“Wailing in the Cities”: Media, Modernity, and the Metamorphosis of Georgian Women’s Expressive Labor

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In the Republic of Georgia, the percentage of female professionals participating in politics has sunk to its lowest level since the country became independent in 1991, but as a whole Georgian women have never been so publicly outspoken as they are today, airing political grievances and confronting crisis and conflict on national television.¹ In this paper I argue that there are fundamental continuities between Georgian women’s performances of personal pain and political outrage in the televised media today and their more traditional role as arbiters of interior and exterior worlds and proclaimers of suffering in the historical funeral lament genre. I therefore trace a culturally specific division of expressive labor, defined as the differentiation of functions and appropriate demeanors pertaining to the articulation of grief and discontent, along gender lines. Today, distraught women frequently appear on televised news programs, calling attention to abuses of power by the incumbent government and defending Georgia’s national integrity while its overwhelmingly patriarchal political institutions consistently fall flat in the face of crisis. My present inquiry therefore interrogates the role of media in reproducing hierarchical gender relations, or—put another way—how technology has been pressed into the service of maintaining local, culturally specific social-discursive conventions in new, mass-mediated genres of performance.

The argument about cultural continuity I invoke hinges on the notion that women’s traditional funerary laments and the contemporary, mediated performances broadcast to national audiences draw on a shared set of stylistic, gestural, and discursive-interpretive conventions to precipitate social and/or political change. Drawing on recent work in women’s studies and the anthropology of emotion for comparative perspective, my paper calls attention to a cultural convention in which women become symbols of a “woundedness” that ranges in scope from intimate and familial to national.² It interrogates how key aspects of the form and function of the lament have been recontextualized in highly impersonal, hyper-mediated public performances. Insofar as they share certain textual and paralinguistic features and constitute a key site of female intervention in the public sphere, modern, mass-mediated performances of women’s grief and grievance exhibit a strong stylistic and ideological affinity with traditional Georgian lament, though

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¹ In the spring of 2011, only three of the nineteen ministers in Georgia’s government and nine of the 140 members of parliament were female, while women held less than twelve percent of seats on local assemblies. Shoren Latatia, “Women Losing Out in Georgian Politics,” *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* CWS 583, March 18, 2011, <http://iwpr.net/report-news/women-losing-out-georgian-politics>.

² Joshua D. Pilzer, *Hearts of Pine: Songs in the Lives of Three Korean Survivors of the Japanese “Comfort Women”* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). Like the South Korean female victims of Pacific War-era sexual slavery Pilzer describes, Georgian public culture has actively enlisted women in the production of an ideology of national woundedness. Ruth Emily Rosenberg describes a similar phenomenon, in which contemporary Corsican singer Anna Rocchi arranged and recorded a traditional lament-ballad to call attention to the enduring history of Corsican suffering under French rule. “A Voice Like Thunder: Corsican Women’s Lament as Cultural Work,” *Current Musicology* 78 (2004): 42–48.

this is not to say that the relationship between them is necessarily linear, or one of evolutionary derivation.³ What is more significant is that the lament-like characteristics of Georgian women's performances in the contemporary, vernacular news media create interdiscursive links to traditional religious ritual which, in turn, imbue them with a social and political power highly elusive in the country's post-Soviet history.⁴

The examples I draw on here—the widely circulated clips of Irina Enukidze, now-belligerent, now-disbelieving mother of Sandro Girgvliani, the young victim of a notorious government-sponsored murder plot in 2006, on the one hand, and a newscast clip of three displaced female victims of the five-day armed conflict between Georgia and Russia in August 2008, on the other—call attention to the continued efficacy of women's expressive labor as a form of alternative political power. While the rhetorical stance of the first example is politically oppositional, as Enukidze is shown and heard attacking the government in vitriolic prose, the second example works in rather the opposite way by “nationalistically co-opting” the formal features of traditional lament in order to focus attention on Georgia's (the state's and the people's) plight as a victim of foreign aggression.⁵

The particular confluence of gender, media, politics, and aesthetics these cases exemplify is one aspect of Georgia's postsocialist representational economy, a framework for the interpretation of discourse and action that is plagued by public distrust of official institutions. Anthropologist Paul Manning has compellingly described independent Georgia's representational economy as “ridden by crisis and conspiracy” and cynically informed by “a semiotic habitus formed under Soviet power, in which all public displays were arranged by the state and public life took on the specific characteristics of theater.”⁶ Given women's marginality to Georgian politics, or the official functions of the state, in recent years, are television broadcasters and the politicized powers that control them banking on the fact that viewers will find women's impassioned discourse more trustworthy, sincere, and persuasive than men's emotionally restrained public oratory?

Mourning vs. Modernity

As a public speech event, the traditional Georgian funeral lament offered women a rare opportunity to comment on, complain about, criticize, or otherwise intervene in the politics of a fundamentally patriarchal community.⁷ The mourning ritual known as *khmit nat'irali* [voiced weeping] was historically strongest in the mountainous regions of northeastern Georgia, which were a frequent stage for military combat with North Caucasian tribes. In these areas—Tusheti, Pshavi, and Khevsureti—the archetypal

³ Nancy Ries takes a similar perspective on the relationship between religious, poetic, and lamenting genres and perestroika-era Russian conversational discourse in *Russian Talk: Culture and Conversation during Perestroika* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 86.

⁴ See Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs, “Genre, Intertextuality, and Social Power,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 2, no. 2 (1992): 148. The notion of “interdiscursivity” calls attention to the broad body of “signifying practices” and “situational contexts” from which dialogically related texts derive meaning. See Richard Bauman, *A World of Others' Words: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Intertextuality* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004).

