say, is publicly recognized, the opposite sex relationship is secretive, furtive, private.

Returning to the poem, while the central role of vodka in particular seemed to point to a Khevsur folkloric source for the poem, at the same time, there are Pshavian elements in the poem. In the Pshavian poem above, the man comes to the woman at night (as indicated by the fact that she prepares the bed for him), which is the rule for *tsatsloba* relationships, whereas in the Khevsur tradition, the woman comes to the man. Another small difference is the role played by vodka. In the Pshavian tradition, the man comes to the woman empty handed, while in the Khevsur tradition, the woman comes to the man, always bringing (stolen) vodka with her:

*Stsorproba* begins this way: a woman goes with one bottle of vodka to like down with a boy, even if (tundac) they don't know each other close up (axlo) and only like each other from afar. First—kissing, lying in each others arms, hugging and caressing with great shyness and restraint happens, but later, when they little by little get to know one another, this hugging and kissing becomes freer (Tevdoradze 1930: 131).

The following Khevsur poem (Tevdoradze 1930: 139-40; the translation is adapted from Tuite 2000: 42) makes the role of vodka clear, but is one of many of its type:

...

When the dark of the night has come, a woman rejoices in her heart,

She longs to see her *dzmobili* [boyfriend], it would be hard to keep her away,

The lad as well, full of eagerness, cannot take time to eat his meal.  
He goes and readies the bed for her, lays the sheets, fluffs up the straw,  
Heart is working its magic on heart; at the same time, he is thinking  
“Could it be, she will not come, or that something has gone awry?”  
The woman approaches, with quiet steps, she draws not a rustle from the straw.  
In her hand she carries a bottle of vodka, stolen from her home.  
...

For Khevsur girls, stealing and saving vodka for the boyfriend is a sign of love, of pining, of marking time apart and expectation of time spent together in the future. As Barthes (1978) puts it: ‘The lover's fatal identity is precisely: I am the one who waits’, and for Khevsur girls, the measure of that wait is vodka. It is also part of a relationship of reciprocity, for the just as the woman saves for the man a stolen bottle of vodka, so the man will bring the woman ‘sadzmobilo’ gifts, as in this poem:

*sadzmobiloshi magartva, sam manaTian arghani,  
shenc shegenaxa botlai, araqiani, camcami,*

He brought you for your *sadzmobilo*, a three ruble music box,  
You in turn saved for him a bottle of sparkling [*camcami*] vodka. (Ochiauri 1980:  
125)

Such *sadzmobilo* gifts, gifts like silver rings, which are given by boys to girls and girls to boys, are kept as reminders of the relationship. The silver ring is worn publicly, but its significance is hidden. If asked, they will say the ring was a gift from a deceased relative and they keep it as a reminder. Other objects, woven or carved gifts especially, are also kept as durable reminders, in fact, carefully preserved to be carried to the grave.

Preserving the gift is a sign of devotion, giving it is a test: the boy takes a ring off his finger and gives it to the girl, saying “You will keep it, you know, you won’t keep it, you know”. Sometimes a boy will test a girl in a casual dalliance by offering her or asking from her a ring, to see if she will assent. If she gives such a ring, in a context where there is no trust, he might then give it to someone else, which would be insulting to her (Baliauri 1991: 123). Sometimes a boy will test a girl by making a secret mark on the ring, so he will recognize it if she gives it, in turn, to someone else. If he sees it on another’s hand, he will become angry, and sometimes challenge the other boy by throwing a cup of vodka or beer in his face, if they are at a drinking event. The ensuing fight will be brutal, but no one will know precisely why they are fighting. This is one of the many ways that men’s dueling is secretly fueled by romance. Sometimes they will be forcibly reconciled (somewhat ineffectively) by being forced to become sworn brothers (again, with vodka), but it will not be really resolved until the girl somehow gets the ring back from the other boy. Upon getting it back, the girl will smash the ring with a stone, wrap it in something, and send it back to the boy who gave it (Baliauri 1991: 67-9). The same scenario of a twice-given ring is possible for girls, too, but girls have fewer sanctions to ensure the return of the ring, but the situation may similarly degenerate into a

fist fight between the girls and threats directed at the boy, which, however, are not taken seriously by the boy (Baliauri 1991: 70).

Of all the gifts that mark this relationship, bottled vodka is the only one that only girls save for boys (Baliauri 1991: 65). The vodka that has been saved can be a haunting reminder of a future event of drinking together that never materialized, as in the following, the poem of a jilted lover, the vodka the girl saved for seven weeks will now be drunk with someone else, where they will drink toasts with that same vodka to the faithless one, until dawn. But the vodka here is poured for another girl, not a boy. Just as a ring, once given, can never be worn again by anyone else, but must be smashed with a rock, vodka saved by a girl for a boy cannot be consumed with another boy, the only way to get rid of it is to drink it with a girl (Baliauri 1991: 155 and below)

*rom mitxar, rad mamat'q'ue, shemavxq'vebodi stvelsao.*

*minai araq'iani malodins medga shensao.*

*gatavda shvid k'viraei, mardli gaeba q'elsao.*

*shevasmev melaniasa, sadghegrdzelosa shensao.*

*davlevdit tito-orolsa, davaghamebdit dghesao.*

(Baliauri 1991: 155)

When you told me, that you lied to me, 'I will come in autumn'

I had a bottle of vodka awaiting you.

Seven weeks have gone by, a sliver got stuck in my throat,

I will pour for Melania, your toast,

We will take turns drinking, we will drink til dawn.

Far from being the ‘drink of devils’, vodka is seems much more like ‘the drink of lovers’.

But vodka is also a pervasive mediator and sign of relations of sociability of all kinds.

According to Natela Baliauri, an ethnographer who was herself a Khevsur, vodka, like beer, is a pervasive drink, needed for every sort of social ritual event, and is brewed by the average family forty times a year at least,

because without vodka, by local rule, nothing can be done, neither the cost of a funeral, nor weddings, nor reconciling enemies, neither women can become sworn sisters nor men can become sworn brothers, regard cannot be shown for relatives, nor sowing nor harvest and many other customs. Everything requires vodka, beer is required on the other hand for more heavy and serious matters, but even then vodka is also considered necessary. Khevsurs have a good opinion of vodka. (Baliauri 1991: 154)

Beer has a specialized ritual function, but still, vodka is everywhere where beer is, and everywhere it isn't too. If vodka and brewing vodka are pervasive generalized signs of sociability, vodka has a particular heightened, and somewhat opposed, significance for young women, corresponding to the heightened expression of sociability associated with romance. Bottles of vodka are the generalized currency of romance, and hence when and where vodka is being brewed, there too are young women, seeking special bottles of vodka:

When a family brews vodka, if they have a young woman in the household, she asks, 'Please fill me one *mina* (bottle, lit 'glass')!' and tries to ensure that they fill it with good vodka. She asks parents and brothers alike for this. Sometimes even fellow villagers will fill a bottle of vodka for a young woman, uncles and cousins (*bidzashvilebi*) will joke with her, 'when I am suffering, then give me some to drink!' But in reality they cannot be given back the vodka she has requested. They say this in jest. (Baliauri 1991: 154)

They will also tease her to 'Have whoever you pour this vodka for say a toast to me,' knowing she will do no such thing. Since girls will always have saved up bottles of good vodka hidden somewhere, or such is the general opinion, a guest might joke with a young girl 'I don't want this vodka, pour me the saved up bottled vodka of the girls!'

For men, vodka is the generalized currency of hospitality and sociability: its value derives from its open-handed expenditure. At weddings, for example, the hosts must not only brew considerable quantities of beer, but they must make a massive prestation of bottled vodka; the groom (*nepe*) must personally give a bottle of vodka to each guest which they use to drink his blessing (Makalatia 1984:171, 173). Men traveling to visit friends and relatives will always 'go with vodka' (*arqit misvla*), and they also will carry 'road vodka' (*sagzao araqi*) and offer vodka to everyone they meet, even if the vodka is needed at the destination. To not do so is considered, for men, to be quite shameful, stingy, or 'mother-minded' (*deda-chk'ua*), that is, open-ended generosity is a masculine virtue, contrasted with feminine stinginess (Ochiauri 1980: 7, 14-15). By contrast, the stolen vodka of girls is withdrawn from general consumption and saved in small glass

bottled for personal use, no longer addressed to generalized reciprocity, 'to whom it may concern', it is a gift saved up for intimate addressees. Road vodka carried by men is often quite weak (it is carried to protect the better vodka to be drunk at the destination, thus revealing a masculine stinginess as well), but gifted vodka, the begged or stolen vodka of girls, must always be the best, the strongest. The very same drink takes on different values because it has different trajectories in exchange. For men, vodka is expected to be expended freely to all and sundry, the primary sign of generosity, sociability and hospitality is vodka (hence the need for weak, watery 'road vodka' addressed 'to whom it may concern' to protect the good vodka that has specific addressees), while girls not only save the vodka they have been given, they also save vodka stolen when and where they can from whomever they can (Baliauri 1991: 154). The jokes directed at young women draw attention to the inapplicability of principles of masculine generosity to the begged, stolen, saved up vodka of girls: the important thing is not the means by which she gets it (that is, by any means necessary), but that once she has it, she hides it, saves it. Vodka is at once both the medium of masculine generalized reciprocity and its feminine opposite.

She saves it, but for whom? She will bring her vodka out for special guests, she will bring it out when the young people gather apart from the adults, and especially, if the girl has a *dzmobili* in the village, she brings it to him, if they meet alone. But here the practice is a little different, because unlike in the other cases, it is not consumed, or rather, the boy drinks a little, and saves the rest: 'The boy will in turn take this vodka and drink it with two or three other friends, though none will ask who brought him this vodka, nor will he himself say. But he is pleased that girls save vodka for him' (Baliauri 1991:

154-5). The girl saves vodka for her specific boy, as a sign for him and him alone; the boy in turn freely distributes this vodka in a more typically masculine manner among his friends, without identifying the source, but for a boy to have vodka is in itself a sign of a girl's prior gift of vodka. The individual sharing can become a general vodka redistribution, if, for example, all the village boys gather together in the village square (*pekhoni*), then by definition all the *dzmobilis* [boyfriends] of all the girls in the village will be gathered there too:

Sometimes the young men have the young women bring them bottles full of vodka even in the *pekhoni* (village gathering place). They will say 'Well, girls, whoever has right now bottles saved up at home, bring them here, you have saved them up for your *dzmobilis*, right now we (boys) are all here, pour for us, your *dzmobilis*, too, if here you have someone.' (Baliauri 1991: 155)

But the primary value of saved up bottles of vodka (a drink which, unlike beer, stored in glass bottles, can last in potable form indefinitely) is in fact a measure of pining, a way of constructing time as a measure of devotion in absence ('Am I in love? -- Yes, since I am waiting' (Barthes 1978)), because lovers are constantly separated by this thing or that (Baliauri 1991: 23). The girls steal or beg vodka which they hoard and hide for their *dzmobilis*, the fact that they can dispense it for whom they please is merely a reflex of the fact that they mostly please to dispense it for their *dzmobilis*. Saving the vodka is a sign of devotion: "Some girls will save up this bottle of vodka for her *dzmobili* even up to a whole year. This is a sign, that she remembers her *dzmobili* and she will save it until

her waiting comes to an end” (Baliauri 1991: 155). Saving the vodka is a sign of appreciation, expressing a hope that in the future she might drink it with the boy, or give it to him to drink with others, again, his possession of vodka will index publicly the private devotion of some girl, because he has no other way of acquiring it. But if her hopes are dashed, if for some reason she will not see him again, then she will save it no longer, but consume it instead with others. But she consumes it with girls instead: she cannot consume it with boys because then it would no longer count as having been saved for her *dzmobili* (Baliauri 1991: 155).

Khevsur love is somewhat one-sided in expression. As we will see, girls acquire and save vodka for boys to consume much as they compose love and praise poetry for boys to consume. In both cases, the saving of vodka and the composition of love poetry, girls are active producers, boys are passive consumers, in a manner that parallels the way that the girl must come to the boy at night among the Khevsurs (Gogochuri 1974: 114). The Khevsur economy of stolen vodka, love poetry and making out are all of a piece. This relationship between vodka, love and poetry is simply one aspect of a broader culture of circulation (Lee and Lipuma 2002) generated by the parallel, homologous, and mutually constituting circulation of genres of linguistic text (poems), varieties of drink and other objects of value, and kinds of persons and relationships. To understand these parallelisms between circulatory media as different as making out, stolen bottles of vodka and love poems, and their opposition to beer and all it stands for, we must understand the cosmological and spatial horizons in which the circulation takes place, in particular the cosmological underpinnings and spatial realization of indigenous notions of ‘private’ and ‘public’.

**Cosmology and space: Pshav-Khevsur dualism.** The opposition between beer and vodka is simply an example of a pervasive dualism in Pshav-Khevsur cosmology: pretty much everything is either ‘of god’ or ‘of the devil’. One might mistake the exposition of this chapter as being an exercise in structuralism, and it is that, but this is also partly because the Pshav-Khevsurs invented structuralism independently, as one of my Georgian friends, Zaza Shatirishvili, likes to say. The Pshav-Khevsurs believe that the universe is organized in terms of two equal opposed principles, a masculine principle identified with God and purity, and a feminine principle identified with the Devil and impurity (but not absolute evil, it is important to note). Men are created by god, women by the devil. Beer is ‘of God’, vodka ‘of the Devil’. A brief creation story of the Pshavs illustrates the basic principle well, all of creation is conceived of as a tit for tat sibling rivalry between a female ‘trickster’ Devil and her brother, God:

At the start God and the Devil were brother and sister. The Devil apparently angered God, for which God cursed her and abandoned her. After that the Devil became God’s rival, competitor, or trickster. After that the Devil would try to hinder God. God created the sky out of a net, the angered Devil created mice and made them cut up this net, but God to destroy the mice created the cat. God created the vineyard, the Devil created goats to dig up the vineyard. To destroy the goats God created wolves and others. The Pshavs attribute the creation of woman too to the Devil, ‘woman is wrong’, Pshavian men say. The Pshav husband and wife do not have a common bed. They sleep separately, they

considered sleeping together to be shameful, sleeping in one bed. (Vazha Pshavela 1961: 421)

Other than the cosmological grounding of everyday misogyny, what is interesting here is that a cosmological battle between *brother and sister* is used to explain not only the separate creation of men and women, but also the *avoidance* that prevails between *husband and wife*.

Each Pshav-Khevsur community considers itself to be linked to a specific shrine complex (Khevsur *jvari* ‘cross’, Pshav *khati* ‘icon’, though one seldom sees actual crosses or icons at such shrines) that serves as a religious expression of that community’s unity (Tuite 2002, Manning 2008b). The terms *jvari* or *khati* (*jvar-khati*) refer both to the concrete structures that make up the shrine and the resident divinity itself. This *jvar-khati* is believed to mark the spot where a founding figure came to earth, a *khvtishvili* (child of god) who drove out the local demons (*devi*), who are portrayed as being similar to people in social organization, albeit with different architecture and some physical monstrosity (backwards feet, for example), and made the area inhabitable for humans (Ochiauri 1967). The founding of shrines is recorded in a specific genre called *andrezebi* (‘myths’) (Kiknadze 1996). Although the Khevsurs lack anything resembling an autonomous centralizing political organization, the shrine itself serves both as a source of social, political and religious organization for the group, with certain shrine artifacts called ‘flags’ (*droscha*) used both to communicate with the divine and also in battle as symbols of unity. Although Khevsurs never experienced feudal domination as serfs by lords as happened in the plains, this is precisely how the Khevsurs imagine their

relationship to the *jvar-khati* (Tuite 2002), a Khevsur community is called a *saqmo* ('group of serfs') and each Khevsur man is a *qma* ('serf') of the *jvar-khati* (Kiknadze 1996, Tuite 1999, 2002).