⁵ The notion of nationalist co-optation of lament is from James M. Wilce, *Crying Shame: Metaculture, Modernity, and the Exaggerated Death of Lament* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 203–06.

⁶ Paul Manning, “Rose-Colored Glasses? Color Revolutions and Cartoon Chaos in Postsocialist Georgia,” *Cultural Anthropology* 22, no. 2 (2007): 173, 208, n21.

⁷ For a comparative account of the lament as a site of women's intervention in male-dominated public discourse, see Charles Briggs, “‘Since I am a Woman, I will Chastise my Relatives’: Gender, Reported Speech, and the (Re)Production of Social Relations in Warao Ritual Wailing,” *American Ethnologist* 19, no. 2 (1992).

lament was performed upon the death of a male who had lost his life in combat, in honor of his sacrifice to the community.⁸ The Khevsureti region in particular has been celebrated for its distinct martial arts and for producing Georgia's most valiant warriors. According to a Georgian friend who has conducted extensive fieldwork among elderly Khevsur swordsmen, "in Khevsureti, every man was a warrior." The ideal subject of *khmit nat'irali*, then, was "weary with war, drunk with blood," as one metaphorically rich lament text suggests.⁹

In the northeastern Georgian mountains, women's wailing would publicly announce a death in the community and initiate the mourning process. During a formal ritual physically surrounding the body of the deceased, a female lead mourner (usually an immediate family member or, less commonly, a professional mourner who served as a kind of surrogate victim) would improvise a series of simple, step-wise descending melodic phrases at the interval of a fifth. A wide, deliberate vibrato would emphasize the ends of phrases and lend the voice a kind of broken, faltering quality, as in the following example. The combination of low audio quality and unfamiliar dialect renders the text nearly incomprehensible, but this early wax cylinder recording is useful for illustrating the musical parameters of a traditional lament performance.¹⁰

Audio Example 1: Tushetian woman's lament (Archive of the V. Sarajishvili Tbilisi State Conservatory)

View at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mp.9460447.0006.202>

Laments were almost always addressed to a particular audience, most commonly to the deceased individual ("Day has dawned, *Agato* [Agatha], day has dawned / The sun has come over the mountaintops / They'll drive the cow ahead / Why are you still sleeping?!")¹¹ or the company of mourners ("People, why are you surprised that I am crazy / Or overtaken by madness? / I've lost a child...").¹² As these and other examples demonstrate, rhetorical questions and appeals for sympathy were frequent features of lament texts ("May God dry up my tears / They are like shards of rock, people, heavy! / I myself should be wept for / I am sorrow itself...").¹³ Accusations were common as well ("Death, if you are so easy / Why didn't you die once yourself / Why didn't you melt like snow in the sun?!").¹⁴ While the lead mourner delivered her intoned lament, the women surrounding her empathized with stylized sobbing on non-lexical syllables, as though filling the dramaturgical role of a Greek chorus.¹⁵ Typically they would sob on the icon of grief *vai* or a variant of it, which the lead mourner might also incorporate to evoke pathos in the lament text proper—for example, "*Vaime* young bride [the deceased], *vaime*, *vaime va* my head" (*vaime*, an extension of *vai*, might be loosely translated as "Woe is me!"; the head stands in, syndecdochically, for the self).¹⁶ Frequently they would cup their hands at their mouths or muffle their sobs with handkerchiefs;

⁸ Amiran Arabuli, *Samgloviaro p'oezia* (Tbilisi: Zek'ari, 2006), 67–68.

⁹ Ibid., 64.

¹⁰ I can find no explanation for the brief bodily eruption at the end of the second verse, except to say that it sounds like an (unintentional?) belch.

¹¹ This lament is attributed to a woman named K'esane Gulukhaidze-Tataraidze, born in the Tusheti region in 1925. The full text is posted on the website of the Georgian State Folklore Center, at <http://www.folk.ge/index.php?pg=mn&idm=4&idms=39&idms=39&id=53> (accessed June 29, 2012).

¹² Nanuli Azik'uri, ed., *Khmit nat'irlebi* (Tbilisi: K'avk'asiuri sakhli, 2002), 50.

¹³ Arabuli, *Samgloviaro p'oezia*, 52.

¹⁴ Azik'uri, *Khmit nat'irlebi*, 50.

¹⁵ See Gail Holst-Warhaft, *Cue for Passion: Grief and its Political Uses* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 30.

¹⁶ None of these features of Georgian lament texts is unusual. As Steven Feld and Aaron A. Fox observe with regard to laments throughout the world, "these texts draw significantly on highly affect-laden lexical or discourse areas (e.g. place

they might also clutch their heads in a gesture of despair and disbelief. Male members of the community, meanwhile, would remain at a physical distance from the women, or stand quietly nearby.¹⁷

Figure 1. Mourners surround the body of a male elder. Northeastern Georgia, c. 1910.
Courtesy of Eter Tataraidze.

names; personal names and relationship terms; rhetorical questions to the deceased or audience; accusations; remembrance formulae; allegorical, metaphorical, or veiled speech; indirectness; social criticism and transgressive commentary; and appropriation or recontextualization of prior discourses.” “Music and Language,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23 (1994): 43.