Gender dualism is at the core of Pshav-Khevsur cosmology. The shrine, divinities, *jvar-khati*, are imagined as being men, and linked to each shrine are female principles, called *dobili* ('sworn sister'), who are conceived of as being semi-demonic powers allied to the masculine principle of the shrine, with their own cult buildings and objects. These powers can take the form of small children, beautiful or old women, as well as monstrous or animal forms (snakes, pigs, birds, in one case a 'mist-colored horse'), often depending on the role they are playing, and they can only threaten women and children, who are protected by 'lower grade' guardian angels than men, they typically come out to 'play' at twilight, dawn and dusk (Ochiauri 2005: 81, 191, 233, 336). Just as God and the Devil were brother and sister, the relationship between male *jvar-khati* and female *dobili* is patterned after a sibling relationship. As the name *dobili* 'sworn sister', implies, the relationship is a kind of artificial siblinghood, a kind of 'sworn sister-sworn brotherhood' (*dobil-dzmobiloba*), the same term that the Khevsurs sometimes use for *sts'orproba* (Baliauri 1999: 9). But because the female element in the divine couple is always demonic, the term 'sworn sister' (*dobili*) automatically serves as a euphemism for 'female demonic consort'. The gods and their demonic female consorts do not marry, they engage in a relationship which seems opposed at every point to marriage (hence, 'anti-marriage'), or rather, one that seems to partake both of properties of relations between siblings and spouses (Tuite 2000).

The name of the *dobili* is what concerns us here: elsewhere this just means ‘sworn sister,’ it is the feminine pair of ‘*dzmobili*.’ We saw above the somewhat remarkable fact that in the *stsorproba* relationship the ‘girlfriend’ calls the ‘boyfriend’ *dzmobili* ‘sworn brother’, and surprisingly, the boyfriend calls the girlfriend ‘*dzmobili*’ too. This strikes everyone as remarkable, but it is not as if the term *dobili* ‘sworn sister’ doesn’t exist in Khevsureti (as is sometimes claimed, e.g. Tevdoradze 1930: 131), merely that it has a specialized meaning. Just as in the human community, men and women form amorous relations, referring to each other as *dzmobili* ‘sworn brother’, something analogous happens in the divine community, the male shrine divinity has a set of female companions of demonic origin (these are the female spirits captured by saint George from Kavajeti, sort of a demonic land of fairie) who are his consorts, *dobilis* ‘sworn sisters.’ The cosmological context is the best explanation for the curious fact that one calls one’s girlfriend *dzmobili*, ‘sworn brother’. One can’t very well go around calling one’s girlfriend something that would translated roughly as ‘female demonic consort’, can one?

If the relationship between the male divinity and the feminine *dobili* resembles the community endogamous relationship between lovers that is sometimes called *dzmobiloba* (‘sworn brotherhood’), then the external relationships between Pshav-Khevsur communities resembles not exogamy (after all male divinities cannot marry one another), but are instead modeled as relationships of sworn brotherhood (also called *dzmobiloba*) between these male divinities. As Bardavelidze points out, virtually all political relations of alliance between communities is expressed not in terms of long distance genealogical relationships, but as relationships of artificial kinship (sworn brotherhood) of various types between shrine divinities representing these different communities (Bardavelidze

1984: 178). Feudal relations between these acephalous communities in the mountains and communities represented by human feudal sovereigns in the plains similarly could be achieved by sworn siblinghood relations between mountain shrine divinities and Georgian kings, themselves considered to be incarnations of divinity (Bardavelidze 1984: 180-3). In the same way that the feudal system of the plains represents the publicness of the community by incarnating it as an embodied status attribute of a king or lord (what Habermas calls ‘representative publicness’, see below), so the Pshav-Khevsur community imagines themselves as serfs (*qmani*) of a divine patron, who represents them as a totality with respect to other groups, the publicness of the community incarnated in the shrine complex and its associated material objects, flags and treasury of silver cups. However, neither mythological cosmogony nor political relations are conceived of using metaphors of common consanguineal descent or affinal alliance. Siblinghood, *stsorproba* or ‘anti-marriage’ and sworn brotherhood are the relations structuring the cosmology and the political order, alliance by marriage and descent figure in neither.

But, aside from the name, does the divine relationship of ‘anti-marriage’ shed any light on the human one? It turns out that some shrine divinities, especially Lasha, are especially tolerant of *tsatsloba* amongst the Pshavi because in their time, as men on earth, they too took lovers in the same fashion (Gogochuri 1974: 130). This principle is extended in the Khevsur and Pshav shrines to the feminine consorts, but the *dobili* spirits, aside from protecting the shrine, and being in general agents of harm, often to children, have a special set of sexual relations making them resemble *succubi*. These spirits are almost completely promiscuous and thoroughly fecund. They will ‘lie down’ with virtually anyone from the shrine god, to each other, to humans, both men and women,

appearing as attractive members of the opposite sex, usually in a dream. For shrine attendants, seeing these female spirits in a dream, even if ‘nothing happens’ in the dream, causes them to become impure and unable to fulfill shrine activities until they have purified themselves for three days. Moreover, whoever they lie down with in a dream, from the shrine god, to each other, to humans, they always produce an offspring who is also a *dobili*, but a lower rank *dobili*, more prone to be evil than themselves. Hence, they themselves often destroy their own offspring. The *dobili* in a sense violate all the rules separating anti-marriage and marriage, they are promiscuous (allowed in anti-marriage, but not marriage), always engage in sexual intercourse (allowed in marriage, not so much in anti-marriage), and are completely fecund (children are allowed in marriage, forbidden in anti-marriage), they only produce more beings like or worse than themselves, and they eat their young (Makalatia 1984: 236-7). Hence, the divine community is structured by a peculiar dualism, but, this is important, there is no analogy there to the relations of marriage, divine elements are always male, demonic elements are always female, but, in contrast, say, to the average Olympian pantheon, or even the Christian one, there are no genealogies: each type of entity either produces no offspring (shrine divinities) or produces offspring more or less like itself (*dobili*). The net result is that just as God and the Devil are brother and sister but also rivals, so the shrine divinities, the ‘children of god’ who fight the demons (*devi*), also have demonic female consorts (*dobili*), who serve as the ‘hosts’ of the shrine god. At each level of the cosmology male and female principles are radically opposed by nature and then re-united in some sort of sibling relationship.

Within human community itself, the same gender dualism applies. While all humans are impure, 'fleshy' (*xorcieli*), men are 'purer' than women. Men are by nature closer to the masculine principle of the shrine than women are (they 'have a part of' the divine nature, *nats'iliiani*), while women are in general 'mixed' or 'impure' (*mireuli*) (Tuite 1999, 2002). The opposition applies recursively: within each group there are relatively 'pure' and 'impure' members: there are 'pure' men (*motsmidari*) who observe special taboos avoiding certain kinds of impurity, especially that of menstruating women and the dead, which allows them to serve as shrine attendants of various grades of purity; there are also impure men who have had close contact with sources of impurity (menstruating women, the dead) and have not been purified. For women, too, there are gradations of purity, with certain women who are able to be considered 'pure' (*motsmidari*), often because they are post-menopausal, and other women who because of menstruation, recent childbirth, and so on who are considered to be especially impure, or 'mixed' (*narevi*). An important point here is that menstruating women are a source of impurity to all men (siblings, spouses), *except* her (romantic) *dzmobili* (Baliauri 1991, Tuite 2000).

This gendered category of purity versus mixedness is underlies the whole spatial logic of the Pshav-Khevsur community (Tuite 1999, 2002). The shrine complex as a whole is purer than the Khevsur village, which in turn is purer than the menstruation and birthing huts of women. The houses of the village *as a whole* (that is, both the relatively pure and relatively impure parts of the house) are impure relative to the shrine buildings, as a whole. According to Tevdoradze, the Khevsurs explain this state of affairs by claiming that long ago, before the rules of ritual purity had been established for houses,

women had spent their menstrual cycles inside the family house (according to Makalatia, still the case in his period for poorer Pshavians) (Tevdoradze 1930: 141).

As this implies, the normal place for women to spend their menstrual period was at a distance from the village, in another collection of small huts, the menstruation huts, *samrelo*, whose name implies that it is a place (*sa...o*) for those that are impure or ‘mixed’ (*-mrel-* contains the root for mixture *mi-rev-* (Tuite 1999, 2002)). Amongst the Pshavs nearby these also have the name of *boseli* (‘stable’). The menstruation hut complex, then, relative to the village, is impure. Even more impure than this is a woman who is giving birth, who must have built for her a hut (*sachekhi*), that is for one single use, after giving birth it must be destroyed, it is so impure. For the Pshavians, as a concrete referent, the term *boseli* can mean either a structure separate from the house where women go during menstruation, *or* it can mean simply the first floor of the traditional two story Pshavian house, where the livestock are stabled. The ambiguity apparently points to a real overlap in Pshavian practice, for poorer Pshavian households the lower floor of the house serves as the *boseli* in both senses.

The same principle of gender and purity applies recursively to spaces within the house. A house is divided into two floors. The top floor of a Khevsur house is the ‘pure, masculine’ floor (*cherkho*), and the associated flat roof porch (*bani*), where men sleep, and the bottom floor, called the stable (*boseli*), where women sleep, and where cattle are also kept (hence the name, not because women are being compared to animals), is the ‘impure, feminine’ floor (Makalatia 1984: 136). The same opposition between masculine and feminine spaces again recursively subdivides *each* of the two floors, both of which are divided into masculine and feminine subspaces, based on the relative orientation to

the hearth (Ochiauri 1980:77). Women cannot enter the men's space in the *cherkho*, just as men cannot enter the *boseli* through the female entrance, but must descend into it from above. Similar oppositions are found in traditional Pshavian dwellings.

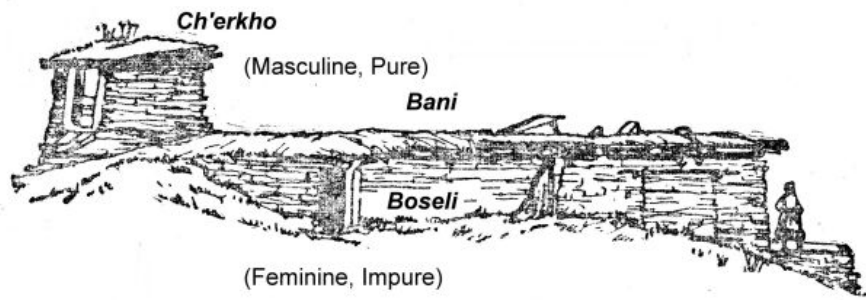


Figure 1: *Khevsur House*, adapted from Makalatia (1984: 136) (in most traditional Khevsur houses the *bani* is smaller and the *cherkho* much larger than implied here)

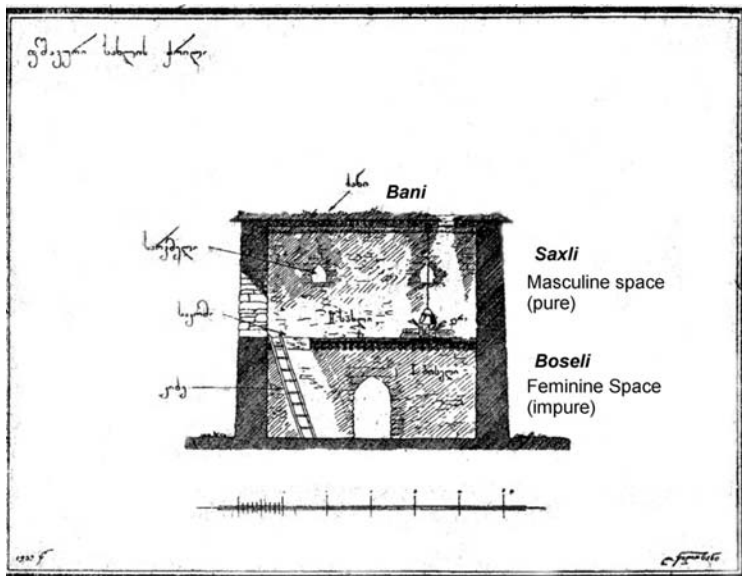


Figure 2: Traditional Pshavian house plan: Adapted from Makalatia 1934: 108 (such houses were already considered to be ‘old style’ at the time Makalatia was writing)

The oppositions between the top masculine and bottom feminine floor of the house, as well as subdivisions within each floor, in turn mirror the opposition between the pure, masculine shrine complex and the impure, feminine, complex of menstruation and birthing huts. The gender dualism of Pshav-Khevsur cosmology is given continuous, permanent, recursive and insistent spatial expression, and this cosmology-laden landscape forms the backdrop for the circulation of persons, texts and things. In particular, it provides a set of cosmologically significant spaces that will allow us to better understand the circulation of vodka and beer, but also, the homologous circulation of lovers and love poetry.

**Intimacy and secrecy.** The non-romantic sworn-sibling version of *dzmobiloba* is an open and publicly recognized relationship, the opposite sex romantic ‘boyfriend-girlfriend’ version is furtive and secretive. Thus, to understand local notions of intimacy is to understand local notions of publicity by opposition. I have been using the terms ‘public’ and ‘private’ so far as a handy translation to gloss local concepts and practices, some of which indeed seem parallel. Without losing the historical and cultural specificity of the terms ‘public’ and ‘private’, and yet again without according these concepts an absolute untranslatableability, we can still (following Kaviraj 1997) attempt to find some vocabulary for comparison that captures the similarities and the differences simultaneously. In spatial terms, as Kaviraj notes (1997: 86), for example, there is usually some sort of idea of a *common space*, notions of greater (but not *universal*)

accessibility of space (for example, the *pexioni* above is clearly such a village ‘common’ space, and there are others). Let us call this the ‘spatial access’ sense of ‘public’: for example, the *pekhoni* (village square) is a universally accessible space, opposed to spaces like individual houses and ‘pure’ masculine shrine spaces and ‘impure’ feminine spaces like the menstruation hut.

In a sense, the *pekhoni*, open to all, is the closest to this sense of publicness as universally accessible, or ‘common’, space that is the core of our contemporary notion of publicness. But the term ‘public’ also has in contemporary usage a sense of issues that affect everyone, universally, because ‘the public’ is taken to be a kind of universalizing term for the social totality.. The Pshavs and Khevsurs also view their community as a social totality, but here social matters of *common concern* are decided by the older men in ritual gatherings in the most inaccessible places of all, the shrine complex. The term that is used for the ritual gathering of older men, from which women and talk of women is banned, at which judicial and other ‘public’ (e.g. military) matters are decided, is *jari*, meaning ‘army’ in standard Georgian (i.e. the armed men of the community), but in derivatives like *sajaro* it means ‘public’ in standard Georgian. Among the Pshavs and Khevsurs the *jari* is embodied by the older men of the community, who have the greatest access, and greatest cosmological similarity, to the spaces in the community and associated rituals that represent that community as a totality (the shrine and its divine lord). This represents quite a different notion of ‘public’ from the received modern one, what we can call a ‘ritual publicness’.