¹⁷ In Tusheti there was also a men’s lament, called *dala*, which was performed as part of a set of commemorative rituals (*dalaoba*) marking the first anniversary of a death. *Dala* was traditionally sung by a group of men gathered on horseback. A leader would deliver an intoned verse, which expressed the sorrow of the bereaved and the heroic deeds of the deceased; the company would respond sympathetically, in unison, on the words “*dala, dala*.” Shalva Aslanishvili, *Nark’vevebi kartuli khalkhuri simgherebis shesakheb*, vol. 1 (Tbilisi: Khelovneba, 1954). Available transcriptions suggest that the melodic contour of the men’s *dala* was similar to that of the women’s *t’irili*: the pitch range was no larger than a sixth, the overall motion of each phrase was descending, the rhythm slowed at the end of each phrase, etc. *Dala*, however, appears to rely on a somewhat stricter textual template than the women’s *t’irili*. For example, all of the transcriptions I studied began with the verse “Sing *dala*, horsemen (*dala, dala*); *dalaoba* is difficult (*dala, dala*).” Aslanishvili, 165; Edisher Garaqanidze, *Kartuli musikaluri dialekt’ebi da misi urtiertmimarteba* (Tbilisi: Sakartvelos matsne, 2011), 153; Sergi Mak’alatia, *Tusheti, t’pili: Sakartvelos geografiuli sazogadoeba* (1933), 172. Women also lamented during *dalaoba*, albeit separately from the men on horseback. According to one source, *dala* was sung not only in Tusheti, but in the neighboring Pshavi and Khevsureti regions as well (Garaqanidze, 104).

Figures 2, 3, and 4. Women lamenting. Khevsureti region, Georgia, 1960s.
Courtesy of Niko Abazadze.

In addition to comforting the deceased and helping to ensure her or his peaceful establishment in the next life, the lamenter was expected to offer an account of the deceased individual's life on earth and circumstances of death for the community's oral record. Local accounts of this particularly politically charged aspect of lament ritual tend to emphasize its role as a kind of academy: by enumerating the heroic and self-sacrificing deeds of a warrior, for example, the lamenter cast his life as an ideal to which others should aspire, instructing her audience how to live in order to be honorably remembered at death. But this same eulogizing aspect of the lament often instigated conflict by establishing "facts"—including the guilty party in cases of wrongful death—that, in turn, could precipitate blood feud and other forms of "revenge code violence"¹⁸ (for example, in the menacing statement "The Kists [a North Caucasian tribe] rejoiced in your death").¹⁹ Indeed, as Steven Feld and Aaron Fox have written about the social function of laments cross-culturally, "Performed acts of remembering...simultaneously renew and potentially amplify both the sociability and solidarity forged by participation, and the emotional exhaustion, enmity, and antipathy forged by contemplating loss."²⁰ Importantly, while the heavy use of hyperbole in a mourner's praising of the deceased and reckoning of his esteemed deeds was expected in Georgia, it was considered sinful to tell a lie over a dead body. Therefore lament texts carried a strong cultural assurance of truth and, by extension, women enjoyed a certain measure of discursive authority in funerary contexts.²¹

While it is unclear exactly how long ritual laments of this type were practiced in Georgia, historical records suggest that they go back at least one thousand years. The modern history of the Georgian lament begins in the nineteenth century, as predominantly Russian-educated intellectuals and public figures began to question the need for traditional funerary practices to continue and, in parallel, to treat lament texts as "folklore"—collecting and publishing them in nationally circulating print periodicals.²² These efforts helped to shift responsibility for the management of personal emotional experience—including emotions surrounding death—from relatively close-knit, space-delimited rural communities to an increasingly urban imagined national public. Adopting certain "colonial sensibilities"²³ impressed upon them by their Russian peers, members of the Georgian intelligentsia began publicly criticizing the perceived excesses, superficiality, and social backwardness of traditional funerary ritual.²⁴ Using the emergent public forum of the printed press to stage what was frequently very heated diatribe, they called into question the continued necessity of traditional mourning practices—including women's lament.²⁵ While the debates were aimed at curbing the excesses of funerary ritual in Georgia's western regions in particular, they offer evidence of a watershed moment in the history of the country as a whole. In 1901, for example, writer and publicist Ak'ak'i Ts'ereteli circulated the following remark regarding the outmodedness of women's voiced weeping:

¹⁸ C. Nadia Seremetakis, *The Last Word: Death and Divination in Inner Mani* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). On the fact-establishing, or "juridical," function of laments, see p. 101.

¹⁹ Arabuli, *Samgloviaro p'oezia*, 63.

²⁰ Feld and Fox, "Music and Language," 40.

²¹ Arabuli, *Samgloviaro p'oezia*, 6. For a comparative case, see Briggs, "Since I am a Woman," 341.

²² Arabuli, *Samgloviaro p'oezia*, 7. See Rosenberg, "A Voice Like Thunder," 32, for a comparative case in Corsica.

²³ Wilce, *Crying Shame*, 15.

²⁴ See *ibid.*, 114, for a germane discussion of the Canadian government's banning of the Tlingit potlatch ceremony in 1885, a policy decision made in approximately the same period, also on grounds of material excess and "economic irrationality." The difference, of course, is that the Georgian intelligentsia grew critical of its own traditional practices under the influence of Western-oriented Russian thought, whereas the Canadian government condemned the practices of a culturally separate, indigenous population.

²⁵ For the broader historical context, see Paul Manning, *Strangers in a Strange Land: Occidental Publics and Orientalist Geographies in Nineteenth-Century Georgian Imaginaries* (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2012).

This kind of wailing was necessary before there were newspapers, but what purpose does it serve today, when biographies, obituaries, and life stories of the dead are printed and orators speak them with words? This is precisely why the lament is gradually disappearing... Who laments with wailing in the cities anymore?²⁶

Bracketing the emotional, cathartic function of sung laments, Ts'ereteli focuses instead on their logical, record-keeping function. Since it was female mourners who conveyed facts about the deceased that would serve as the basis of public record, Ts'ereteli's "progressive" agenda effectively limited women's role in public life in the interest of an enlightened, urban, European kind of modernity.²⁷ In the enlightened model, print periodicals and literate (male) orators were better suited to comment on the public significance of a soul's departure from this world.

With significant help from the industrialization and population resettlement projects of the Soviet twentieth century—and the Georgian Orthodox Church's subsequent efforts to purge polytheistic rituals from the funerary practices of its flock—the modernizing, rationalizing initiatives of the nineteenth-century intelligentsia vis-à-vis the lament were largely fulfilled: today, the number of villages where women's voiced weeping is still a part of funerary ritual is probably less than a dozen. Like the Bangladeshi lament described by James Wilce, the traditional, locally bounded Georgian funeral lament is "vanishingly rare."²⁸ Contemporary, non-sung performances that gesture toward lament, as I suggest here, seem to memorialize the "vanishing" genre—itsself defined by its memorializing intent²⁹—by mimicking its formal conventions and capitalizing on its political effects. According to one observer, the first element to have disappeared from the Georgian lament, in regions somewhat peripheral to the mountainous areas in which they were historically strongest, was the melody.³⁰ The more resilient textual features, paralinguistic elements, and embodied gestures—that is, the generic attributes of the lament that persisted after the melody disappeared—now emerge in urban, cosmopolitan contexts, reconstituting women's expressive labor in a mediatized public sphere.

A Vengeful Mother and the Sins of a State

If the lament created a space of women's empowerment in the public arena of a community or circumscribed region, today a homologous genre of publicly performed pain and suffering provides women with a platform for empowerment at the much larger level of national media. In the same way that traditional women's lament performances generated intense emotional responses from the community—in extreme cases, feeding the cycle of revenge (*shurisdzieba* in Georgian) and blood feud (*siskhlis agheba/dzieba*)—by offering the final account (what Seremetakis calls "the last word") of the deceased's life,

²⁶ Ak'ak'i Ts'ereteli, [No title], *Iveria*, no. 161 (1901): 1.

²⁷ There are comparative contexts for this sort of modernizing project elsewhere in the world. Many anthropological studies have argued that institutional attempts to manage mourning are thinly veiled efforts to suppress women's emotional excess. See, for example, Holst-Warhaft, *Cue for Passion*, 9; Seremetakis, *The Last Word*, 170–71; and Nicole Loraux, *Mothers in Mourning: With the Essay of Amnesty and its Opposite* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

²⁸ Wilce, *Crying Shame*, xi. The preface to an anthology of Georgian lament texts published in 2002 indicated that the lament was still an "active genre" in the northeastern mountain regions of Pshavi, Khevsureti, and Tusheti—areas known especially for their verbal arts, while it has largely "faded out" of practice elsewhere in Georgia (Azik'uri, *Khmit nat'irlebi*, 6).

²⁹ Wilce, *Crying Shame*, 75, citing Bambi Schieffelin.

³⁰ Helga Kotthoff, "Gender, Emotion, and Poeticity in Georgian Mourning Rituals," in *Gender in Interaction: Perspectives on Femininity and Masculinity in Ethnography and Discourse*, ed. Baron and Kotthoff (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 2001), 285.

women's evocations of the grief and suffering provoked by current events are intended to generate further emotive responses among the public and to propel political change. As the following examples of a bereaved Tbilisi mother campaigning for justice after losing her son in a notorious state-sanctioned homicide and three embittered women displaced to Tbilisi as a result of the August 2008 Georgia-Russia conflict illustrate, a certain repertoire of vocal styles, poetic elements, and gestures are common to both.

The murder of 27-year-old Sandro Girgvliani on the night of January 27–28, 2006, was a high-profile scandal that became emblematic of President Mikheil Saakashvili's failure to deliver on the promises of peace, transparency, and government accountability made during his rise to power after the 2003 Rose Revolution. Sandro Girgvliani, Chief of United Georgian Bank's International Relations Division, was discovered tortured to death in the woods on the outskirts of Tbilisi following an encounter with high-ranking government officials at a Tbilisi bar. At a press conference within a month of her son's murder, Irina Enukidze accused Interior Ministry officials of conspiring to perpetrate the crime. In the months that followed, television news stations identified with the political opposition broadcast several video clips of her, and these were, in turn, recirculated on the Internet. These news segments focused on the tragedy of a mother in mourning, capturing her initial livid demands for justice and, later, her quiet, introspective desolation. Significantly, in the traditional hierarchy of lamenting privileges, it is the mother who leads the community in mourning in the case of a young person's death.³¹

A news clip broadcast on opposition television channel Imedi's *Chronicle* program shortly after the homicide shows Irina Enukidze on a public street, surrounded by a crowd of silent, mixed male and female spectators. She berates the government officials who masterminded her son's murder. While her black head scarf marks her as bereaved, her repertoire of embodied gestures and the coarse, strained character of her vocal delivery conveys a vindictiveness that calls to mind the traditional lamenter's role in provoking the bereaved community to act in response to an instigation of conflict:

I know who killed him, who hacked him to death. I demand the punishment of those who ordered his murder: [Interior Ministry officials] Akhalaia, Sanodze, Donadze, Melnikov...Salaqaia! It's by his order—he's beaten up more than one young man, this Salaqaia! He's a wicked rat escaped from some dungeon that controls the whole government. He's the backbone of the whole operation, as I've figured out. I beg you to take measures immediately. Yesterday he revealed—bless him for his manly heroism!—that it was Melnikov! Bless that young man! I knew it was Melnikov, but I couldn't prove it. So it turns out that the whole table [of government officials gathered at the bar] committed the crime. That's it, it's finished! People, let's not forgive—they'll slaughter your children! They embittered me! I'd prefer that my son had been in an accident or died some other way. They hacked him to death! They martyred my child! They tortured him! I am the mother of a strong, courageous child! I am not forgiving anyone!