In classic sociological and social anthropological literature something like this sense of ‘public’ is closely associated with Durkheimian conceptions of ritual. On the

one hand, ritual (like drama and other forms of performance) has been viewed as representational, symbolic, or expressive behavior, directed towards a public, rather than technically effective or practical behavior (Asad 1988: 75-77). This opposition leads to the next, ritual is associated with outer, public expression rather than inner, private individual expression and emotion, leading incidentally to an expressive divide in which “feelings” [were seen] as private and ineffable and “ritual” as public and legible’ (Asad 1988: 84). Thus, ritual performances are both representations of publicness (representative publicness) and representations before a public. In the former sense, they are not public in the sense of being inclusive, inasmuch as what is being formed is a highly idealized but public and semiofficial representation of the community as a *totality*. Representative publicness, in Habermas’s sense, is closest to this: ‘Here the people functioned as the backdrop before which the ruling estates, nobility, church dignitaries, kings etc. displayed themselves and their status. By its very exclusion from the domination so represented, the people are part of this representative publicness’ (Habermas 1992: 426).<sup>3</sup> This is one of the general senses of ‘public’ discussed by Michael Warner, (‘a kind of social totality’ (Warner 2002: 49).

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<sup>3</sup> Because feudal estates, particularly the king, identified themselves as incarnations of cosmological principles, their ‘representative publicness’ incarnated in their persons cosmological properties as status attributes. Because of a specific feudal Christian cosmology of *incarnationalism* in this case status attributes of persons were felt to incarnate cosmological oppositions (the ‘king’s two bodies’, one corporeal, one of which was in effect a cosmological/social imaginary) (citations):

This *publicness* (or *publicity*) of *representation* was not constituted as a social realm, that is, as a public sphere; rather it was something like a status attribute, if this term may be permitted....[The

Factoring away the historical specificities of feudalism, Habermas' representational publicity is simply Durkheimian ritual publicity. In the case of the Pshav-Khevsurs, the relevant status attribute that allows the men of the community to embody representative publicness, with respect to the women, is the cosmological attribute of purity, of being *natsiliani* ('partaking of the essence of the divinity' (Tuite 1999, 2002)). In such idealized representations of the cosmology of the community, portions of the community itself (in this case, *jari*) will be identified with the social totality, others will be erased. Just as common spaces will generate explicit or implicit exclusions, so idealized images of the social whole produced in ritual representative publicness will substitute the most eminent part for the whole (for example, the shrine divinity contracts relationships with external groups through coordinate entities [other shrine divinities in the mountains, kings and lords in the plains] as discussed above). If we follow a generally Durkheimian sort of view of ritual (see the Goffman summation in the introduction), then rituals produce specific sorts of schematic representations of cosmological systems, social totalities, such as publics, with appropriate elisions and erasures, before the community in situations of performance where members of the community are both actors and audiences. They are representations of the idealized whole before that actual whole, performances in which the community is allowed to see an idealized portrait of itself and its cosmology (e.g. Goffman 1979:1).

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Manorial lord] displayed himself, presented himself as an embodiment of some sort of 'higher' power.... For representation pretended to make something invisible visible through the public presence of the Lord. (Habermas 1991: 7)

Ritual performance must not only be performed, they must be witnessed, which brings us to the last sense of ‘public’ relevant here, ‘public’ as the relationship between a text or performance and its audience (discussed by Warner 2002). There are really two senses of public here, the public of a performance or ritual is a public limited to spatial field bounded by the senses, a public whose members can see and hear each other, they are consociates, while the public of a circulating text is limitless, infinite, relationship between contemporaries who are not consociates (Warner 2002). While this sense of public will occupy me later, right now what is important is that certain kinds of ritual are constituted as public by the fact of being witnessed (usually by members of the community who count as members of the *jari*).

This is important for distinguishing between the two kinds of *dzmobiloba*, the public sworn-siblinghood and the romantic, private relationship of boyfriend-girlfriend. Although the intimate boyfriend-girlfriend relationship of *storpoba* uses some of the same terminology as relations of sworn brotherhood, and even similar ritual apparatus in some cases (including commensal drinking of vodka, with or without silver flakes), there is an important difference: sworn brotherhood is as clear an example as we are going to get of a locally conceived ‘public’ event (an event performed before a *jari*), because the ritual *must* be witnessed to be effective; the romantic relation of anti-marriage, by contrast, will tolerated, is more of an open secret, it is tolerated just in case it can more or less be ignored, hence, it is most likely to be banned at focal public rituals at shrines, but even here, it can be tolerated if it stays out of the limelight. Hence, to understand these similar but opposed relations will help us construct the nearest analogy to indigenous

conceptions of ‘public’ and ‘private’ in relation to romance, which have some spatial reference, as well.

These ‘boyfriend-girlfriend’ relationships in Khevsureti and Pshavi are generally tolerated, but largely with a blind eye from the older, married, generation. There are occasions when such romantic expression is not allowed, in Khevsureti, but not in Pshavi, it is banned at most shrine festivals (Makalatia 1998 [1925]: 11), and is generally not allowed at serious festivals such as funerals. In general, the relationship has a precarious existence at those events that we might want to call the indigenous equivalent of a ‘public event’, especially in Khevsureti, always existing at the margins of rituals and gatherings that have a public representative function, those where Durkheimian sorts of rituals, ones that represent the group as a social totality in relation to a cosmology (Habermasian ‘representative publicity’, the ritual representation of the group as a totality), that map individuals into groups, rather than express relations between individuals within a group.

The avoidance of publicity that typifies the ‘boyfriend-girlfriend’ relationship expresses itself differently depending on who goes to whom, thus is expressed differently among the Khevsurs and the Pshavs. Among the Khevsurs, the girl must go to the boy, and the relationship is arranged by a mediator (*elchi*, ambassador), generally a girl, who first asks the girl whom she would like to spend the night with (if either the girl or the boy is a stranger in town, she does not ask, she simply decides herself), and then gets consent from the boy to bring a guest (without, it appears, revealing who the girl will be), saying something veiled like ‘I will be your guest tonight. Do you have guests or not, if so, how many. I want them to be few in number’ (Baliauri 1991: 11-12). From this the boy will understand her intent, but in turn will want to know who she intends to bring to

spend the night, which the ambassador will stubbornly resist, a conversation like so (as imagined, certainly not witnessed, by the indigenous ethnographer Baliauri [see Manning 2007b]) ensues until the boy concedes (Baliauri 1991: 12):

-- Taimekel [the ambassador], what in the world do you intend?

-- What do I intend, man? First tell me, will you be in, or not. Or did someone tell you [what I was planning]? Don't hide anything from me!

-- Ooo I understand, I understand, Tamo, first tell me, who do you have as a guest [for me]? Is she a fellow villager (*sopleli*) or a fellow member of the community (*temuri*)?

-- Who should I have as a guest? Man, it's not your affair, who I have, first tell me, what I asked you and then I will tell you.

-- I won't tell you, Tamo, no.

-- Lad, don't hide your mind from me (*gons nu milev*). Say, *ar magdisa*?!

-- I won't say anything until I find out, who you are talking about.

And so it goes, when the boy concedes, the ambassador will determine with precision where the boy is sleeping, who is sleeping nearby, and then they will agree on a sign (in Khevsur dialect *lishani*) to announced the arrival of the ambassador and girl, whether to imitate the voice of some animal, or throw pebbles, or whatever. All this to ensure the girl is not tragically placed by mistake with some other man (Baliauri 1991: 13). The ambassador will then return to the girl's house, and invent some pretext to tell the girl's parents for why the girl must spend the night at the ambassador's house (Baliauri 1991:

13). She will take the girl to her own house, and then, when everyone there is asleep, they will slink out in turn to make for the boy's house (Baliauri 1991: 13). Later, when the boy and the girl advance from being mere *stsorperis* to 'knowing' one another, and eventually perhaps *dzmobilis*, they can dispense with the services of the ambassador (Baliauri 1991: 16). In general, even if the relationship is an 'open secret' (after all, in Khevsureti the relationship must happen where the boy is sleeping, in a common room, with many many other people, hence if the boy gets too 'frisky', the girl need merely stand up and leave to humiliate the boy), the actual process of arranging it is rife with all manner of familiar teenage subterfuge.

Among the Pshavs, too, where the boy goes to the girl and no ambassador is required, the relationship is also marked by secrecy. The relationship is kept particularly under wraps if the couple is too closely related, always making sure that their relatives don't see them (Makalatia 1998[1925]: 9). Unlike the Khevsurs, where the relationship occurs wherever the boy is sleeping, in Pshavi it begins in peripheral, often wild places:

Newly brought together Tsatsals, in the first period, lie down in some hidden, concealed place outside the house, in the stable (*boseli*) or the cattle-feed-storage-place, or in the forest under a cloak (*nabadi*) without taking off their clothes. The boy always goes to the girl at the appointed place, the girl pretends to sleep and the boy has to wake her up, with his caresses and with sweet talk, whose content revolves around *tsatsloba*. (Makalatia 1998[1925]: 9)

As the relationship develops and becomes more 'serious', the relationship moves from hidden woodland places into the house, becomes ever more publicized in speech, with the lover coming and making secret signs by which the girl knows that the boy is coming and which boy it is, for there may be several such. Always there is some attempt to pretend that the older people will not be aware of what is happening. The amount of elaboration of these 'secret' rules and mediators allows the relation into the open all the while paying obeisance to its secrecy, but also, the play of secrecy, secret signs and intermediaries, pining and expectation cannot but be part of the enjoyment and pleasure of the relationship, a kind of self-valuable sociability in itself. Note that Pshavians use the term 'sworn sister' [*nadobi* in Pshavian] to mean girlfriend and 'sworn brother' [*nadzмоби*] to mean boyfriend, the neutral term being *tsatsali*, while the Khevsurs as noted call both boyfriend *and* girlfriend 'sworn brother' [*dzмоби*].

When the *tsatsals* have become closer to each other, then they continue lying together in the house of the *nadobi* ['sworn sister' i.e. girlfriend in Pshavian dialect], but they act so *chumad* (quietly) and artfully/skillfully, that the parents don't find out, and even if they do find out they too pretend to be deaf. Aside from this, between *tsatsals* there also exists special signs of knocks at the door and and whistling, according to which the *nadobi* [girlfriend] understands, which *nadzмоби* ['sworn brother' i.e. boyfriend] is coming as a guest and will open the door quietly if she is not already being a *Tsatsali* to another and at the cock's crow she again will quietly help her *nadzмоби* steal away from the house.

(Makalatia 1998[1925]: 9-10)

At those ‘public’ shrine festivals where the practice of lying down together is accepted (primarily in Pshavi), the required secrecy will be supplied by nothing more than hiding under a capacious skin cloak (*nabadi*). At such events, those young people who have not ‘hooked up’ with lovers will engage in a practice of revealing the hidden lovers, stealing objects from them and forcing them to buy them back, while deriding them and expressing disgust. All of this expressing the playfulness and joking behavior that characterizes the gathering of youths at a Pshavian shrine festival, standing in sharp and unrelieved counterpoint to the seriousness of the activities of the shrine attendants. At the same time, the ‘raid’ allows these secret relations to achieve a certain amount of inadvertent publicity within the peer group. Interestingly, the ‘fine’ for engaging in *tsatsloba* and retrieving the goods stolen from the Tsatsali boy, is *vodka* paid by the Tsatsali *girl*. *Vodka* is the universal currency of teen romance in Pshavi as well.

On the first night of the shrine festival [khatoba], approximately at 2 in the morning, when the pilgrims (faithful ‘prayers’ *mlocvelebs*) were sleeping peacefully under the stars, some sort of commotion broke out and I noticed a group of young people, who were going among the sleepers and taking off their *nabadebi* [cloaks under which they were sleeping]. At my questioning as to the meaning of this, they answered me that they were holding a “search” (“*moxilva*”) or “raid” (“*darbeva*”). I became interested in this raid and I followed them. Indeed, upon the removal of the *nabadi* under it lay a girl and a boy embracing one another, who were scared and hiding from the light of the candles. The

raiders were stealing the hats, short swords (*khanjal*), belts and other possessions of these boys engaged in *tsatsloba*. In the morning this group announced that the confiscated objects were for sale, and the owner was forced to redeem his own possessions with a litre of vodka, which, bashfully, his *nadobi* brought with her own hand and her own *dzmobili* followed her with her *mandili* (head scarf) wrapped around his arm. Upon the return of the goods, the group of raiders expressed disgust with them for their *tsatsloba*. (Makalatia 1998[1925]: 11)

The most peripheral place of all is the menstrual hut, the limiting space of female impurity, on which there are sharply conflicting views. Tevdoradze tell us that

In the Pshavian imagination the word “boseli” refers to a peripheral (*ganapira*, extreme, outskirts), inaccessible, quarantined place, to which menstruating women and women giving birth are exiled, that is, the word ‘boseli’ means an unclean, defiled (profane) place, where ordinarily ‘clean’ people cannot go (Tevdoradze 1930: 167)

In general, women are believed to be, compared to men, a source of impurity, and menstruating women and women who are giving birth are particular sources of impurity who are segregated from the village during their times of impurity in both communities. However, impurity is relative, and while shrine attendants must avoid all women at all times (thus constituting women as the opposite of public), ordinary men are under fewer strictures. Most interestingly, a male *dzmobili* is immune to the effects of

female impurity of his partner, it only affects her consanguineal and affinal kin, and by definition, he is neither of these. Among the Khevsur, too, this has a corollary in practice, namely, that just as *stsorproba* amongst the Khevsurs, but not the Pshavs, is itself sort of ‘impure’ and hence is forbidden at ‘public’ shrines and shrine rituals, it is allowed with impure women who are confined during menstruation, however, inasmuch as among the Khevsur the man does not go to the woman, but the woman goes to the man, they will not meet in the menstruation hut, rather, ‘they lie down, but somewhere distant (moshorebit) from the *samrelo*, in some meadow.’ (Makalatia 1984: 162). Among the Pshavians, where the man goes to the woman for these purposes, the *boseli* itself (either in the sense of lower feminine floor of the house or the sense of ‘menstrual hut’ [sometimes the same in poorer Pshav households]) is celebrated in poetry as the place of romance. First of all, the term recalls various moments in Pshav love (*ts’ats’loba*) poetry where the know at the door of the *boseli* is the sign of a male lover come to visit his girlfriend, for example, this male poet brags

*bevr kala gamovaghvidze t’q’avis dzvelashi nac’oli,*

*bevra boslis k’ar gavaghe, bevrgan avxade sak’omi*

(Makalataia Makalatia 1998[1925]: 13)

I have awakened many girls lying in old hides,

I have opened many a door of a *boseli*, many a window have I opened.

Another expresses his desire for *tsatsloba* by saying

*kalebtan ts'ola mts'adian gagheba boslis k'arisa.*

I want to lie down with women, to open the door of the *boseli*

(Makalatia 1934: 223)

The ethnographer Tevdoradze actually claims that Pshavian women *increase* the number of days they stay in the *boseli* to take advantage of the freedom it affords them for *tsatsloba*.