As would be customary in a traditional funeral lament, Enukidze—as chief mourner—delivers the guilty verdict and charges the public (those physically present, as well as imagined television and Internet viewers) to stand resolutely against their common enemy. While she is not advocating revenge per se, she demands justice and categorically refuses to consider pardoning the men responsible for her son's death.

³¹ Ibid., 285.

Enukidze's voice is strained throughout, but as her seething tirade evolves, she seems to reach deeper and deeper down into her vocal apparatus to draw ever more guttural power from her average-sized frame. The pitch and volume of her voice gradually rise, intensifying to rival the caustically penetrating wail of a woman broadcasting news of a death to a village caught unawares. As she speaks, she shakes her index finger menacingly and beats a tightly clenched fist at an invisible enemy. Despite all this, the several male onlookers caught on camera behind her appear impassive and unpersuaded, if not indifferent. It is only in response to her appeal for solidarity—"People, let's not forgive!"—that a few bystanders become audible, albeit with only a weak, inarticulate murmur of concurrence.

In January 2007, an Imedi news report marking the first anniversary of Girgvliani's kidnapping and murder opened with a close-up photograph not of Sandro, but of his mother in mourning. Next, viewers were shown an amateur video of Sandro jet skiing on a lake in the U.S. during a year he studied abroad in college, then quickly redirected as the scene shifted to his Tbilisi bedroom. Here reporter Diana T'rap'aidze points out a few meaningful material possessions that Sandro left behind, then turns the gaze on his mother. "Of everyone, it is Sandro's mother who has the hardest time going into his room," T'rap'aidze tells viewers. Irina Enukidze, brows furrowed and facing away from the camera, sobs as she gingerly strokes the door of his closet. She speaks between heaving gasps for air:

I'm afraid to look inside this closet. It's filled with his scent. I'm very worried these days, since a full year has passed. I've gone completely crazy from not having seen my child in a year. [Pause while she turns again toward the closet] I'm always waiting. I don't even want to go up to the cemetery, Diana. People drag me there. Father [a priest in the Orthodox Church] says that's not right, that I should go to the cemetery regularly. I don't go to the cemetery. VERY rarely. I HAVE NOTHING TO DO AT THE CEMETERY!³²

A gradual rise in pitch and volume suggest increasing distress, and by the end of the clip Enukidze is practically bellowing at the camera.

This same Imedi channel report literally gave Irina Enukidze the last word in the ongoing public scandal over Girgvliani's death by closing with another clip of the bereaved mother at home, in a conspicuously bare living room. This time Enukidze explicitly cast the broad Georgian viewing audience—as opposed to the journalist taking the interview in her home—as her addressee:

They tortured him. They stabbed him in fourteen places and said, "We didn't want to kill him." When you give a man fourteen stab wounds, is it possible to say, "I didn't want to kill him?!" You'd have to be crazy, people, to go completely mad! When I was most happy, then they killed him—then, people! After I had done everything I could to raise Sandro into a man, then they killed him! They tortured him, people, that's how they killed him. Today I am Sandro, I am fighting in his place!³³

Here, Enukidze's maternal suffering becomes the narrative basis for her legal claims. Her repeated calls of "People!" aim to collectivize her pain, transforming it from a personal struggle into a popular crusade.³⁴ As she appeals for public support for justice, teary-eyed and again with an overexerted voice, she draws on a

³² This segment appears approximately nine minutes into the video at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lqPQxs96ToY>

³³ This segment appears at 33:20 in the video cited above.

³⁴ The notion that a lamenting woman aims to "collectivize the experience of grief" is from Rosenberg, "A Voice Like Thunder," 37.

repertoire of paralanguage and gesture that evokes traditional lament performance: the audible inhalation and sobbing, the periodic drawing of a handkerchief to her face, and finally, the quasi-heroic, quasi-self-flagellating beating of a clenched fist against her chest at the words “Today I am Sandro!”

Enukidze emboldened the political opposition in its coverage of Girgylani’s murder and, by extension, in its broader campaign to shake public confidence in the incumbent regime. In the months that followed, a flurry of acts of civil disobedience demanded the resignation of then-Interior Minister Vano Merabishvili, while general public outcry over the incumbent government’s failure to protect fundamental human rights seemed to grow louder and more impatient. The media spectacle around Enukidze may have also precipitated prominent journalist Eka Khoperia’s abrupt resignation as anchor of a popular political talk show in July 2006, as one woman’s politically efficacious grief begot another’s outrage. On her regular evening broadcast on network Rustavi 2, which is nominally independent but backed by the government, Khoperia announced that she was resigning on account of the authorities’ attempts to censor the guest appearance of Dato Akhalaia, an Interior Ministry official whom Girgylani encountered at the café on the night of his murder.

Irina Enukidze lost her own life in August 2007. While the official cause of death was cancer, many Georgians believe she died of grief. Members of the political opposition coalition Georgian Dream [*Kartuli otsneba*] have made a point of visiting her grave each year on Georgian Mother’s Day (March 3). They place flowers on her grave and light candles, praising her as a model Georgian “hero-warrior-mother” and documenting their annual ritual for the television news cameras.³⁵

A Trio of Women Laments a National Calamity

While Enukidze sought to translate her private suffering into a public, collective disgracing of Mikheil Saakashvili’s government, it is less clear how much the women in the next example were performing an act of civil disobedience against a government that had impetuously sent an ill-prepared, ill-equipped army into harm’s way in the 2008 Georgia-Russia conflict, and how much their public lament was appropriated by a pro-government news agency to symbolize the tiny Georgian nation’s victimization at the hands of a Goliathan foreign aggressor. The interpretation is largely contingent on the viewer’s predispositions.

Here, three middle-aged, evidently rural, underclass women displaced from the northeastern Georgian separatist region of South Ossetia as a result of the August 2008 war deliver consecutive impassioned outcries for the television cameras in front of the parliament building in downtown Tbilisi. They are captured in a crowd of demonstrators on what has historically been the site of Georgia’s most dramatic displays of civil disobedience.³⁶ The women are not identified by name; they are undifferentiated, anonymous victims unashamed to perform their woundedness in house dresses in the middle of the bustling public arena of Tbilisi’s Rustaveli Avenue, the city’s main thoroughfare.³⁷ As in Irina Enukidze’s

³⁵ See, for example, a clip of their visit on March 3, 2012: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BKAQM1rFCug>.

³⁶ Perhaps the most famous event to have taken place here in Georgia’s modern history is the tragedy of April 9, 1989, during which Soviet troops violently dispersed a peaceful anti-Soviet demonstration, killing twenty people and injuring hundreds.

³⁷ On the cultivated subversive aesthetics of glamor-lessness, see Lauren Ninoshvili, “Report from the Kitchen Sink: The *Supra* and the Seeds of a Georgian Feminism,” in *Nation in Formation: Inclusion and Exclusion in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Catherine Baker et al., Studies in Russia and Eastern Europe 1 (London: UCL School of Slavic and Eastern European Studies, 2007).

example, private grief is transformed into public crisis as the women demand answers, action, and sympathy:

Video Example 1

View at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mp.9460447.0006.202>

- Woman 1: *Vaime*, I've never seen such a thing in my life! My people, how long can we remain in this patron-less country? How long? When will anyone pay attention? *Vaime!*
- Woman 2: We had hope in America, first in Abkhazia, then in Iraq. Our young men are in Afghanistan. Where is America [now]?
- Woman 3: What can we do? We don't know where our children are, people! We fled from bullets. They destroyed our homes.

The content of their rhetoric evokes helplessness and a social and emotional vulnerability to which women—as mothers, wives, and caregivers—are considered particularly susceptible. In doing so, it resonates powerfully with the poetic conventions of traditional lament. To begin, Woman 1 frames her segment with the linguistic icon of grief *vaime*. Each of the women invokes what James Wilce has called “that most common of rhetorical tools in lament across the world—grieving question[s]”³⁸: “How long...?” “Where is America [now]?” “What can we do?” The list of national and international crises which the speakers believe authorize Georgia to rely on America as an ally (“...in Abkhazia...Iraq...Afghanistan....”) creates a kind of semantic parallelism—here, based on place names—like that found frequently in lament poetry (“Did you go up to Gomet's'ari? / Did you cross over to Laghistavi? / Did you go down to K'alotgori? / Did you bid farewell to all the mountains and plains?”—a mother was recorded lamenting over her child).³⁹ The women explicitly place blame on America (for failing to reciprocate after Georgia aided in its war efforts) and on Russia—the alleged instigator of the August war, denoted here by the veiled pronoun “they.” Woman 3 addresses her audience directly (“...people!”), as though calling for public action. Their discourse is marked by an implicit, reprimanding moral evaluation.

The stylistic features and embodied gestures of these impromptu performers also evoke traditional lament. They shout in short phrases which begin loudly, emphatically, then seem to back off as though in resignation, gesturing with their hands in a manner that corresponds to the contours of their speech. Their brows are knotted, the veins in their faces and necks rigid with tension. Woman 1 periodically draws her hands to her face in distress; Woman 2 emphatically strikes her right index finger against the palm of her left hand as she moves down the laundry list of U.S. debts to Georgia, then slaps the back of her right hand violently against the palm of the left to emphasize her point. They do not appear to know one another, or to be in any sort of orchestrated collusion, but they seem to feed off of one another: their “solo” segments overlap, with Woman 2 and Woman 3 launching into their respective irate speeches while Woman 1 and Woman 2, still protesting loudly, begin to back away from the camera.

³⁸ Wilce, *Crying Shame*, 206.

³⁹ Azik'uri, *Khmit nat'irlebi*, 49.

As in the clip of Irina Enukidze demonstrating on a Tbilisi street, the men that appear in the background here maintain a discreet, almost unaffected presence. In fact, some of them do not even seem to be paying attention. As co-creators of the situational context, the men who appear in the shadow of these outspoken women reinforce the interdiscursive link to the traditional lament genre: they are passive (stoic?), silent witnesses—a “silent chorus”—to women’s more volatile emotional display.⁴⁰ They remain outside the “social space of competent brokenness”—the testimonial frame—which is co-constructed by the women, the camera operators, and the television news producers (I return to the latter below).⁴¹ The anonymous women’s enraged discourse appears to be a source of discomfort for the men who stand in close proximity, and they are reluctant to express their grief with them in consort.