According to Pshav custom (*adat*), Pshavian women in the period of menstruation go into the *boseli* and instead of 3-4 days stay 7-8 days. This so that they can compensate themselves for the three bitter days spent there with sweet moments. In this circumstance the three or four day long monthly curse is very useful to them in order to buy themselves four or five days more, for during this time *tsatsloba* happens more freely. The Pshavian woman in the theft of romantic feelings is almost classically perfected, experienced and a great expert in opening traps. (Tevdoradze 1930:163)

A married man avoids his menstruating wife, but a male lover goes to his menstruating girlfriend. As a result, some Pshavians apparently developed an etymology of *boseli* 'stable, menstruation hut' as being derived from *bozoba* 'prostitution, debauchery'.

The Pshavian man of the family not only does not lay with a menstruating woman, he doesn't even go near her, but at the same time young men engaged in *tsatsloba* (*motsatsle*) go even to menstruating women and lay down with them freely. In the opinion of some Pshavians contemporary young people only just recently got into the habit of stolen making out (*tsantsali*) in the *boseli*, but we think that the phenomenon must be extremely old. According to the definition of some Pshavs, the word 'boseli' derives from 'bozoba' (prostitution, debauchery), but most people do not agree with this opinion and even consider it to be insulting. (Tevdoradze 1930: 167-8)

The Pshavian practices of *tsatsaloba*, then, proliferate on the margins of the community, they are in a sense the opposite of public shrine rituals, which sometimes tolerate their presence, sometimes do not. Secrecy as a kind of privacy is part of a way in which this relationship is constantly denied, placed in check, refused (Tuite 2000). Separation is felt to be desirable, because it places desire in check (Kiknadze 1991) and causes desire, frustrated, to grow (Baliauri 1991: 23). Most of all, these relationships are occasional, one cannot lie with ones lover at all times, there are occasions where it is forbidden, where it is simply impossible, lovers are constantly separated, love is constantly unrequited, all winter long the lovers compose poems (Gogochuri 1974: 30-31)), for there is nothing else to do. And the occasions for performing these poems of love are often precisely those occasions when the evening ends and lovers will steal off in order to lie down together. The practice of 'lying down and getting up', and the poetry it

inspires and which describes it, are tied to many of the same occasions. And these occasions were many of the social occasions of the group:

In Khevsureti not one incident would end, if at the end of it *stsorproba* was not arranged, aside from those times, when someone died and they came to mourn him. In other such minor events the young men and women would gather more for the sake and purpose of *stsorproba*.... (Ochiauri 1980: 231)

We now move to different senses of ‘public’ that have to do with the circulation of poetic texts: occasions for love and the occasions for love poetry are more or less the same, just as the occasions where both are forbidden. What then are these occasions like, other than the fact that they all seem to involve drinking vodka, how does love and love poetry find its occasion?

### **Poetry and its publics: heroic poetry and love poetry, *jari* and *axaluxali***

The Pshavs and Khevsurs are renowned in Georgia for their poetry, so much so that the first volume of a planned series of folklore collections (the rest of which never materialized) was a monumental collection of Khevsur poetry (Shanidze 1931). The editor of this volume, the renowned folklorist and linguist Akaki Shanidze, divided his Khevsur poetry collection according to several genres, with ‘heroic’ poetry taking the lead and being sharply opposed to ‘love’ poetry. *Sagmiro*, ‘heroic’, epic poetry mostly dealt with the past, with heroic figures of various clans (*gvaris*), most of whom died heroically in battle. The other branch of poetry we have already seen examples of, what

Shanidze calls love (*sat'rpialo*) poetry, resembling lyric poetry, whose themes include not only loss and loss, but also includes the expression of all manner of sentiments related to these, including satirical and insulting poetry.

Khevsur epic or heroic poetry not only deals with the past, dead heroes, but is largely anonymous, resembling cultic myths called *andrezebi* which deal with founding of local shrines by heroic male shrine divinities. Both have in common that they tell mythic or epic stories that have a general 'public' relevance to all members of the clan (*gvare*) as a group, since the shrine god is the founder of the clan, in mythic times claiming the territory of the clan by driving out the prior demonic occupants of the soil, and heroes, known as 'good servants' (all Pshavs and Khevsurs consider themselves to be servants or serfs *qma*, *qmebi* of the shrine divinity, the community itself is called the *saqmo*) who die in battle in more recent, epic times, defending this same territory against human enemies. By contrast, both the experience of love and the poetry celebrating it, from an epic perspective, seems to celebrate relationships that cross-cut, divide up, and even cause antagonism *within* the social group for which the 'good servant' gave his life. From the hegemonic perspective of heroic poetry, then, the good servant is one who is dead, who died in battle against other men for the clan, and the 'hero' of a love poem is no hero at all, but rather a 'bad servant', an effeminate figure who would prefer to lie down with women:

*k'ai qma lashkar mok'vdeba,*

*sc'orebis mjobinobasa,*

*cudai—boslis quresa,*

The good serf will die in battle,

Settling scores,

The bad one--at the doors of the stable

*kalebtan loginobasa*

bedding down with women.

(Kiknadze 1997: 200; text from Shanidze 1931: 013)

Or

*K'ai q'ma qmalsa chaxedavs, "ne'ar, gamich'ris tu ara?"*

*Cudai—kalis ubes: "net'ar, shamixvevs tu ara?"*

A good serf looks at his sword and says "I wonder, will you cut for me, or not?"

A bad one – to a woman's bosom: "I wonder, will you embrace me, or not?"

(Shanidze 1931: 013)

Shanidze took these lines from 'high, serious' epic poetry as being the last word in indigenous literary criticism, once again reproducing the local ethnic binarism in which the Khevsurs are the warlike macho 'good servant' and the Pshavs the effeminate poetry-loving 'bad servant':

Love poetry is relatively less well represented [in the Khevsur poetic corpus]. In this branch the Khevsurs sink down below the level of Pshavs. But they sink down below them not because they were not able to say poems about love as eloquently as the Pshavians,--no, this branch of poetry is not so attractive to the warlike nature of the Khevsurs. (Shanidze 1931: 013)

Apparently, Shanidze was simply wrong about the prevalence of love poetry among the Khevsurs. The relative infrequency of love poems (what Khevsurs call ‘girl-boy’ (*sakalvazho*) poems (Gogochuri 1974: 107))) appears to be a simple sampling error, love poetry is to a great extent part of the repertoire of women, and is less accessible to men who are also outsiders (Gogochuri 1974: 108). But a binary dualism between the heroic ‘good servant’ and the not-so-heroic ladies man, the ‘bad servant’, the respective heroes of heroic poetry and love poetry, respectively figuring the ethnic binarism of ‘Khevsur’ and ‘Pshav’ poetic composition, partly reflects an indigenous viewpoint, but is one-sided. For everything in Pshav-Khevsur culture is two-sided (including the local ethnic binarism between Pshav and Khevsur!), and for all the admiration of the sacrifices of heroes, it remains that everyone takes lovers. Women especially praise living men in ‘love poetry’, and men praise dead heroes in ‘heroic poetry’, true. But what do women find praiseworthy in their lovers? Khevsur women, in general, are attracted to men who have the properties of ‘good servants’, heroic, gallant, brave, attractive, self-controlled, well-dressed, and indifferent to girls. Khevsur men who are too openly concerned with matters of love, who follow girls around like a ‘bad servant’, are derided as *kalachuna* (‘cowardly’, ‘sissy’), this is why the man must not display his love openly or ‘go to’ the girl (Baliauri 1991: 17). Men, too, in the very act of seeming indifferent to women, concerning themselves with dueling, war, and other heroic, public matters, make themselves attractive in the eyes of women. Indeed, men deliberately seek out duels (‘good servant’ behavior), secretly not merely *because of* matters of love (jealousy, betrayal), but also *in order to* attract a lover (‘bad servant’ behavior). Khevsur love

seems as one sided as Khevsur love poetry, but this would seriously underestimate the role matters of romance play for men.

Shanidze seems to have applied the Western distinction between ‘epic’ (heroic) and ‘lyric’ (love) to organize his materials, but the indigenous classification is more complex. In indigenous terms, first of all there is the opposition in native terms between *simghere* ‘song’ and *leksa* ‘poem’ (Gogoch’uri 1974: 10). The former resemble epic poetry, the latter lyric poetry, because the themes of Khevsur and Pshav poetry are divided temporally, *simghere* in fact deals with the world of predecessors, heroes who are all dead, and *leksa* deal with contemporary life (Gogochuri 1974: 10). In fact, Khevsur poetry should be divided into three groups, of which the second two are variations, depending ultimately not on topic or expression, but the specific rhetorical goal, praise (*keba/khotba*), or blame (*sena*), as well as form. Although some forms of Khevsur poetry, such as love poems, superficially resemble lyric poetry, in Khevsur ‘lyric’ there is not the lyric focus on personal expression, here too the expression of love (called locally ‘desire’) typically take the form of praise of the lover and cannot be confused with lyric expression (Gogochuri 1974: 119-120). In *simghere* only praise is possible, because we are talking about positive public models, paragons, who are long dead, bordering on the one side on the world of myths, *andrezebi* (men’s genres), and on the other on the world of the recently dead, the poetry of lament and loss, women’s genres. In *leksa* either praise or blame is possible, since we are talking about the world of contemporaries. Absent from *simghere* is humor, and humorous, joking or satirical poems about contemporaries is the world of the *leksa* and in particular the *shairi* (Gogochuri 1974: 10-11).

Aside from function, the three genres differ systematically in such a way that the maximally opposed genres are *simghere* and *shairi*, with *leksis* forming an intermediate category: In form the *simghere* mostly takes the form of a *dabali shairi* (8 syllable line divided 5-3 or 3-5), while the *shairi* takes the form of a *maghali shairi* (4-4), with the *leksis* doing either; the topics of the *simghere* are always in the mythic or heroic past, the *shairi* always in the everyday present, while *leksis* can be heroic or contemporary; heroic/mythic poems and the genre of *simghere* is exclusively part of the male repertoire, while poems of love and insult form the core of the female repertoire; consequently *simghere* are associated with a masculine performance style, called, *mghera* ‘singing’, often with a kind of guitar called a *panduri*, while the other forms can be sung either in this style or in the style called *leksoba* (‘reciting’) with the masculine *panduri* or the feminine instrument, the accordion (*garmoni, buzika*); lastly, the *simghere* belongs at the center of male ritual publics (*jari*), where talk of women or women themselves are equally forbidden, where the core elements of the feminine repertoire (*shairi*, love poems, accordions) are forbidden, the feminine repertoire finds its indigenous public in gatherings of young people called the *axaluxali*.

**Time and poetry: representative publicity.** The heroic poem celebrates a specific sort of relationship, the relationship of the good servant (*kai qma*) to his shrine, to his community which the shrine represents, the *gvari* or the *temi*. The *kai qma*, in the manner of his death, becomes a representative of the community (representative publicness). Each member of this community has a more or less equal reciprocal relationship to this person, the ‘good’ *qma* who died for the collectivity *saqmo*. His exploits and memory are collective property of the men of the community, and each

*sagmiro* poem belongs to a *gvari* and is sung to please the members of that *gvari*. If the guests and hosts at some congregation belong to different *gvaris*, the hosts will sing *sagmiro* songs that belong to the guests, and the guest will in turn do the same for the hosts. These are songs about those ‘who had died in battle (*lashkarshi*) and for the people. Likewise those warriors who died to strengthen the face of village (*soplis piris gamagrebisa*) and the defense of its women’ (Ochiauri 2005:309).

Heroic songs are unlike poems in that the person celebrated in a poem is not only dead, the world of predecessors, but must have died for specific reasons, while a poem (*leksis*) is mostly about those who are alive, the world of contemporaries (though ‘heroic poems’ (*leksis*) also exist, inasmuch as the *leksis* is a neutral middling genre). In fact *leksis* or *shairi* is specifically forbidden or shameful to compose or recite for persons in mourning (Gogochuri 1974: 34-6). For this reason, perhaps, Gogochuri notes, there are some parallels between the poetry of mourning (exclusively by women) and that small portion of heroic poetry which is performed by women (Gogochuri 1974: 65). As Gogochuri notes there is a widespread misapprehension in Georgia that heroic poetry is especially composed by women in the mountains, which appears to be incorrect for the Khevsurs. What appears to be the case is that poetry of mourning, both graveside lament (*xmit natirali*) and mournful heroic poems are the province of women. Those few heroic poems that are composed by women are composed with apology (Gogochuri 1974: 64-6). As heroes pass from being the recent individual dead (objects of mourning, property of individual mourning families) to the heroic collective dead (objects of hyperbolic praise, representative publicity) they pass from the repertoire of women to the repertoire of men. Moreover, heroic songs differ from other genres about the world of predecessors in that

they celebrate those who died at some point *between* the mythic past (the topic of *andrezebi*, myths, which tell of the founding of communities by semi-divine beings) and the recently deceased (those whose life and exploits are remembered by *contemporaries* with pain and sorrow in various forms of genres related to lamenting the dead, *tirili*). The dead represent the unity of the living group (representative publicness), living warriors are praised with *leksis*, recently dead heroes are mourned, long dead heroes are recalled with *simghere*. For the living praise or blame is possible, for the long dead, only praise.

Of old the Khevsurs had such rules: they would say poems (*leksebi*) to living warriors and praise them, they would recall the dead with eulogies (*shendoba*) and give them respect. With this they would give cheer to the young, who occupied themselves and protected their rules. (Ochiauri 2005:309)

Others, hearing of the fame of these men, reflect on their own lives and wish “I wish I could make such a name and then die. No one will know of my death and they will always remember such people with names” (Ochiauri 2005: 66). Thus, an important part of the function of poetry, especially *simghere* and heroic *leksis*, is ‘making a name’ (*saxelis kna* [Gogochuri 1974: 192-3]), that is, creating fame for a departed hero, turning them into public persons, and establishing that man’s life as a model for imitation by the living. The opposite is true, if praise ‘makes name’, poems of censure can destroy the name of living persons, and are feared for that reason (Gogochuri 1974: 23-5). A bad

deed, publicized by ‘becoming a *shairi*’ (*shairis gaxdoma*), has powerful destructive effects on the prestige of the addressee (Gogochuri 1974: 24).

### **Names, Pseudonyms, and Fame**

‘A good poem is like a bird, whence it flies and where it is flying, no one knows’

-- Khevsur poet *k’undza* (*gamakhela ch’inch’arauli*) (Gogochuri 1974: 38)

The folklorist Shanidze in general followed his European predecessors in defining folklore as a mode of textual circulation that differed in every respect from print culture, from authorship to mode of circulation to kind of public:

When I say “folk poetry”, I mean such poetry, that was born, developed and circulates among the working people of the village, among the peasantry, in that social circle, which is at work and labor and mostly ignorant of reading and writing. This is that poetry, which spreads usually by oral transmission from one man to another and from the older generation to the younger. Its preserver and defender is the memory of many persons and this is the reason that its form and content is mutable.... (Shanidze 1931: 5).

Such a definition of folk poetry certainly animated my colleague Nugzar in our search for folkloric texts (above). However, it would seem that Khevsurs are bad at folklore by these definitions (still active in Georgian folklore), their poetry was neither characterized

by anonymous texts nor entirely oral composition and circulation. After all, contrary to Shanidze's assumptions, ethnographers from the period he was collecting noted that the Khevsurs were in the main literate to varying degrees. Further, even if oral composition and circulation played a crucial role in Khevsur folklore, so too did letters, post cards, and writing in general. Sometimes the Khevsurs talked about their poems as 'written' even if they were spoken.