In making a case for the homology between this performance and the historical lament genre, I return to the notion that a “ritual lamenter’s role is as much *leading* or *stirring up* emotion as it is ‘expressing’ it.”⁴² Like the historical lament, the emotionally effusive display these three women deliver is not an end in itself, but a spark meant to ignite more emotion—sympathy, anger, outrage—and, in turn, more meaningful action. These women stand in for an imagined national public that is mourning the loss of life and territory; the collective body they represent is also their target audience. As with Irina Enukidze, their status as innocent victim-survivors lends them an air of credibility and legitimacy. There is “a promise of objective truth,” “a ‘must be’ quality,” an authenticity about their report.⁴³ Their distance from the machinations of official authority—that is, their relative powerlessness—translates, paradoxically, into a form of *moral* power.⁴⁴ The clip’s production and circulation in a journalistic, documentary format, as well as the candid nature of the performance (suggested by its setting in plainly accessible public space, its chaotic, frenzied execution, and the women’s homely, unpretentious appearance), further reinforce this moral authority.

There is recent precedent for the morally inflected self-empowerment of groups traditionally marginalized from official channels of power in Georgia. Paul Manning argues that, in the distrust- and suspicion-saturated political atmosphere surrounding the Rose Revolution and the overthrow of former Soviet Communist elite Eduard Shevardnadze, the student protest movement K’mara! [Enough] was accepted as credible and valid because “In Georgia, students are associated with an apolitical innocence, a sincerity one might associate with children.”⁴⁵ Given the conspicuous dearth of women in the political sphere since interim president Nino Burjanadze’s brief term in late 2003 through early 2004, I would argue that they, too, have gained popular credibility as innocent, trustworthy victim-witnesses of high-level political and social mismanagement. Manning goes on to point out that, while the student demonstrators could be perceived as “speaking with an ‘out of the mouths of babes’ apolitical wisdom,” they were also vulnerable to interpretation as the “innocent dupes of [properly] ‘political’ actors.”⁴⁶ This

⁴⁰ The notion of the “silent chorus” is from Seremetakis, *The Last Word*, 100.

⁴¹ The notion of a “social space of competent brokenness” is from Pilzer, *Hearts of Pine*, 64.

⁴² Wilce, *Crying Shame*, 47.

⁴³ Gregory Starrett, “Violence and the Rhetoric of Images,” *Cultural Anthropology* 18, no. 3 (2003): 398–428.

⁴⁴ Ries, *Russian Talk*, 89.

⁴⁵ Manning, “Rose-Colored Glasses?” 180. In the same article, he writes, “...in sharp contrast to the relative freedom of the Shevardnadze period, [today] there is little open criticism of the government on any television channel. Postrevolutionary Georgia seems to be following the Russian model of literal freedom of the press, that is, freedom for the print press, but not the television press, part of what Georgian commentators sometimes call a process of “Putinization” (*Putinizacia*)... This is an ironic end for a revolution that was begun as a spontaneous defense of the freedom of the press, and [formerly independent, oppositional channel] Rustavi 2” (203).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

uneasy dialectic holds true for the women who perform grief and outrage for the national media as well, as observers evaluate them as relatively more competent or naïve in light of their own political commitments.

A Poetics of Public Womanhood⁴⁷

Among Georgians, there is a culturally intimate discourse of excessive emotionality that is invoked as much in relation to men as it is to women.⁴⁸ While both men and women are considered genetically prone to nervous excitability, men's uncontrolled emotionality is believed to lead to rash and impetuous action, making them dangers to themselves, their loved ones, and—at worst—to society and the nation as a whole. At the same time, cultural convention seems to condone men's expression of intense sentiments (whether grief, outrage, repulsion, fear, desire, or anything else within the range of human emotions) within domestic or otherwise delimited private spaces, but to condemn the same kinds of expression in public.⁴⁹ This may help to explain why the men who mingle in agitated crowds on the streets of Tbilisi seem to retreat to the margins when they find themselves face-to-face with a television news camera (James Wilce might label this peculiarly modern phobia “stage fright”—a notion of “local self-consciousness” he borrows from Clifford Geertz).⁵⁰

In the Georgian understanding, politically powerful tropes of suffering and victimhood are more sustainable and less self-destructive when performatively enacted by women than by men. One interlocutor suggested to me that it is safer for women to air grievances publicly than it is for men because there are cultural taboos against engaging women in conflict; by contrast, men who speak out openly and emotively are more vulnerable to verbal and/or physical retaliation by their adversaries. The September 1993 Women's Peace Train exemplifies the way this particular gender ideology has translated into practice. This grassroots, mobile rally of sorts mobilized thousands of women to travel by train from Tbilisi to the war-torn Abkhazia region to demand peace. The journey and the women's demonstrations were filmed and broadcast on Georgian state television; the suitability of the drama metaphor for describing the event is reinforced by the fact that it was orchestrated by film actress Ketī Dolidze.⁵¹ In addition to providing a platform for impassioned performances by famous actresses and poets, participants appealed to a powerful trope of female pacifism and male honor when they collectively removed their headscarves and threw them down in a dramatic gesture coordinated on a massive scale. Their choreography reenacted the traditional Caucasian symbol of a woman who throws down her headscarf between two men engaged in combat to compel them, according to an unwritten code of male honor, to stop fighting. While it is difficult to separate history from myth here, what can be certain is that the image of a woman intervening in a male-centered conflict with a dramatic flourish of her arms has been appropriated by Georgian authors, dramatists, filmmakers, and choreographers for at least a century and, as such, reproduced enough

⁴⁷ This section heading is indebted to Michael Herzfeld's *The Poetics of Manhood: Contest and Identity in a Cretan Mountain Village* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), a paradigmatic text in the ethnographic study of gender, performance, and social life.