The other assumption implicit in Georgian folklore studies is that 'folklore' involves not only a kind of circulation (as above) but a kind of authorship predicated on that circulation, that is, anonymous (or original author forgotten) and collective authorship, composed and relayed orally so the product of the same people in which it circulates, that is the author is 'the folk'. Here too the Pshavs and Khevsurs seem to violate the general principle of folklore, for Pshav-Khevsur poetry in general is noted for the way that many poems write the author's identity directly into the poem (*matkvami*), either at the beginning or the end of the poem. This may be a pseudonym (*tik'una*), of course, and many folk authors compose under many pseudonyms, depending on the style of the poem. In fact, named poems are so much the norm that it becomes more interesting to treat the anonymous poems among the Pshavs and Khevsurs as the exceptions rather than the rule. Some poem types, in fact, are nearly always anonymous, not, as Shanidze suggests, because they are so old the author is forgotten, but because their content or function is such that using a *matkvami* would be inconsistent. Such, for example, are certain mythological cycles of poetry, also mourning poems, and also, as we will see, certain kinds of insulting poems, each anonymous for different reasons. Mythological poems portray a cosmological context for which individual human

authority and authorship are simply inadequate, here, as the Ancient Greeks would use the *Muses* as an author, the Khevsurs use a simple ‘voice from nowhere’, and in some cases, interestingly, invoke their musical instruments as the speaker of the poem, beginning their poem with an invocation to the panduri, or, rarely, the accordion. On the other hand, insult poems which are directed at specific persons here and now, here anonymity provides a protection for the author and those obliged to fight on behalf of the author.

Anonymity is particularly characteristic of poetry by women. Women’s repertoires are largely confined to the poetry of mourning (the recent dead of mourning poetry, but not the heroic dead of heroic *simghere*) and the ‘everyday’ poetry of the *leksa* and *shairi* variety. Love poetry, or rather, poetry praising the lover, is largely something limited to women, and women’s occasions of public performance of poetry is limited too to less consequential side venues like the *axaluxali* (the gathering of the young people), and not the more consequential venues like the *jari* (the gathering of the older men). Public performance of poetry (*leksoba*) was considered shameful for women, but women were free to compose poetry and recite it, but not ‘publicly’ (Gogolauri 1996:5-8). Pshav-Khevsur women composed poetry freely, performed it in limited public events (such as the *axaluxali*, but not the *jari*), but nevertheless such poetry circulated widely but at the same time somewhat anonymously: little is known of the authors and their addressees (Gogolauri 1996: 6, Gogochauri 1974: 94), except in those cases where a woman publicly reclaimed her poetry as she grew older. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Grigol Apshinashvili wrote in the Georgian newspaper Iveria about Pshavians (among whom, let us remember, men as well as women compose love poetry, unlike the Khevsurs):

Women take part in the composition of *leksa* and *shairi* poetry (*leksoba-shairoba*) too, but not as openly (*ashkarad*), as men, reciting poetry publicly (*saxalxod leksoba*) like a man is very shameful for a woman in Pshavi. While a woman is young, she composes poems (*leksobs*) secretly (*daparulad*), when she gets old, then she no longer is ashamed as much and often teaches poems she herself has composed (*tavis natkvam leksebs*) to young girls and boys. (Cited in Gogolauri 1996: 5)

As Gogochuri and Gogolauri both stress, anonymity and pseudonymity are particularly characteristic of love poetry. As Gogochuri points out, not only the author, but the addressee, of love poetry, are concealed, the addressee frequently given a specific nickname in the poem that only the boy and girl concerned would know (Gogochuri 1974: 93). One of the most powerful motivations for women to compose anonymously is because of both the serious consequences of insulting *saseno* poetry as well as the love poetry of praise.

**Places and occasions of performance: *jari* and *axaluxali*.** The occasions for the performance of these genres, and genres of performance associated with them, in turn serve to divide the social universe into two spheres, what we might call with caution ‘indigenous public’ and ‘indigenous private’ (or even ‘counterpublic’) spheres. The occasions appropriate for the performance of heroic poems constitutes what might be called the ‘indigenous public sphere’, what is called the *jari*, denoting the older members of the community, especially the men, whose opinions matter and who are collected together to discuss matters defined as being important to the community as a whole,

‘public’ matters, you might say. The *jari* is a form of representative publicness in much the same way that the *kai qma* is, that is, they are those who represent the community in battle as well as ritual. As a result, there is an equal and opposite list of things that might be called ‘private’, which are barred from discussion at the *jari*, and all of these deal with women.

The term *jari* not only includes the sense of ‘representative publicness’ (the portion of the community that represents the whole in ritual or in battle), but it can also mean the public before whom a performance occurs (as in a theatrical audience). As Gogochuri notes (1974: 49), Khevsurs are particularly fond of performing poetry (of any genre whatsoever) for their own entertainment, so much so that they have a word for such performance without a public, called *sak’utreuli* (‘for oneself’, cf. modern Georgian *sak’utari* ‘one’s own’, *sak’utreba* ‘property’, the Pshavian poetess Babulia above refers to certain lines of the poem as *sak’utari* ‘of my own authorship’ as the opposite of *xalxuri* ‘folk’). The opposite mode of performance, one with a public, is called *jarze* ‘Before the *jari*’. So the term *jari* in some sense means ‘assembly, people, public’ (in modern Georgian *sajaro* means ‘public’). Thus any performance is classified as to whether or not the performance is ‘public’ or ‘private’.

Gogochuri further divides contexts of performance into three different kinds according to venue. On the one hand, there are ritual events connected with the shrine, the *jari* in a more limited sense. At these events certain kinds of poetry, particularly those performed as *mghera* dealing with heroic or mythological themes, are performed. Banned from the *jari* (composed of shrine officiants and older men who have a special cosmological status of ‘representative publicness’) are poems that deal with love or ‘girl-

boy' (*sakalvazho*) poems as they are called, or, indeed, any talk about women at all (Ochiauri 2005: 37-8). The thematics of these shrine events are as masculine as the public, women do not take part in them as topic or as participant (Gogochuri 1974: 51-2). At some such rituals the 'feminine' accordion (*garmoni*, 'buzik'a') is not allowed, only instruments like the *panduri* that are appropriate for *mghera*. The second sort of event is typified for Gogochuri by the wedding. If the shrine ritual is like the type of genre that predominates there, the *simghere*, then the wedding is as mixed as the *leksa*, for here the whole repertoire of folk poetry, more or less, is possible (Gogochuri 1974: 53). The third sort of event, the *axaluxali*, or gathering of young people, is really a sub-event within the others. Some extremely grave shrine events do not have an *axaluxali*, at others it exists at the suffering of the more official gathering of older people, the *jari*, but at weddings there is always one (Gogochuri 1974: 53). Regardless of the broader event type, the important thing is that as a sub-event it exists in a specific 'counter-public' relationship to the 'public' that is the *jari*, it is a public that is aware of its subordinate, non-representative, status (Warner 2002). Again, at the *axaluxali* all genres are possible, like the wedding, the atmosphere here is completely the opposite of the somber atmosphere of the *jari*: "The "*axaluxali*" context is the most free and the least restrained (*shezghuduli*), because elders do not take part in it" (Gogochuri 1974: 54).

For informants, the *jari* and the *axaluxali* are opposites, as different as the singing styles (*mghera/leksoba*) and themes (heroic/mythic versus love) that dominate in them. At some matters of extreme gravity, such as blood feud resolutions, the matter was deemed so serious that a separate meeting of the *axaluxali* would not be allowed in general. In some cases, the young men would meet in the same gathering as the elders, in

which case the appropriate genres, aside from singing heroic songs, would be an opportunity for the young men to learn the shrine founding myths, the *andrezebi*, from the older generation (Ochiauri 2005: 92, 255). In general, knowledge of heroic poems and myths is the defining form of authority that allows a man respect in the *jari*, marking ones transition from a light minded young man composing love songs to a serious minded adult, from ‘bad *qma*’ to ‘good *qma*’: ‘If a man knows many heroic poems, they hold that man in regard—‘he knows many songs and myths (*andrezebi*)’ (Ochiauri 2005: 38)

The Pshavians at such gatherings of the *axaluxali* prided themselves that when drunk, they would not fight, among the Khevsurs, following the local ethnic dualism by which the typical Pshav is the ‘bad *qma*’ and the Khevsur is the ‘good *qma*’, it is the opposite, fights were common (Ochiauri 1991: 162). As with all sociability, events that bring people together in amity, and make them get drunk, are also events full of potential for conflict and division (Karp 1980). And, indeed, much of the lower forms of poetry are designed for precisely this purpose, to incite conflict, especially among the *axaluxali*. Part of the crucial division in function then is that *simghere* poems, which only allow praise of people long dead, emphasize unity and amity as well, whereas *saseno* poems, *shairi* poems, which can only be performed at the *axaluxali*, emphasize joking or insults of living people, and are in fact *designed* to produce physical conflict. Oddly, then, events (*jari*) where women cannot participate, where the dead are praised, are also events where they talk about strife, conflict and reconciliation (movement from conflict to amity), whereas the *axaluxali*, in which women play a major role, are places where discord is seeded by poetry and conflicts begin. Thus, at least, is how it is imagined (cf.

Serematakis (1991) for parallels). *Saseno* poems, which form the central core of the repertoire of women at the axaluxali (Ochiauri 1980: 125), lead to conflict:

Some would recite [leksobdnen] joking poems, some would recite about imprisonment, army life, and occasionally ‘*saseno*’ (offensive, insulting) poems (if there were here such young men and women, who came angry with each other). A fight frequently would follow *saseno* poems. If a boy offended a girl in some way with a poem or by saying something else, young men close to her would not tolerate this and the matter could end in a fight with short swords. Out of fear of this women frequently hid their annoyance, they would not disclose the fact to their male friends and relatives. Often such an enmity would happen, that one *gvari* (lineage sharing the same last name) would be incited against *gvari* over women. This was very shameful. (Ochiauri 1980: 30)

The consequences, then, of *saseno* poems, were potentially quite severe. As a result, such poems are not enunciated with the loud ‘public’ voice of the *simghere*, but are circulated out of the limelight, in whispered asides (like the relationships that provoke them), this forming a third, unofficial mode of performance opposed to both *mghera* and *leksoba*. Just as certain kinds of mythological *simghere* differ from ordinary daily life *leksa* in that the author does not write themselves into the poem (*matkvami*, discussed above) as Khevsurs often do in ordinary poems, in these *saseno* poems the identity of author and addressee was blurred or erased. The anonymity of mythological poems produces a greater sense of ‘publicness’ (a mythological voice from nowhere), leading to

no questions about authorship, here the author and addressee are hidden for private reasons, particularly because men are obliged to fight over women, in effect.

In spite of this, boys and girls would not let it rest and would tell each other *saseno* poems *chumchumad* (quietly, on the sly). When they would say (such a) poem, they would conceal their own identity (*vinaoba*) and often the poet (*melekse*) would completely hide to whom the poem was addressed and even the teller [the person relaying the poem] did not know, they too would say their own reply poem (*sapasukho lekss*) in such a way that [someone] would not know who they were talking about. *Saseno* poems said about women annoyed all the women, if they recited it in an 'axaluxali'. *Saseno* poems by women also annoyed all the boys (young men), and they too would without fail reply with a *saseno* poem. (Ochiauri 1980:30)

Naturally, after a *saseno* poem is recited, they began to seek out the identity of the author (*matkvami*), and sometimes someone else, irritable for some reason, would announce the motive and identity of the author, which could, in turn, lead to a fight with short swords. Under such circumstances, poetry, which caused the conflict, might also ameliorate it, as someone else might then pick up the *panduri* and recite a poem whose purpose was to entertain and make those present forget their foul mood and wash the taste of conflict from their minds (Ochiauri 1980:31). This would be a *lekxi* of another genre. If, however, men decided to fight on matters related to women and poetry, then here, too, women played a decisive role in restraining the men. Women would run and take hold of

men who intended to fight, and a man so held could not free himself from the woman who held him without great shame (Ochiauri 1980:31). Finally, if women were few, and men many, this method would not work. Here a single woman could take off her headscarf (*mandeli*) and throw it on the ground between the men. Out of respect for the headscarf and the gesture, men were expected to restrain themselves from fighting (Ochiauri 1980:32). In such cases, depending on how far the fight had gone and its relative seriousness, amity could not be restored between the combatants without some ritual gesture of reconciliation. Drinking, which leads to poetry and fighting, can also be the means of reconciliation between fighters.

### **The ritual meaning of substances: Languages of Liquids and Metals**

Drinking vodka leads to love between boys and girls, to boys fighting (about girls), and to ritual reconciliation of the boys. Ritual reconciliations between enemies take the same sort of form of oaths of friendship and even love, and the degree of the offense elicits different degrees of ritual oaths of friendship. Interestingly, all involve drinking together, but the nature of the offense in each case dictates that they drink *different* substances together to effect a reconciliation. Sometimes they drink vodka, sometimes other things, as we will see below. In such a circumstance, different material substances have differing ritual contexts and differing ritual effects. For example, one particularly serious ritual of reconciliation only beer can be drunk, leading to the conclusion that beer is more 'serious', more of a ritual drink, than vodka. According to a nineteenth century ethnographer of the Pshavs and Khevsurs,

This doubtful matter [of death after a duel when it is unclear whether this is due to the wounds suffered] the judges must look into. The nature of the matter requires many judges. The matter itself however must be decided by the oath of the accused. This is an oath, which is at one and the same time a reconciliation also, usually occurs with a big event. The owner of the deceased by prepare a table on the grave of the dead man, of enormous dumplings and fried bread; there must also be beer, vodka is not possible (*'It is the drink of devils'* [they say]), (Khizanishvili 1940:65, emphasis added)

This is, of course, the context in which Khevsurs specifically forbid the use of vodka, because it is 'the drink of devils'. The question is, when can vodka be a ritual drink, and when can it not, and what other ritual drinks are there for what occasions?

First of all, whether or not the performance of an act of ritual drinking is *performative*, that is, *effective* ('performative' in the sense of performing or achieving a ritual transformation or change, a performative utterances 'does' something to its context by being uttered) often depends on the *kind of drink*. Both material substance and words are both con-constitutive: here it would be a mistake to predecide the matter of which is more essential by talking of 'performative utterances', rather we will talk of 'performative acts'. Here we should be wary of a Western philosophical bias in the analysis of performatives, a tradition stretching back to Henry Maine, that treats oaths and other species of 'contract' as a matter of the performative power of *words*, just as relations of 'status' are based on the performative power of *substances*. For example, Austin's famous treatment of performative *utterances* treats the essence of performativity

as being a matter of language, ‘doing things with words’, vaguely demoting all non-linguistic material conditions as being mere ‘felicity conditions’ (that is, background conditions that must be in place for the words to do their performative work). This reflects well our own folk theory that contracts (the core example of performative utterance) are, like words, the best example of (modern) conventional signs, just as shared substance (status) are the best example of (traditional) natural signs. Applying Austin’s theory of performativity to ritual without change, then, tends to focus the whole analysis on the ‘performative moment’, a specific *speech* act, and treat the remainder, the bulk, both verbal and material, of the ritual event into a mere set of ‘felicity conditions’.

Let’s return to oaths of reconciliation as an example of a set of rituals that are distinguished primarily by the form of liquid involved. We have already seen one of these, a particularly serious one, which is distinguished by the fact that the two enemies can only be reconciled by using beer, and not vodka, because ‘vodka is the drink of devils’. The context of the above quote is this: after a duel, a person dies and it is unclear whether the wounds sustained during the duel were the proximal cause. In this case, the accused can avoid a more serious set of problems up to and including a feud by arranging a special oath, involving the drinking of beer, and not vodka, together. There is a feast on the grave of the dead man, the judge, chosen by lot, and eight witnesses related to the judge, all must prick their ears and allow blood to dribble onto the grave, the meaning of which is that if they swear falsely, they will become the slave of the dead man in the afterlife. The whole event is characterized by a good deal of ritual elaboration and gravity which will not concern us, except for this, returning to the beer:

After this an old man will play the role of *khucesi* [ritual officiant] and consecrate the table [where the food is]. The oath swearers and the next of kin of the dead man take up a glass (*tasi*) full of beer; in the beer flecks of silver (*chpkhekili vercxli*) has been mixed in. Both sides thrice in turn will drink from the glass; then they sit down at the table and with the judges they eat bread on the grave. (Khizanishvili 1940: 66)

Beer must be drunk before witnesses, and moreover, the beer must contain silver shavings. Such silver shavings appear in a whole series of oaths of reconciliation, what is generally called the ‘oath of silver’. For example, in another serious oath of reconciliation (*piris sheqra*, Khizanishvili 1940: 66-7), the two enemies must drink together in front of two judges, one from each side. But what will they drink? Does it matter?

There, in the house the judges make both sides drink *beer or vodka* three times and kiss each other on the mouth.... (Khizanishvili 1940: 67)

The liquid, *in this case*, has nothing to do with the performativity of the toast. That is not to say that the materiality of the drink is irrelevant, however. Here it is not the fluid, but a third thing, the presence of metal, that makes it a ‘ritual drink’. As long as the metal silver is involved, the actual nature of the fluid which serves as its carrier is relatively irrelevant, it can even be a non-alcoholic fluid: clarified butter or honey will do as well as beer or vodka.

... In the cup they scrape off silver, and if not—they place an *abazi* (a small silver coin valued at 20 kopeks) or an *uzaltuni* (a silver coin valued at 10 kopeks). In case they have nothing to drink at hand, they make them drink clarified butter or honey from a cup; in every case scraped silver, or an *abazi* or an *uzaltuni* is necessary; then a brotherly meal begins. (Khizanishvili 1940: 66-7)

On the one hand, there is a sense in which the fluid is materially relevant, it certainly makes the difference between these two rituals. The more serious oath must be sworn on beer, even vodka is too profane, while the less serious oath can be sworn on beer or vodka, by preference, but in material conditions where neither can be obtained, any drinkable fluid will do, clarified butter or honey. Secondly, however, both of these rituals involve another element added to the fluid, silver scrapings. Again, silver scrapings are obligatory in the serious ritual, but in the less serious one, silver coins can be substituted, but in general some object from the class of objects that count as ‘silver’ must be added. Oaths involving silver are always witnessed. Silver is the substance of performativity, the substance of public oaths. Silver is the substance of *representative publicness*.

Versions of the oath of silver are quite widespread in mountain Georgia. With it, relations can be established not only to reconcile same gender enemies, but also to establish friendships between or across genders. The ritual can take slightly differing forms and differing functions. For one, among the Phsavs and Khevsurs more serious versions of an oath of brotherhood or reconciliation substitute a natural substance, mixing

the blood of the two parties into the drinks instead of silver, or even engage in a form of ‘milk-relation’ where the offender is adopted by pretending to drink mother’s milk from the breast of a woman. In such cases the social substance, silver, is part of a continuum of substances which also include the natural bodily substances blood and milk. Sharing blood and milk, bodily substances, to create an artificial relationship modeled on a kinship relationship, has an obvious naturalizing symbolism, but what is unclear is how silver enters into this continuum of shared substance.

In some communities, such as among the neighbouring Tush, sworn-brotherhood (*dzmobili*) relations between men are affirmed by drinking an alcoholic beverage (vodka or beer) and the metal introduced into it is lead from a bullet (the symbolism is martial, lead is like silver, but it is also a metal associated with masculine pursuits). If at least one of the partners is a woman, then the fluids are different (instead of vodka or beer we find cow’s milk) and the metal is also different (instead of lead from a bullet, a silver coin is used). Gender oppositions are marked both by the symbolism of the liquid (‘masculine’ drinks versus ‘feminine’ drinks) and the functional symbolism of the metal ((bullet) lead versus (coin) silver, remembering that Tushian women use coins also as a key form of personal decoration, just as bullet cartridges are for men).

But elsewhere, notably in Pshav-Khevsureti, we don’t find bits of lead being drunk, we *always* find silver. For Khevsurs and Pshavs, traditionally, all metallic wealth can be divided into two (or three) categories representing two spheres of exchange (Bohannon 1955). Human wealth is typified by objects of iron and especially copper: the metals out of which tools are made. The wealth of adornment, silver, generally classified with gold (and often referred to as if it were in fact gold), is the wealth of the shrine gods, it is the

wealth of sacrifice: it is used (in coin form or not) to adorn clothing and weapons, of course, adornments of persons, but otherwise the accumulation of wealth in silver and gold is uniquely the attribute of the divinities who represent the solidarity of the community. An early observer, Vakhushti Batonishvili noted of the Pshavs and Khevsurs that “Neither a Pshav nor a Khevsur, if he should find gold or silver can in any way (veraraid) use it for himself, but gives it to the sanctuary of Lasha” (cited in Kiknadze 1997: 15).

Hence silver (and gold) are intimately associated with sacrifice, rituals that affirm the solidarity of the community as ‘serfs’ *qmebi* of the same otherworldly lord to whom all such metals must be sacrificed, and this metal has the same range of ritual functions one associates with beer, in fact. This association of silver and beer as otherworldly, as opposed to base metals and vodka, becomes particularly clear in the way they are directly associated in shrine rituals. For one, while the hidden treasure of the shrine is said to be composed of gold and silver (even today the small shrines of Pankisi Pshavians are filled with small silver coins), the visible or revealed part of this wealth consists often of silver cups (or functional equivalents, including horns), in fact, the treasure of the god is usually called the *tas-gandzi* ‘cups and other treasure’ (Kiknadze 1997: 90, Ochiauri 2005: 81), or other objects like sacred ‘flags’ (*drosha*), and also *panduris* (which have a mythological origin and ritual function, and mythological gold and silver *panduris* are part of the treasure of a shrine [Gogochuri 1974: 102]) any of which can in addition be elaborately decorated with additional silver elements, which are themselves objects of sacrifice: chains, crosses, and buttons (Ochiauri 2005: 81, 107, 244). Those kinship

groups that have a particularly salient political function in the region are those that have such silver treasuries (Tuite, personal communication).<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 1-3: Silver cups with silver adornments**



Silver cups decorated with buttons, crosses and other elements

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<sup>4</sup> Different kinds of sacred flags are distinguished by the metal used to decorate them: the flag decorated with iron spear points (*shubiani drosha*) is used in fights and battle (107), the ‘flag with [silver] crosses’ (*jvriani drosha*) is the ‘travelling flag’ (*mgzavri drosha*), the flag that is taken from the sanctuary into other villages and non-shrine spaces (ibid. 244, Ochiauri 1991; 140).



Silver cups play crucial ritual functions, including the drinking of beer. Even the exceptions to this ritual alignment of silver and beer are revealing. In one particularly crucial ritual of commensal drinking of beer at the shrine, the *saqino* ritual found at most Pshav-Khevsur shrines, each male member of the shrine will drink beer or sometimes wine (brought in from vineyards associated with each mountain shrine in the plains) out of one single large such cup (Ochiauri 1991: 11-2, 77-79, 120), an obvious and central ritual of incorporation and unity (Kiknadze 1997: 92-3). Unlike many shrine rituals, where the cup is silver (e.g. Ochiauri 1991: 72, 137), here the cup, the *saqino tasi*, is very large and often made of copper (Ochiauri 1991: 77). Nowadays, any steel bucket seems to serve the purpose.

Why would the most 'sacred' of the ritual glasses be made of the 'base metal', copper? One version of the origin story of *saqino* attempts to explain it thus, again, in

terms of a general language of metals. The origin of *saqeino* is sought in a great battle where the mountain people defeated a Tatar Khan (an etymological story since *saqeino* means 'for the Khan'). The victorious heroes found a great store of gold and silver wealth as booty. They said to the people: 'Let us divide this wealth amongst us equally'.

However, the people in turn told the heroes, that 'This victory was because of you, you should have the wealth'. The heroes tried to get the people to take this wealth, but they refused it. The heroes then sacrificed the wealth to the various shrine divinities, dividing the wealth equally among them. Here we see the 'noble' metals can not be divided equally among the people as human wealth, to keep such wealth, even divided in an equalitarian fashion, would be divisive and hybriatic. They forgot one such divinity, and one of the heroes became ill until he was warned and made a sacrifice of 18 silver cups to that shrine, and to another seven silver cups. Now, these cups, *saqeino cups*, were cups made of silver, as large as tortoise shells. So the original *saqeino tasi* was of silver, and the arrival of them was a crucial moment in establishing the 'language of metals'.

However, the wealth of shrines is also desired by men, and men stole these original vessels, and sold them far away, so they could not be retrieved. Of the seven cups at the shrine of the Archangel of Tsibaurta, only one, the smallest, remained. In the end, all of the silver cups were stolen, hence, the existing cups are all of copper (Ochiauri 1991: 152-3).

In the *saqeino* ritual itself silver reappears as the counter gift, the sacrifice, for each male member who so drinks must leave silver money for the shrine. Each male member may also invite others to drink and pay for them to do so. The silver money is tossed into the *saqeino tasi* which is full of beer or wine, and the man then drinks on his knees,

without touching the *saqeino tasi* with his hands. Each man (women were not allowed) could drink as many times as he paid or was paid for, as they might wish (Ochiauri 1991: 11). Unlike the oath of silver, where silver takes the form of substance (metal) first and only secondarily and accidentally under the form of coin, in this ritual the fact that it is coin is primary, essentially, and the fact that it is silver is secondary. The silver sacrificed verges on a monetary *payment* buying privileges to drink, and unlike *sacrificial* silver which is withheld from exchange, this silver will be used as money for the shrine's expenses, for example, maintenance of the vineyards of the shrine in the plains (Ochiauri 1991: 12, 79). However, like the oath of silver, the ritual is one of incorporation, silver and beer (or wine) are in both cases commingled and imbibed to create linkages between persons. Even here silver coin has a special status, the amount one sacrifices is decided by the sacrificer, there is no 'price', and doing so is entirely voluntary. Only silver money can be thrown into the drink. In some places only silver can be so sacrificed (Ochiauri 1991: 11), in others paper money in the absence of silver money can sometimes be used to 'buy' the rights to drink, but this paper money (as well as excessively large payments of silver) must not be mixed with the wine of the *saqeino tasi*, but are placed in a second, dry container to the side (Ochiauri 1991: 79, 120). Copper money was not allowed as a sacrifice at all (Ochiauri 1991: 79). Silver and beer then represent in different ways otherworldly substances, specifically opposed to copper or vodka, that bring individuals into the otherworldly community of the lord.

What is the relationship between sacrificing silver to the gods as an act of personal incorporation into the community and incorporation of silver into ones body in the oath of silver? A clue here is found in the so-called 'language of the crosses' (*jvart ena*), the

special stylistic register used in particular by special religious charismatic figures called *kadag* ‘prophet’ (Ochiauri 1954: 128-135): ‘The *kadag* cries out publicly (*saxalxod*), as if the *jvari* the *xvtishshvili*, speaks in its language. At this time the force of the *xvtishshvili* has entered the organism of the *kadag*....He has become a divine force and what the *jvaris* want, he tells forth (*gamtkma*)’ (Ochiauri 2005: 342). Often the divine language, *jvart ena* (lit. ‘language of crosses’, Pshavian *xatis ena* ‘language of icons’), will use simple replacement words or phrases, often using part for whole tropes, naming a thing after its most characteristic feature, such as calling dogs ‘the barking one’ or calling sheep ‘the wooly ones’ (Ochiauri 1954: 134). It is interesting then, that a good many things are ‘golden’ or ‘silver’ in this language, especially things pertaining to the shrine divinity itself (its sacred fields are called *ker-okroni* ‘barley-gold’) (Ochiauri 1954: 131), whereas silver things themselves are sometimes ‘white’. But most important is that the word for ‘lad, man’ in *jvart ena* is ‘silver button’ or ‘gold button’ (*vercxlis/okros burtvi/ghili*) (Ochiauri 1954: 130-131). The Pshavians too have the Shrine divinities refer to their ‘serfs’ (*qmani*) as ‘gold buttons’ (*okros ghilebi* Makalatia 1934: 134). (Women, on the other hand, are not ‘silver buttons’, exiled as they are from the masculine world of the shrine, the word is *bizhioni*, a term of uncertain etymology).<sup>5</sup>

Moving from linguistic metaphor to material symbol, an analogy is revealed between the way men are referred to as silver buttons in the language of the crosses and the way the silver cups representing the shrine god are decorated with actual silver

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<sup>5</sup> It appears that all talk of women and things relating to women was banned from the shrine precinct (Ochiauri 2005: 37). Further women were not allowed to utter the sacred name of some divinities like Iakhsari in some communities (Ochiauri 1991: 77).

buttons (figure 3): Just as the flag or silver cups that represents the divinity are decorated with actual silver buttons, so too the men of the community, as ‘serfs’, are tied to the shrine. Just as silver belongs to the shrine (expressed by its sacrifice to the shrine gods), so too do the ‘silver buttons’ (the male members of the community who have access to the shrine). Just as sacred objects are made of silver themselves and bedecked with silver adornments, so too the men of the community partake of a *single substance* with the shrine divinity (men are *natsiliani* ‘having a part of’ the same substance as the gods [Tuite 1999, 2002]).<sup>6</sup> This shared substance appears to be silver. Men are ‘silver’, silver is the metal of ‘representative publicness’, publicness as a incorporated substance, public relations between men (and women) can be formed by shared consumption of silver.

Silver is strongly associated with divinity and masculinity throughout the cosmology. Silver cups, and sacrifices of silver, for example, are found in rituals associated with male shrine divinities. By contrast, the various feminine powers, especially the semi-demonic female hosts, the *dobili*, as well as semi-demonic *devta deda*, and another female *genius loci* called the *adgilis deda*, have sacrificial substances that differ systematically from the male divinity in all respects. All such divinities have shrines consisting of piles of rocks that are outside the space of the main shrine complex, therefore relatively impure. The *adgilis deda*, for example, is a shrine that is unique not only in that it is *inside the village*, but ‘in a central place in the village, the most impure and filthy place you please’ (Ochiauri 2005: 82), because femininity is associated with

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<sup>6</sup> Women, it might be argued, are represented by sacrifices of silken cloth, *Baghdadi*, tied to the flag along with the ‘silver buttons’ representing the men, in each case an item associated with personal adornment is tied to an item of the shrine (Tuite, personal communication).

impurity. The animal sacrifices, too, are different: for *dobili* the animals sacrificed are goats or kids (according to Robakidze (1994: 217), the Khevsurs say ‘the goat is of the devil’ (eshkmak’eulia)), while shrine gods there must be a ‘worthy sacrifice’ (*ghirseul sak’lav*), either sheep or cattle (Ochiauri 2005: 81). The symbolism of the opposition between goats and sheep follows a common theme found from the Middle East to Europe, where sheep are opposed to goats as tame to half-wild animals (goats are tame animals whose pasture is wilderness), thus here representing the masculine ‘core’ of the community (sheep) and its semi-demonic feminine other (goats). Not only do the *dobili* not receive silver valuables as sacrifice, but their own ritual cups (12 in number, like the *sadobilo* cakes sacrificed to them) differ from those of shrine gods in that they are made specifically out of clay and not silver (Ochiauri 2005: 373).