⁴⁸ When Georgians say “Georgians are a very emotional people” (and they do, quite frequently), they use the Latinate cognate *emotsiuri* rather than an indigenous term approximating the idea of “emotional,” suggesting that this particular identity discourse took shape relatively recently, as a product of Georgia's encounter with the West.

⁴⁹ Lauren Ninoshvili, *Crossroads of Feeling: Speech, Sentiment and Solidarity in the Georgian Supra in New York City* (master's thesis, Columbia University, 2005). See especially chap. 2, “Men Getting Drunk on Feelings.”

⁵⁰ Wilce, *Crying Shame*, 123–24.

⁵¹ Tamara Dragadze, “The Women's Peace Train in Georgia,” in *Post-Soviet Women: From the Baltic to Central Asia*, ed. Mary Buckley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

times to become a powerful symbol of gender ideology. Mothers, in particular, are endowed with a special peace-making prerogative, and the women of the Peace Train—like Irina Enukidze and the women displaced by the August 2008 war—frequently invoked discourses of motherhood in an effort to impact the political process. The irony, of course, is that the same ideology has authorized women to be both peacemakers and instigators of revenge.

The political instrumentality and aesthetics of women's capture for television news are enabled not just by the women themselves but also by a complex network of government and independent broadcasting institutions, producers, journalists, and viewing audiences. The gendered division of expressive labor in television news reporting can be observed on an almost daily basis in Georgia, suggesting that broadcast journalists and camera operators are accustomed and willing to turn their literal and metaphorical lenses on the outspoken women who artfully perform their rage for the public. For example, most of the clips described above use the technique of the close camera shot, which has the effect of minimizing the distance between the subject and the viewer, as a means of evoking a female complainant's inner emotional state.⁵² Today, communications networks facilitated by satellite and Internet technology carry women's politically charged sentiments to national and international audiences, including significant diasporas in Eastern and Western Europe, North America, and Australia. The main Georgian news networks broadcast live and archived programs on their websites, and segments are often posted and recirculated on more heavily trafficked websites, such as YouTube. In such a way, television news broadcasts become accessible to Georgian citizens living abroad, as well as to non-Georgians, in ways that were unimaginable during the Soviet period.

By drawing on the stylistic and social conventions of the traditional lament, Georgian women present themselves as both conduits of national culture and advocates of the national interest. This is not to say, however, that broadcast media have empowered Georgian women by altering the gender hierarchy in some essential way. Rather, I would argue with Sascha Goluboff (who has researched the contemporary laments of Azerbaijani Mountain Jewish women) that Georgian women can acquire some limited agency by invoking traditional signifiers in politically charged contemporary contexts, but that they still lack the power to transform a fundamentally patriarchal public sphere.⁵³ The more compelling transformation evident in the examples presented here concerns the adaptation of an expressive genre to serve specific historical and socio-political contingencies. Richard Bauman relates the following regarding the nature of genre metamorphosis:

Emergent elements of here-and-now contextualization inevitably enter into the discursive process, forging links to the adjacent discourse, the ongoing social interaction, instrumental or strategic agendas, and other situational and extrasituational factors that interact with generic orienting frameworks in shaping the production and reception of the utterance. These in turn will influence the ways in which the constituent features of the generic framework—formal, pragmatic, thematic—are variably mobilized, opening the way to generic reconfiguration and change.⁵⁴

⁵² Lila Abu-Lughod, "Egyptian Melodrama—Technology of the Modern Subject?" in *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*, ed. Faye Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Brian Larkin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 117.

⁵³ Sascha L. Goluboff, "Patriarchy through Lamentation in Azerbaijan," *American Ethnologist* 35, no. 1 (2008): 82. See also Briggs, "Since I am a Woman," 347–48, 355.

⁵⁴ Richard Bauman, "Genre," *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 9, no. 1 (2000): 85.

The “elements of here-and-now contextualization” shaping the metamorphosis of Georgian lament today include the large-scale abandonment of rural regions and corresponding saturation of the cities, frozen (periodically flaring to “thawed”) conflicts in multiple separatist regions, ongoing unemployment and economic crisis, massive emigration to Europe and North America, ecological decline, and an ongoing pattern of executive power transitions which take place outside the law. Today, the genre of women's expressive labor which most closely resembles traditional lament circulates on television and the Internet; in terms of lament's public record-keeping function, these modern media have joined the printed text in complicating the means by which a once exclusively oral ritual was historically transmitted and archived.

The early modernist/nationalist writer and public figure Ilia Ch'avch'avadze (1837–1907) was among the first, in the late nineteenth century, to systematically collect and publish the texts of Georgian laments. A recent scholarly study of the Georgian lament attributes to him the following curious quote: “Sorrow and tribulation make a man speak; were there no tribulations in the world, man would never have moved his tongue.”⁵⁵ While the noun Ch'avch'avadze uses for “man” (*adamiani*) is grammatically gender neutral, it is etymologically derived from the name Adam and, as in English, is culturally associated with the male gender. Given Georgian *women's* more vocal public presence in contexts of sorrow and tribulation historically and today, would it not be more precise to say that distress and misfortune still the tongues of men, but move the tongues of women?

⁵⁵ Cited in Arabuli, *Samgloviaro p'oezia*, 36. The source of the quotation is not given.