Silver and gold represent ‘accumulable’ wealth for shrine divinities, wealth to be piled up, hidden, cached away and revealed in rituals, but for men they are also a form of ‘personalistic’ wealth closely linked to physical embodied adornment. That is, silver is not only metaphorically associated with masculinity, but also metonymically, for men both wear silver items, and are allowed to come into physical proximity, to touch, silver objects of the shrine, as when drinking from a silver cup. The Pshavian poetess Khvaramze (floruit circa 1840-1890, Gogolauri 1996: 20), whose life was characterized by a tragic inability to be near her beloved, in one poem fantasizes being transformed into a series of objects of silver and gold in order to be able to be always close to her beloved, from whom she is physically estranged: she wishes to be a silver cup (such as is used by men only at a shrine), a silver ring, and a ‘gold ball’ (*okros burtvai*) the very term used in

*jvart ena* (the language of the gods) to mean ‘man’, and silver money, all objects of silver or gold.

<i>Vercxlis tasadamc makcia,</i>	Let me be turned into a silver cup
<i>Ro ghvinit agevsebodi,</i>	That I would be filled with wine for you
<i>Daperili mkna ts’itlada,</i>	Let me be burnished redly,
<i>Shamsvamdi, shagergebodi,</i>	You would drink me, it would befit you,
<i>An mkna vercxlis satite,</i>	Or make me into a silver ring,
<i>Ro xelze chagedebodi;</i>	That you would wear me on your hand,
<i>Ana mkna okros burtvai,</i>	Or make me into a golden ball
<i>K’altashi chageshlebodi;</i>	In your lap I would lie [?];
<i>An vercxlis pulad makcia</i>	Or let me be turned into silver money
<i>Jibshi chageqrebodi!</i>	I would collect in your pocket!

(Gogolauri 1996: 20)

All of these things are objects that will bring her physically close to her lover, but they are also all made of silver, the metal metaphorically associated with men. She continues:

<i>An sheni namglis qana mkna,</i>	or make me a field for your sickle,
<i>Ro pxaze shagech’rebodi;</i>	That I might be cut on your blade;
<i>Ana mkna vardi qoili,</i>	Or make me a rose flower,
<i>Ro p’irze dageqrebodi;</i>	That I might be strewn on your face;
<i>Ana mkna mois p’erangi,</i>	Or make me a silken shirt,

<i>Ro gulze dagadnebodi!</i>	That I might be worn out on your chest!
<i>An sheni dzma mkna mots'ile,</i>	Or make me into your brother, by your side
<i>Arodes dageqrebodi;</i>	I would never abandon you;
<i>An sheni nandauri mkna,</i>	Or make me your lover,
<i>Guls javrad chagech'rebodi!</i>	I would cut you painfully in the heart!
<i>Dzalian dats'ukhebuli</i>	Filled with longing
<i>Gzazedamc shageqrebodi</i>	Let me meet you on the road.

The insistent use of objects of silver and gold in the first stanza leads to a series of other wishes for transformation in a second stanza, into objects associated metonymically with her lover: a field to be cut by his scythe, a rose for him to smell, a silk shirt for him to wear (out). Finally moving from metonymy to identity, she wishes, as she does in other poems, to simply become a man, his brother, and then, just as quickly, from brother (*mots'ile dzma*) to lover (*nandauri* 'desired one'), showing how close the two series are in a relationship that is aligned with sworn brotherhood, where the lovers call one another 'sworn brother (*dzmobili*). Finally, a more realistic fantasy, not a transformation of self, but a transformation of circumstance, she hopes simply to encounter him on the road, with no one around.

All her wishes having in common that they are things metaphorically associated with men (objects of silver and gold) and metonymically close to her lover (objects to be worn or that come into close physical proximity to men, finally simply a wish to become a man herself): "each wish has as its justification and its only goal – proximity to the beloved" (Gogolauri 1996: 17). But her distance from her lover is both in cosmological

space (hence her desire to transform into masculine objects, objects of silver), and physical space (hence her desire to transform into objects physically attached to her lover). Her desire for physical proximity to her lover expresses itself as a desire to transform her very essence into a masculine one, into a silver object, or other object associated with men, to allow her entry into the forbidden masculine world of representative publicness, the world of silver objects, the world of beer.

**Circulatory signs: Vodka and Beer** There are strong similarities between the ‘public’ non-romantic relation of *dzombiloba*, and the ‘private’ romantic one between a boy and a girl in terms of content. What about form? And most of these relationships are constituted by some variation on an oath that involves drinking together. The term *dzmobili*, then, for the Khevsurs, operates in two very different spheres, and is constituted by an act of drinking in both (vodka). But the act of drinking that forms a ‘public’ *dobil-dzmobiloba* sworn sibling relationship takes the form of an ‘oath of silver’, it must also be witnessed, and sometimes, beer is drunk, other times, any old drink will do. In addition, stronger forms of the relationship can be formed by replacing the social substance, silver, with the bodily substance of the participants, blood. The ‘boyfriend-girlfriend’ form of *dzmobiloba*, by contrast, has none of these features. The only drink possible in this relationship is vodka. This brings us back to the differences between beer and vodka as diagnostic of the difference between ‘public’ and ‘private’ relationships.

Like silver, beer is diagnostic of the masculine universe of ritual publicity. Beer is not only a part of ritual consumption, but from start to finish beer is associated with ritual. In popular ‘orientalizing’ accounts of the Khevsurs, the fact that beer is brewed in sacred precincts (in a special structure called the *salude* ‘the place for beer’) is magnified

to the exclusion of all other buildings in the precinct and given as a further example of Khevsur paganism, the elevation of beer to an actual fetish object, the ‘chief god of the Khevsurs’:

The Khevsurs are, if you like, Christians....[Khevsur] temples house the religious effects of the Khevsurs, which are like no others in the world. They consist of huge barrels and copper pails. There is nothing else in the temple whatever. In the holy barrels beer is kept, and it is prepared in the holy pails. Beer is the chief god of the Khevsurs, and the brewers are their high priests.... (Essad Bey 120-22)

#### **Insert figure 1-4: Salude**

This sort of deliberately distorted ‘orientalizing’ account contains some truth, shrines do indeed include among their structures a building for brewing beer, although this is not the ‘holy of holies’, and the main job of certain shrine attendants is in fact to brew beer. One could say that the shrine includes within it a whole economy of beer brewing, having their own fields for grain, their own threshing floors, their own supplies of yeast, their own shrine officials whose responsibility is as brewers and their own brewing equipment, and their rituals for the drinking of the beer.

Essad Bey’s account is in a sense valuable in that its exaggerating orientalizing moment draws attention to the way that we ourselves strongly oppose technical activities of production to ritual activities (Barth 1960, Peters 1984, Asad 1988), we can also more easily imagine the sacrality or ritual qualities of drinks in their ‘ritual’ moments of

*consumption*, but production seems somehow to be opposed in our tradition to ritual activity, placing technical activities at the center of ritual architectures seeming like a kind of primitive ‘beer fetishism’. This is because because, as Asad points out (1988), our commonly held notion of ritual tends to oppose ritual as symbolic behavior to technical or practical behavior (indeed, in social anthropology, the fact that one could not understand the practical function of a given behavior was often the basis for claiming it to be ritual (Barth 1960, Peters 1984)). The Khevsurs, it would seem, make no such hard distinctions between technical and ritual, material production and symbolic elaborations. Both vodka and beer can be described in terms of a production process which focuses on the technical aspects, or a ritual process (or absence of one) that focuses on symbolic aspects, but in both cases the object qualities that provide the material for the symbolic and causal potentials of the product in circulation and consumption are drawn from both dimensions.

**Technical and ritual qualisigns.** It is true that Pshavs and Khevsurs are aware of something that might be called a technical dimension of beer and vodka production, as opposed to purely symbolic ritual elaborations. Both technical production and ritual processes involve meaningful transformations of objects, at once involving symbolic recategorization and causal transformation of object potentially meaningful qualities of material objects (what are called ‘qualisigns’, in general, following Peirce, meaning material properties or qualities of objects (quali-) that are potentially meaningful (-signs)). Some such qualisigns, like flavor and strength, what we could call the ‘technical’ dimension, are felt to be distinct from what might be called the ‘poetic’ or ‘ritual’ qualisigns of objects, like ‘purity’, which have to do, for example, with cosmological

purity of the maker, the materials, and so on. In general, however, there is no hard a priori way to define the difference between these two kinds of qualisigns, technically basic qualisigns remain qualisigns that have potentially important ‘symbolic’ consequences for the circulation of the beer. At the same time, we should resist the idea that there is a natural technical dimension to the beer making process that determines its form, instead of talking of object properties producing a technical determination, we may speak of object properties as giving ‘affordances’ (Pfaffenberger 1992, Hutchby 2001), qualities of objects that afford causal potentials, in much the same way that we talk of ‘qualisigns’, qualities of objects that afford symbolic potentials.

For beer, opposed ‘technical’ and ‘ritual’ dimensions of transformation give rise to different sets of qualities associated with beer. Khevsurs know, for example, that some people make better beer than other people, although in principle this is not a condition for becoming a beer-maker the way that ritual purification is, or that sometimes it comes out better, sometimes worse, or that making beer in the winter is intrinsically harder, requiring different techniques to ensure fermentation (Ochiauri 2005: 21). They also are aware that, for example, there is a technical basis for beer production distinct from the matter of purification or nature of the maker, that beer involves processes involving interactions of grain, water and yeast, and that hops, which need to be acquired from the plains (Ochiauri 2005: 83), are essential as well for good beer. That they identify this mixture of grain, yeast and hops, as a quasi-natural substrate of beer production is indicated by a little poem which attributes the invention of beer to a little bird, who brews beer accidentally in its stomach, puffs up and gets drunk. As T. Ochiauri retold me the story in an interview:

[Khevsur] tradition ascribes the invention of beer to a bird:

...

chit'ma tkva: marcval(i) shevchame	The bird said: I ate some grain,
sve davaqole, davitver	I followed it with hops, I got drunk,
me sul pat'ara viqavi	I was a little tiny thing,
ghorisodena shevikmen	I became the size of a pig!

The bird got drunk. The Khevsurs wondered at the little drunken bird and started to brew beer themselves.

The basic 'technical' or 'natural' properties of beer, as opposed to the ritual ones, seem to be brought together as those that could happen 'naturally' by accident in the belly of a bird. Hence, as a ritual drink, some aspects of beer production attend more to its ritual qualisigns more, others seem more directed to 'technical' qualisigns like taste. For example, at one Khevsur ritual (Kriste) the official shrine beer-makers seem engaged in primarily technical activity, a *techne* or craft which is the probabilistic outcome of a number of factors, including equipment, hops and technique. For example, if good beer is needed, they add more hops and brew it longer,

If they are not assiduous about making good beer, then they cut down on the hops (ak'lebena), nor do they boil it down as much. They make a thin beer. It depends on the *k'odi* (wooden fermentation vat) too, in some k'odis good beer comes out, and in some not. (Ochiauri 2005: 21)

Unlike beer, vodka, which is made by women at the house (that is, is wholly impure) from almost anything (the ingredients are not pure), can be described almost entirely as a ‘technical’ process with discernable probabilistic outcomes in terms of quality. In addition, vodka is evaluated almost entirely in ‘technical’ terms, while beer has an additional set of cosmological qualisigns and affordances that derive from ritual contexts. The quality of vodka, like beer, is variable, but much more subject to chance outcomes than beer (where, as noted above, the quality of beer can be controlled by hops and boiling). According to Gochoridze, Tushian vodka, for example, is highly variable in both strength and taste. Strength is the primary measure of quality of vodka, Tushians call good vodka ‘marqay araqi’ (‘strong vodka’) and bad vodka ‘alala? araqi’ (‘gentle vodka’). A vodka basin (kvabi) is usually six chapi in volume, a chapi being 18 litres, from which is brewed about eight two liter jugs of vodka if everything comes out well, if not, no more than three drinkable jugs will come out. As Gochoridze points out, vodka production is much more subject to chance outcomes than beer production, ‘Vodka is haphazard: sometimes it comes out well, sometimes it is spoiled. No one knows why’. (Gochoridze 174-5). Part of this variation can be controlled by mixing distillations of different strengths to produce a final product. Vodka is brewed in a series of distillations (Gochoridze 174), each distillation is kept separate from each other, the final fourth distillation and after being called ‘shamani’. Normally the first three distillations are mixed together, the fourth, shamani, if it comes out well, is also mixed in, to produce a medium strength vodka in larger quantities (Gochoridze 174-5). Depending on the purpose of the vodka, mixture of varying distillations can control the resulting strength for the desired purpose (Ochiauri 1980: 6-7).

While beer shares with vodka a certain variability in terms of strength and flavor, the qualisigns of beer that have effects on social trajectories are ‘ritual’ qualisigns, qualisigns with cosmological reference (for example, purity of the maker, the barley, the equipment), while the qualisigns relevant for the social trajectory of vodka are almost entirely ‘technical’ (taste, strength). From the beginning to the end of the circulatory career, different kinds of beer are carefully distinguished especially with respect to their ultimate goal, and the movement of beer, like the production, has its own ritual attendants, so that the whole production circulation process of beer is one long ritual process, not merely the consumption of at shrine rituals. Hence, the source of the grain used in beer is from fields that belong to the god (sacrificed to the shrine), that this grain has been threshed by the shrine officiants who make the beer on a special threshing floor that belongs to the shrine, and is stored in the shrine complex in a sacred granary to which entry is difficult, prior to it being brewed into beer in cauldrons in a special hut (salude) also part of the shrine complex, and finally moved to the point of consumption by special ritual attendants. All these actors, objects and places share the qualisign of ‘ritual purity’. Such non-palpable qualities of persons and places transferred to beer have powerful effects on the subsequent circulation of the object. Beers made in the home, for example, do not have these properties, though it may otherwise taste the same.

But this initial opposition hides certain similarities that belie the idea that vodka is a purely profane drink whose qualities are purely ‘technical’ ones. For example, the ‘road vodka’ of men is opposed to the ‘stolen vodka of girls’ in every possible way, both in technical ‘affordances’ (like taste and strength) and symbolic potentials and association (given freely versus stolen and hoarded indefinitely). We have already seen

that vodka, by opposition with beer, *also* takes on properties of persons and places with which it is associated, bringing beer and vodka into opposition on the basis of qualities that are not, strictly speaking, intrinsic ‘technical’ properties. By virtue of the different locus of production (shrine, home), different producers (men, women), different materials (pure shrine materials versus everyday), the two drinks take on opposed social trajectories. In general, beer moves centrifugally, from the ritual center of the community towards its outer edges, from the home of the wedding or funeral host to the community, and vodka moves centripetally, from the homes toward the shrine complexes, and also circumferentially between households, persons, within and across communities.

The technical dimension of production is relevant here too. As Tinatin Ochiauri noted in an interview, beer as a technical process requires collective labor for its production, and its consumption too is also collective, beer and collective ritual are synonymous; in much the same way, the production of vodka is a matter of individual households, but the ends and social occasions to which it is put by households are as socially general (if not always collective) as the variety of materials from which it is made:

Beer is the ritual [*sak’ult’o*] drink, a holy [*ts’minda*] drink. It demand great labour-consuming work. For that reason the rules of its preparation are collective. Its use too is collective in the same way. At the time of a gather of a lot of people (xalxianoba), either a holiday, a wedding or a funeral, which are associated with a large number of people, then they prepare beer. They are always preparing

vodka. My mother was always brewing vodka. From elderberries, crabapples, fruit, from grain, they made vodka from everything. In the family they always needed vodka, for guests, other things. (Tinatin Ochiauri interview 2005)

By contrast, the preparation of vodka is a matter of individual households, it can be made of most anything by most anyone, and the functions to which vodka is are far more general than beer, if beer represents the social as an undifferentiated collectivity, vodka mediates it as a complex aggregate of relations between individuals. In fact, vodka is such a general drink that Khevsurs will even make their horses drink it, because drunken horses amuse them.

But the material properties of of these two drinks are not merely interesting insofar as they make possible arbitrary *difference*, differences which can be somewhat arbitrarily loaded with meanings, these material qualities have *causal consequences* for how the two beverages behave in a social universe, beyond the fact that they are meaningfully different. The very different potentially meaningful qualities (qualisigns) of beer and vodka have powerful material *causal* consequences (affordances) for their potential careers as circulatory objects.

Mountain beer is thick and sweet, a Georgian friend of mine likened it to ‘sweetened motor oil’, when I first drank it, it gave me a pounding headache and road sickness. It doesn’t keep long, either. Gochoridze, writing about neighbouring Tushian beer (‘aludi’) in the thirties, notes that it will last only ten days, and that thereafter it will become sour. The desirable properties of Tushian beer, is that it be ‘black, thick, sweet, and ought to have a little taste of hops’ (Gochoridze, 171). One important property of

beer, then, is that it doesn't last for a very long time, and fairly large quantities of it will be needed to produce a general state of inebriation in a given population.

Vodka will keep indefinitely, unlike beer, and smaller quantities of vodka will serve more people than beer, which must be in large quantities which will not keep very long. In Pankisi, for example, where vodka has completely replaced beer as the ritual drink, each mountain shrine will have a small collection of bottles of locally produced vodka that are stored there for an indefinite period awaiting the day of ritual observances.

Therefore, vodka, when compared to beer, therefore has two basic properties that we will see are very important *causally* in terms of what possible trajectories it can have in social space: its high relative alcohol content gives it a high portability (hence there is 'road vodka' and visiting vodka, but no 'road beer'), and being storable in small glass bottles also allows it not only high mobility in space, but also high durability: vodka is unlike beer in that it can easily travel through both space and time over long distances.

The ability to mix vodkas of different strengths to produce controlled variability allows differences in vodka to be expressive of social differences (girls, for example, only steal *good* vodka), and evaluation of gifted vodka is, in general, a topic of animated conversation. The host praises the guest's vodka, comparing it to fire, the guest disparages their own vodka (Ochiauri 1980: 16). Vodka which is brought as a gift is first tasted, and then, if from its taste it appears that it is strong enough, its strength is displayed to others by sprinkling it on the fire or by pouring in on a blade, and lighting it. If, however, the vodka's taste indicates that it is closer to being 'shamani' (watery, weak vodka in Tusheti and Khevsureti), then its nonflammability is not displayed to others, so that the person bringing it not be shamed (Ochiauri 1980: 7).

The difference in quality of vodka is an almost accidental by-product of production, but because it can be partially controlled by mixture, it can in turn be revalorized in meaningful ways in exchange. An example of this exploitation of the variable properties of vodka is the practice of visiting and bringing gifts of vodka ('mosanaxavi') to a family that has recently added a new member to the family. If a boy is born, the visitors will prepare more and better vodka, and a larger and wider set of relations will do so, than if a girl is born (Ochiauri 1980: 6-7). Not only did everyone try and produce more and better vodka faster than anyone else in the case of a boy, but also more people would bring a *mosanaxavi* vodka, not merely kin but also family friends, but in the case of the birth of a girl, the scope of vodka production was smaller on all levels, matching the other dimensions in which the birth of a girl differs from the birth of a boy:

The *mosanaxavi* for a boy had to be very good vodka, but in the *mosanaxavi* of a girl no one was interested whether the vodka was good or not, they would say: "I'm not bringing a *mosanaxavi* for a boy, am I? Why do I want good vodka, let them give birth to a boy and then I'll bring good vodka." For the mother of a boy the villagers and relatives will bring *kadas* (a kind of cake associated with prestations and sacrifices) into the menstrual hut (*samrelo*), for the mother of a girl only someone from the household (*shinauri*) would bring them and that only exceptionally. (Ochiauri 1980: 35).

Such *planned* differences in the quality of the vodka are directly expressive of the relative rank of boys and girls within the community as desirable additions to the family. But

even bad vodka has a social value. Travelers visiting friends and relatives would bring with them both good vodka and a quantity of a lower grade of vodka, closer to *shamani*. This low-grade vodka would serve as ‘road vodka’, since Khevsurs are required to give a drink of vodka to everyone they meet on the road (not doing so is considered to be very shameful), this practice can threaten the reserves of the good vodka intended for a prestation at the destination, hence, some will bring the low grade vodka along with them on the road to ‘protect’ their reserves of good vodka from the mouths of chance encounters (Ochiauri 1980: 7).

But such ‘road vodka’ reminds us that vodka has another property, it keeps well and is highly portable, unlike beer. Beer is prepared and drunk within the community, while vodka (thanks to the omnipresent glass bottles) is the most mobile of all drinks. Partly this has to do with the sorts of occasions for which beer and vodka are brewed, beer is brewed only for ritual events that revolve around the community shrine, and for weddings and funerals by the hosts (and not the guests). Vodka is brewed for virtually every other occasion that involves sociability, but vodka is especially associated with parties in motion, vodka is the sort of drink one carries with one (‘coming with vodka’). This is because vodka, unlike beer, is highly portable, it is the only drink that can express long distance relationships, relationships between members of different communities, while beer cannot easily be carried over distances, it expresses relations between people of the same community. Vodka is associated with people in motion, visitors, guests, community members visiting the shrine, beer is associated with the stationary party, hosts, shrine officiants. Vodka also does not spoil, it can be carried over very long

distances for long periods, but beer spoils quickly, it must be drunk very soon after it is prepared.

But no liquid, in itself, is portable, containers of liquid are. The portability of vodka, the ability to store it for long periods, in short the entire economy of vodka for both ‘public’ and ‘private’ uses, including the girlish economy of love, depend on the existence of cheap portable glass containers of high durability. The secret economy of girls, expressed in hiding glass bottles of vodka (*araqiani minai*), could not exist without the same technological innovation that made possible modern Georgian soft drinks (discussed in chapter 3). In this sense, the ‘traditional’ economy of love in the mountains depends on the same technical innovations that allowed the quintessentially ‘modern’ forms of sociability associated with soft drinks (chapter 3) and beer (chapter 4) in Georgia: the rise and circulation of cheap mass-produced glass bottles reaching its zenith at the turn of the century.<sup>7</sup> Without ‘democratic’ access to these cheap and durable containers, masculine forms of shrine related sociability depending on vodka, even road vodka and visiting vodka, would have been possible, but certainly not the secret economy of the stolen vodka of girls that is the engine of romance. In this respect, bottled vodka resembles the feminine instrument for performances of long songs in the *axaluxali*, the *buzika* (accordion), both are instruments of ‘traditional’ Khevsur feminine sociability made possible by modern industry. If nineteenth century ethnographers mention only relatively expensive, relatively non-portable, clay vessels and wineskins (Khizanishvili, writing in the late nineteenth century (1940: 41, 77) as means of transporting vodka, the explosion of ‘traditional’ economies of vodka prestation in glass bottles discussed in this chapter cannot be anything other than ‘modern’.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.ud.camcom.it/guidavini/uk/storia.htm>

By contrast with ‘road vodka’, everything about beer suggests stationary settled community life, centred on the shrine complex, down to the largeness containers in which it is brewed and carried around. Mountain ritual life probably has its most obvious and central material expression in the way that part of the shrine complex is given over to brewing beer, so that beer brewing is a collective act, vodka the product of individual households. If the circulation of beer from beginning to end stressed collective membership in a *saqmo*, the group of people who regard themselves as ‘serfs’ *qmebi* of a single shrine, the circulation of vodka provided direct linkages between individual households and persons within the *saqmo* and across the boundaries of the *saqmo*. One of the many minor sacrifices that individual households brought to the shrine (in return for the beer the shrine provided), vodka also was a kind of social currency, portable, light, exchanges of vodka amount to the very stuff of sociability, without which social relationships, could not be constituted in general.

**Conclusion: Trajectories of Vodka and Beer.** While vodka and beer do have obvious differences in material qualities, none of these seems to be sufficient to explain why beer is the ‘ritual’ drink and vodka is the ‘drink of devils.’ In order to explain the way the two come to have these properties, the answer won’t be found entirely in any of the obvious socio-technical properties the two liquids have in themselves (though these are important), rather, part of the answer appears to be where they come from, that is, how, where and by whom they are produced, which in turn produces entailments on how and where they can go subsequently. The opposition between them, then, is not *metaphoric*, having to do with the intrinsic properties of the products themselves, but *metonymic*,

having to do with the concrete associations between each product and the conditions of their production, and the goals or occasions for which they are produced.

The first thing we need to remember is that they are produced in *different places*, and these places are associated with different forms of *purity*. Beer is usually produced in a special building within a shrine complex devoted specifically to producing beer (the *salude*). Even among groups where this is not the case, like the Tushians, beer is still produced in a collective structure that belongs to the village as a whole, in the same way that the village community *belongs to* a shrine. So there is an association between beer and the community as a whole as the unit that produces it, and for whom it is produced. Even when beer is produced in the home, for example, for a wedding or a funeral, and is thus not as ‘sacred’, still it is produced for the community as a whole. Vodka, by contrast, is produced on a family/household basis, with occasional participation of several households in its production. So the first opposition in production is between *collective* production of beer by and for the community as a whole, versus individual families producing vodka for their own purposes. The community production of beer typically takes place on *sacred* ground, that is, in a communal shrine complex, whereas vodka production takes place on relatively *profane* ground, within an individual household. But this is not all, the beer is often also produced from grain that was itself grown on shrine grounds and stored in a shrine granary, so the entire trajectory of production is associated at every step with ritual purification and ritual buildings.

The location of production has consequences for who can produce it. Men make beer, women make vodka. This is partially, again, because men are ritually purer than women, and hence have access to territories in the shrine complex forbidden to women.

But here, too, there are differences. One variety, called 'sajvaro' or 'shrine' beer, is produced from ingredients that are produced on lands belonging to the shrine by shrine attendants, men who have achieved special degrees of ritual purity. Women are forbidden in these shrine fields because of their impurity. Shrine beer is brewed by special shrine attendants who also have achieved a degree of ritual purity greater than ordinary people. So the ingredients and the producers of shrine beer are purer than the ingredients or producers of ordinary beer, which is also produced by men, presumably borrowing equipment from the shrine. Shrine beer is designed for special communal festivals related to the shrine, whereas other beers are brewed for certain individual family rituals for example, weddings and funerals, which are nevertheless more important than those which require only vodka. Shrine beer is different from ordinary beer in that not only is it in itself purer than ordinary beer, but like shrine attendants, shrine beer itself must 'avoid impurity', specifically women who are in a state of impurity. Just as impure women must avoid spaces associated with ritual purity, so pure men and their products, sacred beer, must avoid spaces associated with ritual impurity. Even the same substance, beer, can be distinguished into two varieties, the sacred beer of the shrine versus the more ordinary beer of a wedding, by their possible trajectories, sacred beer can never enter impure space, while wedding beer can.

[For a woman who is in a state of impurity] the 'cross' [shrine divinity] forbids passing through the fields of the cross and other places considered to be pure/sacred....At the time of a holy day they could not bring 'cross' (sajvaro) beer into the *samrelo* [menstruation hut], for the taking of the *jvaris sadidebeli* into an

impure place was not allowed. However, they would take beer from a wedding or other such drinking occasions [sasmlianoba] into a *samrelo*. This meant a great estimation of the visiting woman (Ochiauri 1980: 244-5)

How do we square this apparent contradiction, that vodka is the drink of devils, and yet, it is everywhere? Beer is at once opposed to vodka as the ‘sacred’ drink to the ‘drink of devils’, and at the same time, vodka is everywhere, where beer is, and where it isn’t, too. We cannot rest content with a simple opposition, like the one that ‘beer is the ritual drink, vodka is the drink of devils’ or even ‘beer is the ritual drink, and vodka is the everyday drink’. The first statement presents the opposition between beer and vodka as if they were contradictory opposites, beer is the opposite of vodka. Therefore, if beer is pure and holy, then vodka must be impure and unholy, ‘the drink of devils’. This is sometimes called an ‘equipollent’ opposition, an opposition where both of the opposed terms are ‘equally powerful’ (equipollent): if beer is the drink of God, vodka must be the opposite, the drink of the devil. Therefore, vodka would be banned from events where beer is found. But this is not true, because we find vodka everywhere. Sometimes vodka is the opposite of beer, and sometimes it is the invisible partner of beer. For example, at weddings the host must produce large quantities of beer and vodka. On the other hand, as Baliauri notes, Khevsurs get married ‘twice’, and the rituals are opposed based on the opposition between beer and vodka: the first ritual being performed with vodka, the second, more serious ritual which seals the deal, with beer (Baliauri 1991). But the second ritual, will also contain vodka, now not opposed to the beer, but an unmentioned accompaniment to it. An equipollent opposition is usually opposed to what is called a

‘privative’ opposition. In a privative opposition, Beer would be holy, but vodka, the opposite of beer, simply lacks any specific properties of holiness or unholiness, it is simply ‘everyday’. We say that in a privative opposition, there is a ‘marked term’, a term which is specifically designated as having certain properties (for example Beer is ‘marked’ as being ‘sacred, ritual’ etc.) and an ‘unmarked term’, a term which simply lacks any specification for those properties (so vodka is simply neutral, in some cases, it is the opposite of beer, in others, it can be drunk alongside beer). So Beer would be restricted to specifically holy and sacred events, while vodka can be drunk at these events, or not.

This brings us back to Pankisi. The Pshavians of Pankisi do not brew beer, vodka has replaced beer in both ritual and non-ritual contexts. When one visits a shrine in Pankisi, one will find small piles of coke bottles, filled with vodka, stored there, awaiting some ritual, along with a plate full of silver coins (most of which, however, are not made of silver). Vodka will keep as well, or better, than the coins of the shrine treasury itself. Vodka, the ‘unmarked’ drink, has become, in Pankisi, not only ‘the drink of devils’, it is, in fact, the *only* drink.